

Full or semi-digitalisation

– WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE WHILE THE WORLD WAS IN LOCKDOWN?





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FULL OR SEMI-DIGITALISATION

– What did we achieve while the world was in lockdown?

The report is based on experiences from 2020 and 2021. Only just over 200 participants (compared to an average of 650 participants) completed an exchange in 2020, and many others who had signed a contract for a work exchange were never able to travel. At Norec, we therefore started talking about ‘home exchanges’ rather than traditional physical exchanges.

Background

The fallout from the pandemic extends far beyond travel and exchanges, with the projects Norec supports experiencing unforeseen and undesired consequences and effects. In this report we discuss digital exchange of competence. The projects and the people in the projects have been involved in and experienced much more than the purely digital: everything from educational work, vaccinations, nursing, health and social care to economic downturns, isolation, burnout and, not least, infection, illness and death. We will only touch on the effects of the pandemic where they have consequences for cooperation and the digital aspect.

In 2020, we funded the recruitment and salary costs of young people in their own countries, and grants for various digital cooperations. Recruitment of new participants was extremely low in 2021. Instead, Norec funded salaries for participants who had previously



VIRTUAL COOPERATION: The pandemic led to new challenges and opportunities in digital cooperation. This image is from a Norec digital cooperation meeting. Credit: Kristine Folland/Norec

been on exchange (referred to as resource persons) and other employees. Norec also funded several activities directed at the target groups for the enterprises and organisations that receive support from Norec.

Clarification of terms

A number of terms and concepts have come into use at Norec over time. Reciprocity is one word we use that is not widely used in the Norwegian public sector or the development assistance sector. The word ‘reciprocity’ has its roots in anthropology, while other words that we use, such as participant and resource person, are not established in the field in the same way. The same applies to ‘follow-up work’ and ‘physical exchange’. These words are self-explanatory to those of us who work at Norec, but mean little to others.

A sea of new words and concepts have emerged as a result of the pandemic. The Language Council of Norway made ‘korona’ (corona) its word of the year in 2020. Key criteria for this accolade are that the word is current, widely used, viable and linguistically sound. In working on this report, we have consciously looked to the education sector to find a word that would match the word exchange, which we use to describe young people being funded by Norec to work overseas. Some of the options include blended learning, on-site and off-site exchange, hybrid teaching, virtual meeting places, mutual learning, eye-level dialogue and exchange.

We consider that ‘hybrid exchange’ will accurately describe the combination of digital cooperation, home exchange and follow-up work. We propose that we should avoid using ‘physical exchange’ in writing and simply continue to call it ‘exchange’. This can be specified by using ‘exchange with overseas stay and/or visit to or work exchange in another country’. The



LEARNING LINKED TO OPPORTUNITIES: This report recommends what Norec should prioritise in its further work on using digitalisation. Credit: Kristine Folland/Norec

term ‘blended learning’ describes how participants and employees learn from one another during and after an exchange. ‘Virtual cooperation and exchange’ can be used when the activities take place digitally.

When describing the activities in budgets and results frameworks, we can use ‘for- og etterarbeid’ in Norwegian and ‘on- and off-site work’ in English if it is necessary to make such a distinction between the actual stay abroad and the follow-up work in the home country. ‘Virtual cooperation and exchange’ can be used when the activities take place digitally.

Task and method

In 2021, a group of 4-6 employees in Norec worked on:

- Documenting different ways in which Norec supported digital exchange and digital opportunities in international cooperation in 2020 and 2021.
- Structuring learning linked to the challenges and opportunities presented by digital exchanges, and recommending what Norec should prioritise in its further work on using digitalisation to refresh its social mandate.

Using input from Norec’s Department of Programmes and the Section for Training and target formulations from the projects in Norec’s database for project results Dynamics, we produced an outline sketch of the planned digital components in the projects in Norec’s portfolio. We shared a number of questions on digital tools with the programme advisers ahead of annual meetings with the partnerships that received funding under the Norec scheme, and retrieved information on these from the post-meeting reports. Questions were added to the Norec’s user survey to capture trends in the cooperation and in the implementation of the projects in 2020 and 2021. The response rate for the user survey was 84 out of 227. Nine users who received the survey did not wish to respond and eleven did not receive it. Next we held a workshop for Norec’s Department of Programmes and Section for Training at which everyone shared best practices from the projects and provided recommendations based on the experience of the last two years. In addition, we took inspiration from the Norec webinar “Successful digital cooperation and capacity building across borders”. In a short hybrid meeting, we also received input from the programme advisers on what they had found challenging in the period.

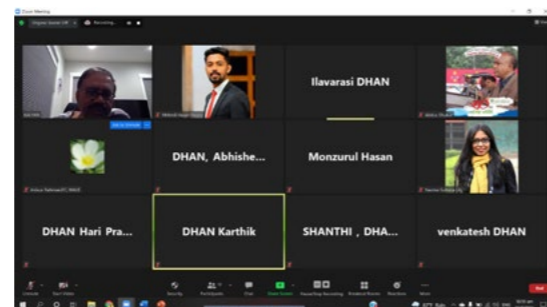
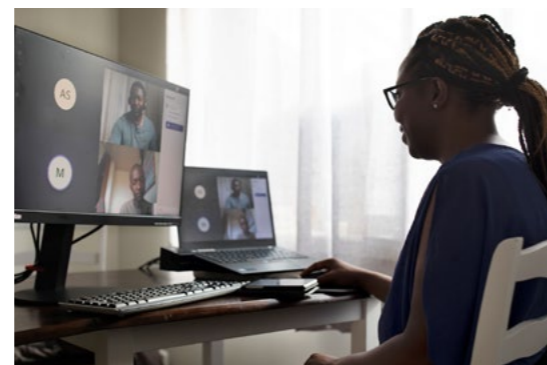


As more persons in the organisations become involved with the Norec project, more opportunities may arise for learning, both within and between the organisations.

Support for participants and resource persons

The term 'resource persons' was introduced in 2021. Resource persons are those persons who have been directly involved in implementation of the activities for the partnerships to achieve their goals. They are persons of all ages with different backgrounds and different roles in the projects. The age principle (18-35 years) was waived to enable the partnerships to continue the cooperation as effectively as possible during the pandemic. Several resource persons have been recruited and redeployed internally in order to use the competence they possess linked to their existing position within e.g. finance, communication, IT, monitoring and evaluation in the organisation. We

estimate that many of the 'resource persons' have worked 20-50% in the project. Others designated as resource persons include previous participants and new participants who have completed a 'home exchange' as a form of extended follow-up period and/or replaced the positions reserved for exchange participants. By way of example, YouthCode in Malawi – one of the partner organisations of Flora upper-secondary school in Norway – appointed previous participants to positions that exchange participants coming from Norway would have had in normal circumstances. However, the organisation found that it had to appoint more people than would normally have been on exchange. It is difficult to understand why this is the case, but it may be explained by differences in educational level and experience. Another example is DataDrivenFinance, which offers reasonably priced life and health insurance to people on low incomes. The company has recruited persons to carry out tasks that would normally have been assigned to exchange participants. DDFinance offered its resource persons, after working for a year in Norway the chance to go on exchange to Kenya in 2022. Many missed out on the chance of an overseas visit to another organisation in 2021, but on the other hand have contributed to the results achieved, exchange of knowledge and cross-border learning.



FUNDED EQUIPMENT: Norec supported equipment so the projects could exchange knowledge even without physical exchanges. Credit: Norec

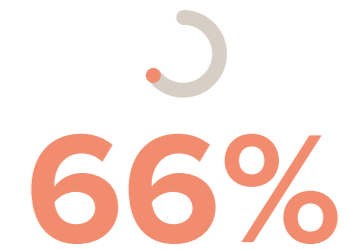


One important principle for Norec in processing the applications in 2021 was that the exchange model has been and shall remain the core of the projects. Consequently, this guided the size of the applicants' budgets in many cases. Through the partner meetings, several programme advisers found that partnerships can benefit from resource persons, and that is something Norec can continue to help the projects achieve their goals. There is therefore a need to review whether the budget has scope for this and, at the same time, to assess the budget ceiling for resource persons. It will also be necessary to assess whether the application templates need to be adapted to include questions concerning resource persons such as percentage of full-time equivalent, name of position, duties and which activities they are directly involved in linked to the results framework. There may further be a need to clarify whether there should be age-related criteria for resource persons as there are for participants.

As more persons in the organisations become involved with the Norec project, more opportunities may arise for learning, both within and between the organisations. In addition, programme advisers and training advisers have found they have had less contact with resource persons than they have with participants. At the workshop we organised, we were given feedback that Norec should plan possible meeting points or courses for resource persons to create a better connection to Norec and provide greater knowledge of Norec for everyone involved in the project. If more employees linked to the Norec exchange so wish, we could also offer training in cooperation, integration at the workplace and diversity management, so that Norec funds can contribute to organisational development to an even greater degree.

Support for digital equipment and activities

In 2021, Norec funded the purchase of equipment so the projects could exchange knowledge even if they were no longer able to send employees on work exchanges to a different country. The money was primarily used to purchase various types of IT equipment, including desktop PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile phones, but also audio-visual equipment such as screens, cameras, projectors and sound systems. Various upgrades were also made to software for digital platforms, monitoring tools, and video and website production services. In addition, software and licences were purchased for accounting systems and upgrades made to internet connections and networks. A number of projects were also awarded funding for more specific items such as an information telephone service, X-ray and CT equipment, motorbikes, vehicles, waste containers for e-waste, carpentry and craftsmen's tools



of the respondents stated that they had used new digital platforms.

and machinery. Not forgetting information material and brochures and, last but not least, masks etc. in light of the pandemic.

These examples show that Norec has been flexible and allocated funds for equipment that was relevant for the partnerships to ensure they could implement the agreements signed. The new guideline states that Norec covers up to a maximum of NOK 8000 per partner, but it may be useful to specify that partnerships can apply for extra funding if required for particularly relevant equipment: equipment that contributes to the achievement of goals directly related to the results framework and promotes good communication/cooperation within the partnership. When projects have been allocated significant funds for the purchase of equipment, it is also important to make sure that the partnership keeps an equipment list and carries out maintenance so that the equipment stays fully functional throughout its lifetime.

Several partnerships also reported challenges in the procurement of larger items of technical equipment during the pandemic. Deliveries of equipment on which partnerships were dependent in order to establish digital cooperation were often delayed, leading to planned digital activities being postponed. Where funding is awarded for larger items of equipment that have to be imported, it can be worth recommending that the organisations start the procurement processes earlier or possibly during the initial rounds of multi-year agreements.

In addition to support for digital equipment, the partnerships also had the opportunity to apply for more support for implementation of activities than previously. As a result, the partnerships restructured their activities to adapt to the COVID-19 restrictions and requirements. The sections below will examine in greater detail how the cooperation was carried out and how this contributed to the results achieved in the projects.





WAVE FOUNDATION: The image depicts beneficiaries of the Norec exchange project between WAVE and Dhan Foundation. WAVE found that the transition to web-based activities was a culture shock for the farmers they work with. Credit: WAVE

Digital aids and virtual cooperation

The partnerships explored the various opportunities the virtual world has to offer, aiming to ensure good cooperation using new digital methods. Different forms of communication such as lectures and one-way dialogue have become an addition to and/or been replaced by new cooperation methods such as using Zoom with breakout rooms to facilitate virtual lectures and discussion groups. In Norec's user survey 2020/21, a full 80% of the respondents said they had made changes to the activity because of the pandemic. 66% of the respondents stated that they had used new digital platforms. Just under half of those who responded to the user survey said they had used an e-learning platform in 2021 and were satisfied with the tools they had used. E-learning platforms used in 2021 included YouTube, Facebook, Global Health eLearning, Google Classroom, Moodle, WhatsApp, Canva, Mural, Kahoot!, LinkedIn Learning, SCORM Cloud and TalentLMS.

Nearly everyone has used virtual meeting places and working methods, and most are largely satisfied with the tools they use. Most use meeting tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meeting and Skype,

and some have used Whereby and Streamyard, but WhatsApp, Messenger, email, Trello, SharePoint, Adobe Creative tools and Slack are also used for communication. Other digital tools include Acast for creating podcasts, Asana for digital project management, CRM in the form of a customer register, the Kobo e-reader and the business tool Bitrix24.

Several projects used social media more actively during the pandemic to showcase their activities. Most respondents to Norec's user survey said they had used websites, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and LinkedIn, but Telegram, Viber and TikTok were also mentioned. The vast majority also said they had used social media more than previously, except for a small number who said their level of usage was the same or lower, and partner organisations in Myanmar, who did not use social media at all. In this connection, it was also highlighted at the workshop that we should look at how the partnerships can be encouraged to raise Norec's profile more than we assume they had previously.

Experiences with virtual cooperation

The partnerships find that communication has improved thanks to more frequent digital meeting points, resulting in more dialogue and information sharing. This is confirmed in the user survey, with more than 80% of respondents saying that they communicate more frequently with partners as a result of the digital infrastructure that the pandemic compelled them to use.

Both partner contacts for the Norec projects and Norec employees say that the digital meetings cannot replace physical meeting points but are seen as a useful supplement.

Several employees find that the cultural differences disappear in the virtual meeting room. Consequently, the hierarchies also become less visible. There are no informal meeting places either, and an etiquette emerges in the digital space. 'Us and them' is toned down, with emphasis shifting to a new communality based on what we can achieve together. This virtual cooperation provides opportunities for increased goal achievement and, not least, fast and low-cost communication.

Many partnerships have embraced innovative digital solutions, but several have also encountered challenges. As many as 70% of respondents mention issues associated with unstable internet connections. Digital communication not only minimises the scope for cultural learning and understanding, but planning and monitoring meetings are rendered difficult by different time zones and language barriers. This is highlighted in the user survey. Lack of physical contact has made building good relationships challenging. When key people in the project have left and new ones have joined, it has been difficult to ensure good implementation of the project across the partnership. Other factors that have played a part include technical challenges such as Zoom fatigue, power cuts and network access.

One consequence of overseas exchanges largely being put on hold is that almost 60% of the participants have completed some form of virtual exchange in which they have worked for the project in their home country.

There has also been a marked increase in internal recruitments for participants. In 2019, an average



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of 30% of respondents reported that they recruited internally; this had increased to 55% in 2020/21. This may indicate that the pandemic meant organisations were seeking new participants internally. There are two reasons for this: Norec has encouraged it and approaching your own organisational network is quick and easy. At the same time, it is important to point out that some partnerships have experienced little or no interest in the virtual exchanges announced.

There are also other types of challenges associated with digital exchanges. With so many new systems available for digital infrastructure, it is easy to forget that the major international technology companies are effectively controlling how we communicate. A lot of informal communication takes place via Facebook and WhatsApp, as well as more formal channels such as email and Teams, Zoom and Skype. What all these channels have in common is that they exploit the users' information to develop their services, but also to collect and systematise user data. Norec has information security routines in place, provides training for its employees and has signed data processor agreements with all its suppliers. We cannot expect our partner organisations to go to the same lengths. This is a problem we must work on more in the future.

Collection and administration of user data is a subject that is increasingly being put on the agenda. Among others, Nobel laureate Maria Ressa has said that unregulated social media can have an antidemocratic effect by spreading fake news (https://snl.no/Maria_Ressa). As a facilitator, we should ensure that communication between partners is secure. In her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), Harvard professor Shoshana Zuboff writes that Facebook and Google in particular actively intervene to minimise protection of users' personal data in order to capitalise on it. Norwegian journalist and author Lena Lindgren explores some of the same ideas in *Ekko* (Gyldendal



The digital exchange is a natural evolution. But we must nevertheless be aware that there are hidden costs associated with the digital paradigm shift.

2021). She discusses how the technology fundamentally changes how people communicate. In this sense, the digital exchange is a natural evolution. But we must nevertheless be aware that there are hidden costs associated with the digital paradigm shift. These may include loss of control and ownership of data, communication taking place on platforms that use data for influence and targeted advertising, and the simple fact is that it is not secure and can hence be used as an entry point for digital attacks.

Results and learnings in partnerships

It is not only the partnerships that have benefited from frequent digital meeting activity and exchange of knowledge. Many partnerships have also allowed employees from partner organisations in other countries to participate in and provide input in digital meetings with their target groups. As a result, information sharing has taken place via more routes. Judging from the minutes from the partner meetings, it also appears that the focus in the dialogue between Norec and the partnerships has placed greater emphasis on achieving results and hence also on end users/recipients. As Norec has provided more money to support activities and equipment, this has increased awareness of how to use resources efficiently and how this will help improve the results achieved in the projects. At the same time, some of the firefighting around cultural adaptation and cooperation challenges with participant and partnership monitoring has been lacking.

Digital learning has taken place at multiple levels in the projects, with the target groups also having chance to get involved. In India, the civil society organisation WAVE found that the transition to web-based activities was a culture shock for the farmers they work with. To

The focus in the dialogue (...) has placed greater emphasis on achieving results and hence also on end users.

make the transition easier, web-based activities were followed up with meetings in the local communities, with WhatsApp and Messenger used to facilitate fast and simple communication. Many of the older people were also anxious about using digital aids, but with mentoring and assistance found they were able to use digital communication more confidently. Young people in WAVE have played a crucial role in teaching the older people to use smartphones and WhatsApp. This shows that technical competence has increased and more people have become digitally literate. Maurice Isabwe, associate professor at the University of

Agder, claims that mobile phones and internet access increase opportunities for participation and inclusion for people in the Global South.

WAVE has also developed an app for farmers. The app provides information on stock management, production records, and registration of sales and recipients. The farmers can use the app to submit farming-related problems and receive advice from an expert. This can be done either in writing or by sending a voice note. The app also shows the farmers' geographical location. Having tested the app in 2021, WAVE will now use the knowledge gained to develop a similar app for its partner, the South African civil society organisation Climate Specific Agro Advisory. Another project that has been able to exchange competence across borders during the pandemic is the Leprosy Missions Nepal and Myanmar, which started digital monitoring of leprosy patients in 2020. Remote physiotherapy appointments have been provided both online and by phone. More than 160 leprosy patients receive virtual consultations online. Expertise from Myanmar is being used to help patients in Nepal, and guidance has been drawn up on how to conduct consultations remotely and virtually.



LEPROSY MISSION: Resource person and Nurse Superintendent Mahima Bantawa from Leprosy Mission (LM), a project between LM organisations in Nepal, Myanmar and Bangladesh. She was a participant at the Anandaban Hospital in Nepal. Credit: Maiken Solbakken/Norec



WAVE AND DHAN: The image portrays beneficiaries of the Norec exchange project between WAVE and Dhan Foundation. Credit: WAVE



Mobile phones and internet access increase opportunities for participation and inclusion for people in the Global South.

The Norwegian Band Federation and Field Band Foundation in South Africa have developed a creative form of cooperation by using the co-creation method digitally. This involves resource persons across the partnership sitting in digital work groups in order to achieve their expected results, for example a work group to monitor and evaluate the project. Together they have set up a digital activity library, using film clips to demonstrate many of their tools for participatory methods. This has become a resource bank that music teachers in both Norway and South Africa can use for inspiration and ideas for new and exciting ways to engage children and young people in relevant social issues. One of the main themes of the YouTube collection is how music can contribute to better mental wellbeing and higher self-esteem.

An external evaluation of YWCA and YMCA Y Global's exchange project for youth activists in Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and Norway found that digital communication works best for messages on human rights, major campaigns and social media, crowdfunding and web-based training. Human connections and face-to-face meetings are absolutely essential for building trust. Online referrals and consultations have worked in the pandemic period but require extra capacity and do not provide the same level of closeness and warmth as a non-digital conversation. This complicates the work on virtual health clinics for young people in the project, and in the same way the evaluation team claims that a physical presence is necessary to create engagement and good learning outcomes for the training. In Norec's webinar, the young people in the YWCA YMCA Y Global project emphasised that web-based consultations and digital meetings enable the participants to be anonymous. As a result, many people feel freer to ask questions about things they are wondering about, and to express their own sexual orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex or queer, than in physical settings where they often encounter prejudice. These web-based spaces have given young people safe arenas where they can be themselves. Some also found they could express

themselves better in writing, and the participants also stress that the chat functions have led to an increased sense of coping and participation in the open meetings. Several of the young people have also said that the threat of physical violence is avoided when meetings on taboo subjects such as gender identity and sexual orientation are organised anonymously and digitally.



91% of the respondents stated that Norec courses had been very useful or useful.

Increased effect for civil society

It seems that new and existing partnerships have dealt with digital cooperation in slightly different ways. Civil society organisation Pravah in India, which is a relatively new partnership within Norec, has tried to facilitate an intercultural digital meeting place among its young members in South Africa and India. They have faced challenges in bringing about dialogue and cooperation. On the other hand, WAGGGS – the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts – has found that they have been able to deploy the participants better than before, and at lower cost. The organisation usually sends 45 participants on exchange. There were no exchanges in 2021, but WAGGGS was still able to facilitate a high level of activity involving 288 girl scouts. All of them worked in their home country, where they knew the cultural context, and were able to design and implement education campaigns and information meetings about menstruation to remove the taboo around the subject and COVID-19 to give young girls better information on health. WAGGGS has also developed a digital platform, as well as digital courses, blog and a collection of resources for the partnership, which gives members an opportunity to meet in informal digital spaces or 'digital campfires'. If the campaign work in each individual country can be combined with digital spaces where the girl scouts can meet other volunteers from their exchanges to share experiences and challenges, learning can be maintained between the organisations in the different countries. This could also work well for other global membership organisations and partnerships that involve large



YESS GIRLS: Partner WAGGGS developed digital resources for the partnership during the pandemic, which gives members an opportunity to meet in informal digital spaces or 'digital campfires'. Credit: WAGGGS

numbers of volunteers. Activating alumni (former participants) could enable participants to continue to share knowledge from their exchange and help to further develop learning within the partnership. KPMG's 2018 study of governmental institutions exchange of staff recommended Norec's projects to developing learning strategies for Norec's projects, so this is something that should be followed up for partnerships with five-year agreements and alumni activities.

Haukeland University Hospital is implementing a project in which they plan to use video for surgical training. The aim is to be able to communicate during the operation, and the video transmissions will also form part of the preparatory activities ahead of an exchange. This will enable the participants to use this period as a training opportunity and make it easier to get going with their tasks when they are sent on exchange. Several partnerships, such as the Haukeland project, see the benefits of preparatory work for participants. For partnerships that want a longer pre-training period before leaving for the work exchange abroad, Norec's preparatory course will have to come slightly later, as Norec only funds one journey to the exchange location. Making it possible to extend the follow-up period beyond two months, as recommended in the

Norec guidelines, can be a way to ensure buy-in and sustainability for the project within the partnership and with each individual partner.

Monitoring results

Programme advisers have found the annual digital partnership meetings extremely useful for monitoring the status and progression of the projects. The programme advisers have also gained valuable insight into the projects by participating in the homecoming seminars for the participants. The Section for Training has had a positive response to the digital courses and webinars, which are seen as a useful supplement to in-person courses. This is substantiated by findings in the user survey, with 54% of respondents saying that Norec courses have been very useful and 37% that they have been useful. The e-learning resources have been relevant and informative. Partners and programme advisers have asked whether these resources can be made available to partnerships and resource persons/participants.



Summary

Norec finds that the funds granted in 2020 and 2021 helped to strengthen cooperation between the organisations and promoted the work on the target groups and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, cultural understanding and international work experience have been lacking during this period. The 2021 funds were targeted less at the exchange participants and more at the organisations. It would be easy to think of the participant and the organisation as two different entities, but this is not necessarily the case. They may indeed be two entities that are mutually dependent on each other. We do not need to say that the main purpose of the scheme is the exchange, but we can say instead that the exchange is the heart of the project.

Previously, the costs involved in Norec's projects have essentially covered travel, accommodation and salaries for young people on work exchanges. In 2021, more funds were allocated to the support functions for the participants, equipment needed to start up projects and salaries for young people who have previously taken part in a work exchange funded by Norec.

In a hybrid exchange model, both the partnerships and the participants will be able to spend time on preparations before the exchange, both on and off site. Returning and former participants will be able to make use of their intercultural competence and, not least, new skills and knowledge acquired on the exchange to benefit their home organisation. Virtual exchanges will never replace physical exchanges, but the hybrid model can provide good opportunities both for preparing for an exchange and making better use of the competence possessed by those who have been on exchange. If participants spend more time working in their home organisation, this could provide smaller organisations with more room to manoeuvre and better opportunities to establish successful learning strategies. This will in

Virtual exchanges will never replace physical exchanges, but the hybrid model can provide good opportunities both for preparing for an exchange and making better use of the competence possessed by those who have been on exchange.

turn minimise the challenges involved in transferring knowledge gained by externally recruited participants back to the organisation.

Recommendations

Against this background, we propose:

1. The partnerships should have longer, virtual periods for preparation and follow-up for both the participants and the partnership. To achieve this in an effective way, Norec should:

- Assess the possibility of the partnerships having a longer preliminary study or get-to-know-you period, where they can work virtually to identify areas for cooperation and establish a positive dialogue before embarking on the exchange.
- Provide funds to cover salary and administrative expenses for central support functions and participants so that the project can facilitate a virtual start-up and training in the home organisations.
- Continue providing funds to cover salary and administrative expenses and activities for longer preliminary and follow-up periods, with new skills and knowledge being taken into use while maintaining the virtual cooperation in the partnership. This would also provide more flexibility if there is a problem with the outward journey because of travel restrictions etc. or visas/work permits being delayed or obstructed. South-South projects and participants from the South should be prioritised in the follow-up work. ODA funding should be used in Norway's partner countries; the costs are lower and this will motivate participants from the South to use the knowledge gained from their exchange and contribute to the organisation's social development in their home countries.
- Ensure that virtual preliminary work and activation of former participants and alumni is highlighted in budgets, the goal hierarchy and learning strategies.

2. Making administrative procedures more efficient

- Everyone seeking to apply for an agreement with Norec is to be offered a consultation appointment. This can take place in the last part of the introductory course, at the annual meeting or at the initiative of the case handler. This session is used to discuss the start-up date for the on-site exchange,

number of participants, total length of the exchange, salary of participants, and requirements for administrative funding to support the project goal and administration of the exchange.

- Collate relevant knowledge from 2020 and 2021 in a Q&A for the programme advisers. The COVID years have shown us that we need to be even more flexible than previously in our evaluations. There are so many possibilities. Many case handlers perceive the administrative procedures as a process of negotiation with the grant recipient. A large number of activities and bigger budgets mean greater responsibility and opportunities to go into considerable detail. It is important to safeguard the principle of equal treatment.
- Create "annexes" to the application form. When the application template is to be added to the grant portal, the main questions must be carved in stone, but it will be possible to add work tasks. We should make it possible to add jointly created tasks to better facilitate a hybrid, dynamic project and exchange model. This can and will accommodate Norec's desire and need for flexible solutions and the principle of equal treatment.
- The case handler manual should be fully digitalised. We need to be able to make changes on an ongoing basis. The situation will remain highly precarious because national measures will continue. Different measures will vary between countries and change quickly. 2022 sees the introduction of the grants portal. This will lead to an increased need for adjustments, which must be communicated identically to everyone and be accessible going forward. Teams works for clarifying issues but not as a reference work.

3. Continue developing Norec as a Centre of Competence by facilitating knowledge sharing internally and externally:

- Publish best practices from 2021 in newsletters and the annual report.
- Identify relevant journals where we want to be visible and use some of the project results from the pandemic to showcase the value and opportunities that an exchange provides.
- Encourage implementing parties to tag Norec in social media posts and reward them for doing so. All newsletters from Norec should showcase at least one partner running an exciting campaign with #Norec.



COOPERATION: Norec exchange participants Zulkifli Hasmun and Rabi Das. Credit: Maiken Solbakken/Norec

- Draw up internal guidance on what works in exchange projects. Many programme advisers lack relevant experience, and this is something we need to address. Guidance of this kind will cover programme advisers' role as guides and simultaneously build up and communicate knowledge on exchanges internally in Norec.
- Motivation meetings and sharing experiences for previous participants. Norec is first and foremost an arena for networking between participants and partnerships that operate exchanges. To maintain engagement, interest and sharing, we should bring together previous participants, previous FK coordinators and partner contacts so that we have a larger group of people passionate about exchanges. This may also give Norec the opportunity to identify and bring in previous participants for regional seminars and meetings. This will also be a place where newly started partnerships can find mentors for participants in their home country for the vulnerable first and second rounds of an exchange.
- Develop and offer a training module on digital security and data processing for the partnerships.
- Make parts of the homecoming seminars for participants available virtually for programme advisers and relevant Norec employees.



SHARED KNOWLEDGE ⇌ SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

NOR⇌C