

#2 /  
2025



**THEME:**  
**Reindeer herding**  
**through the lens of the**  
**UNDRIP**

**Encroached lands,**  
**restricted voices.**  
Ole-Anders Turi on Sámi  
reindeer herders, self-  
determination, and UNDRIP in  
Norway, Sweden and Finland.

# THE STATE OF SÁPMI



SÁMI SOCIOPOLITICAL JOURNAL #2 2025



# About the Indigenous Navigator in Sápmi

The Indigenous Navigator is a framework and set of tools for and by Indigenous Peoples to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of their rights.

**Drawing on international standards** such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, core human rights conventions as they apply to Indigenous Peoples, key elements of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the outcomes of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous Navigator exposes important connections between these instruments. By employing its free, community-generated tools and resources, Indigenous Peoples' organizations and communities, duty bearers, NGOs, and journalists can explore how rights enshrined in these mechanisms can be turned into concrete action.

**In 2021-2023 the Saami Council**, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) conducted Indigenous Navigator national surveys for Finland, Norway and Sweden. Additionally, the partners facilitated three community surveys – one each in Finland, Norway and Sweden.

**The surveys have enabled** us to collect accurate and high-quality data on the implementation of the human rights of the Sámi people and to understand how national legislation and government policy aligns with Indigenous Peoples rights standards enshrined in international human rights instruments, and how these policies are experienced by Sámi communities on the ground. The data is implemented and published on the Indigenous Navigator website.

**During the work**, it has become clear that gathering reliable data on the Sámi population is challenging. There is generally little data available about the Sámi, as statistics based on ethnicity are not collected in Finland, Norway and Sweden. In this article, we present the findings related to the situation of Sámi reindeer herders in Finland, Sweden and Norway.

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# The situation of Sámi reindeer herders in Finland, Sweden and Norway through the lens of UNDRIP

by Ole-Anders Turi, Sámi Allaskuvla

The Sámi are the Indigenous Peoples of Norway, Sweden, Finland and part of Russia. The aim of this paper is to provide further information on the situation among the Sámi reindeer herders in Norway, Sweden and Finland. The article will focus on self-determination and protection of traditional grazing land for the Sámi reindeer herders.

**This article is written** on the data gathered by Sámi researchers and academics, and from Sámi communities across Sápmi – from Norway, Sweden and Finland – who completed a national and community-level Indigenous Navigator survey. The survey has also been supplemented with literature and reports describing the situation regarding self-determination and protection of traditional land.





Guovdageaidnu:

Sámi Allaskuvla (Sámi University of Applied Sciences) is located in Guovdageaidnu / Kautokeino. Established in 1989, the institution is dedicated to Sámi higher education, research, and the strengthening of Sámi language and culture.

*Photo: Andrew Arch on Flickr*

**Reindeer husbandry in Norway, Sweden and Finland** is an important and internationally recognized traditional livelihood for the Sámi people. It has a long and rich history across Sápmi. Reindeer husbandry can be used as an indicative element of the situation of Indigenous Sámi Peoples in Norway, Sweden and Finland, and of the relevant respect for their rights. Using reindeer husbandry as an example is powerful because Sámi reindeer herders share many similarities across the three nations. This is not to say that there are not also some differences. This article should not be read as a comparative study since there is limited space to describe the situations of Sámi reindeer herders in each country. The article will, however, give a short overview of the responses to the Indigenous Navigator surveys on areas related to self-determination and protection of traditional grazing land. Since the space for writing is limited, this article will focus on individual articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). There are other international conventions that also apply to Indigenous Peoples but, due to space limitations, these are not discussed in this article.

**The article opens** with a short overview of reindeer husbandry in Norway, Sweden and Finland, followed by a summary of the survey answers regarding self-determination and self-government in each country, and it concludes with an analysis of the answers in the light of the provisions of the UNDRIP.



Grøtforden, Sállir:

In Northern Norway, for the most part, the summer pastures are along the coastline, and the winter pastures are located inland.

*Photo: Andreas Vonlanthen on Unsplash*

# 1.0 Reindeer husbandry in Norway

There are some 3,000 Indigenous Sámi connected to reindeer husbandry in Norway, where reindeer herding is practised across approximately 40 percent of the land area stretching from Kirkenes in Northern Norway to Hedmark in the south.<sup>1</sup> The right to own reindeer in the Sámi reindeer area is reserved solely for the Sámi people with a connection to the husbandry.<sup>2</sup>

**Reindeer husbandry in Norway** is a pastoral livelihood with seasonal migration between summer and winter pastures. The climatic conditions, but also the vegetation, determines what can be used as summer or winter pastures for reindeer. In Northern Norway, for the most part, the summer pastures are along the coastline, and the winter pastures are located inland.

**Reindeer husbandry in Norway** is organized into reindeer herding districts, and today there are 82 reindeer herding districts in Norway. Each of the districts has its own board with an elected leader. The board prepares and adopts internal rules for, and manages inquiries and matters concerning, the district. Reindeer herding districts in Norway have their own designated grazing areas.

**Reindeer herding districts** are not a traditional way of organizing the work in the husbandry. They were established in the late 19th century as a means of identifying and determining which reindeer herders were responsible for damage inflicted by reindeers on farmland, and who should pay compensation for such damages. Over the same period, a supplementary law was introduced that had rules on how to reduce the numbers of reindeer.<sup>3</sup> Districts were thus not created based on the needs of reindeer herders, nor did they reflect how reindeer herders traditionally organized themselves through *siidas*.

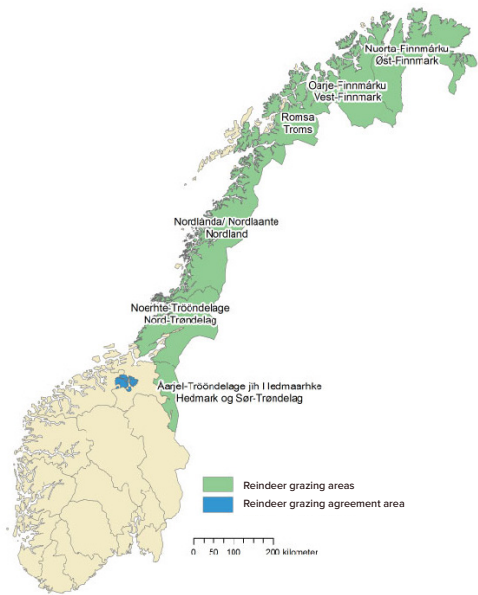
**Today, a *siida* forms part of** a reindeer herding district and, in a district, there may be many *siidas*, with a *siida* forming a family unit and a traditional way of organizing the reindeer herding work. *Siidas* are a dynamic way of organizing work that meets the demands of caring for the reindeer – the need for flexibility and to ensure that there are enough herders to solve tasks, either those connected to herding or those in the daily lives of the Sámi – through other household tasks.

**Siida consist of** individual reindeer owners, husbandry units, the collective and herding unit, the territory, resources, infrastructure and the nomadic migration route (Sara 2009 p. 157). *Siida* are the main bearers of the collective rights to pasture, and this was acknowledged in the Reindeer Herding Act of 2007.<sup>4</sup>

**The previous Reindeer Herding Act** from 1978 introduced something that could be compared to an operating licence for reindeer husbandry in Norway. This was called *driftsenhet* and, for Sámi herders to be allowed to work with reindeer, they were required to have such a licence or be linked to a herder with such licence. When the new Reindeer Herding Act was passed in 2007, it continued the requirement for an operating licence but the licence was given a new name: *siidaandel*.

**The Ministry of Agriculture and Food** has overall administrative responsibility for Sámi reindeer husbandry, and the ministry is responsible for implementing national policies relating to the husbandry.

Reindeer grazing areas in Sámi reindeer husbandry



Source: Statistics Norway (SSB), based on data from the Norwegian Agriculture Agency



**The County Governor (*Statsforvalteren*)** is the regional authority for reindeer husbandry and is divided into six different regional areas. The *Statsforvalteren* is responsible for handling subsidies and has the possibility of raising objections against construction projects that could impact reindeer husbandry grazing areas. The *Statsforvalteren* is, however, also the regional management administration for the central government and, as a regional entity, it must follow and implement the national policies of the Norwegian state regarding reindeer husbandry.

**The Norwegian Directorate of Agriculture** administers the agreement between the state and the herders interest organization (*Norske Reindriftssamers Landsforbund*). The Reindeer Husbandry Act (*Reindrifstavtalen*) is a financial agreement that determines the nature and amount of the subsidies available to reindeer herders. The Directorate acts as secretariat for the Reindeer Husbandry Board.

**The Reindeer Husbandry Board (*reindrifststyret*)** is a national administrative body whose members are appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and by the Sámi Parliament.



June 2025:

The Norwegian Reindeer Herders' Association (NRL) held its annual congress on 13–14 June 2025 in Girkonjárga. Key issues discussed included predator management, hydropower developments in reindeer herding areas, proposed amendments to the Reindeer Herding Act and the Land Consolidation Act, as well as input to the 2026/2027 reindeer husbandry agreement.

*Photo: NRL / Per Anders Siri*

**The board consists of seven board members, with the ministry appointing four members, and the Sámi Parliament appointing three. The Reindeer Husbandry Board advises the ministry in cases of legislative proposals or changes, or in major construction cases that may have an impact on reindeer husbandry. As a public administrative body, the Reindeer Husbandry Board decides, for example, who can own reindeer.**

**The Sámi Parliament in Norway** has no formal role in the public administration of reindeer husbandry in Norway, despite being the seat of Sámi representation. The Sámi Parliament can consult on matters relating to Sámi interests, including reindeer husbandry interests. The rights to consultation are rooted in Norwegian law.<sup>5</sup> The Sámi Parliament, like the Statsforvalteren, can raise objections against construction projects affecting reindeer herders' grazing areas.

## Endnotes

- 1 Not all the land area can be used for grazing, as it also consists of roads, villages, cities and other infrastructure.
- 2 Lov 15.juni 2007 nr. 40 om reindrift (reindriftsloven) §9.
- 3 Ravna, Øyvind (2019). Same- og reindriftsrett. Gyldendal: Oslo
- 4 Lov 15.juni 2007 nr. 40 om reindrift (reindriftsloven)
- 5 Lov 12. juni 1987 nr 56 om Sametinget og andre rettsforhold (Sameloven)



Idre sameby:

The reindeer husbandry in Sweden is organized into 51 samebyar (Sámi villages), which can be compared to reindeer herding districts in Norway.

*Photo: Jannie Staffanson*

## 2.0 Reindeer husbandry in Sweden

Reindeer husbandry in Sweden is practised over approximately 50 percent of Sweden's land area although not all of this land can be used as grazing area for reindeer. The internal organization of the husbandry in Sweden is that there are 51 samebyar (Sámi villages), which can be compared to reindeer herding districts in Norway.



# 3.0 Reindeer husbandry in Finland

Reindeer husbandry is practised across approximately 36 percent of Finland's land area, with the reindeer herding area being divided into three smaller areas.

Aanaar:

In the Sámi reindeer herding area (the area of Enontekiö, Inarja, Utsjoki and area of Lappi in Sodankylä), there are 13 reindeer herding districts or co-operatives

*Photo: Francesco Ungaro on Unsplash*

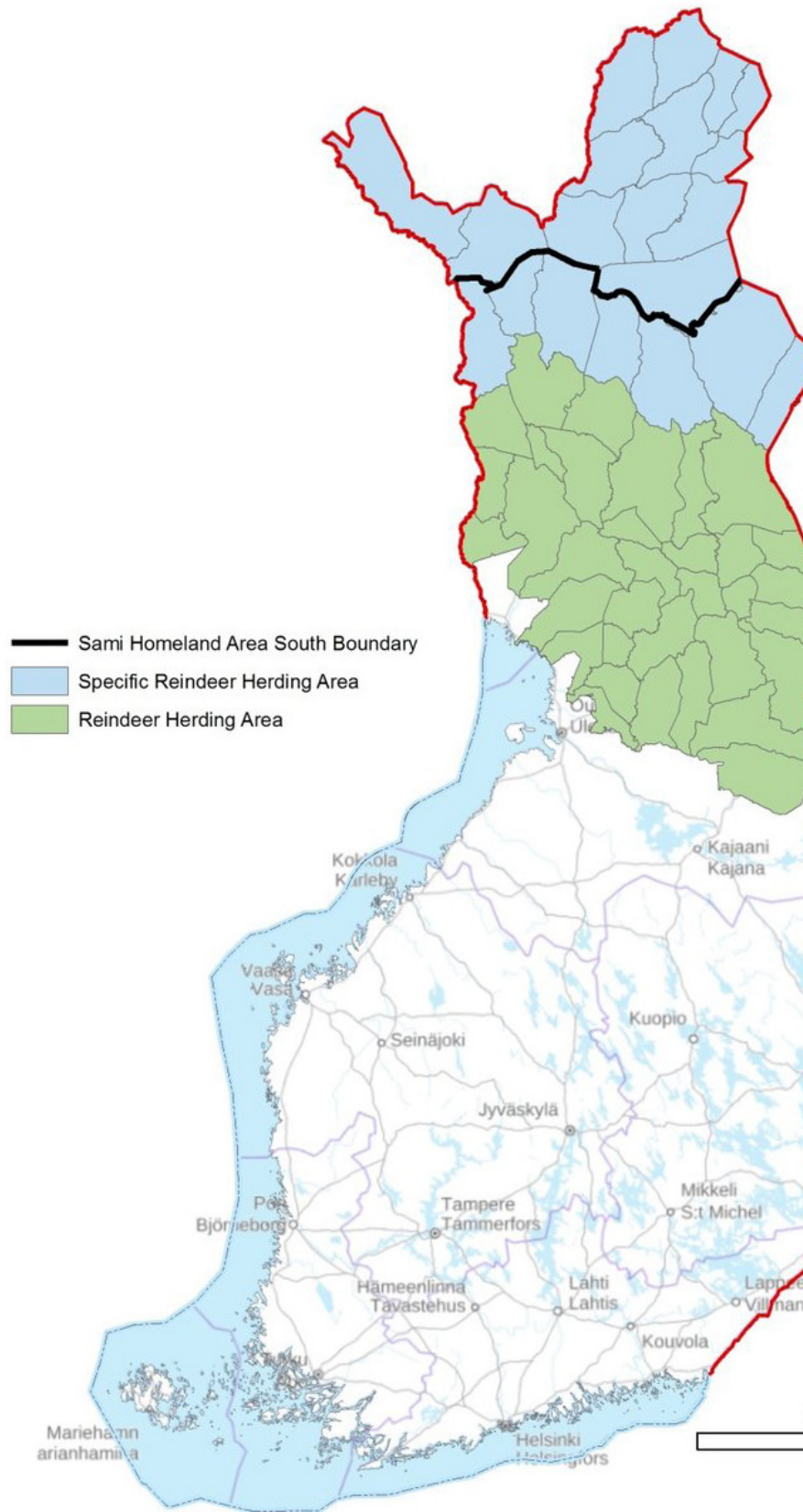




**The Saami reindeer herding area**, often called the Sámi homeland, is in the northern part of Finland. Reindeer husbandry has priority in this area and is established and protected by specific rules with special attention to protecting against conflicting interests or encroachment that could impact the husbandry.<sup>1</sup> The two other areas are a special reindeer herding area and a reindeer herding area. In the special reindeer herding area, the government must consult the reindeer herding districts when something is going to affect grazing land, such as the sale of land etc.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the reindeer herding area does not necessarily benefit from the same protections or priority.

**Reindeer husbandry is** organized into reindeer herding co-operatives (Bálgosat in the Sámi language – Paliskunta in the Finnish language). There are 54 reindeer herding co-operatives, each with its own board and administration, led by a chief of district. In the Sámi reindeer herding area (the area of Enontekiö, Inarja, Utsjoki and area of Lappi in Sodankylä), there are 13 reindeer herding districts or co-operatives. These account for 38 percent of the reindeer population in Finland.<sup>3</sup>

**All reindeer co-operatives are** members of the Finnish Reindeer Herders Association (Paliskuntain Yhtisdys). The association is a steering, advisory and expert organization for reindeer husbandry, and it acts as a link between reindeer herding co-operatives but also between reindeer husbandry and the rest of society.





**The association also develops** the economy of husbandry and promotes research.<sup>4,5</sup> The board of the association is elected at a general meeting held every June, with a chair, vice-chair and 12 members from the different parts of the husbandry area elected every three years. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Sámi Parliament each appoints one representative to the board.<sup>6</sup>

**The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry** manages reindeer husbandry in Finland on a national level, and it is the ministry that decides the maximum number of reindeer that each district can have.

**Reindeer co-operatives are not** Indigenous legal entities and, even in the Sámi homeland, there may be reindeer owners who are not of Sámi descent in the reindeer herding co-operatives. In contrast to Norway and Sweden, anyone who lives within Finland's reindeer husbandry area and who is a citizen of the European Union has the right to own reindeer, although there are some additional criteria. The person must reside permanently in the municipality that the reindeer herding district belongs to, and the members of the reindeer herding district must approve their membership of the district.

**As in other parts of Sápmi in Finland,** siida are the traditional Sámi way of organizing the work with the reindeer but also of organizing the use of grazing areas and other natural resources between siidas. A siida consists of Sámi people representing several different households, who together form a group that takes care of the family and manages the reindeer herd.<sup>7</sup> The Siida has its own territory with associated infrastructure and migration routes. Siida are not recognized by national law in Finland.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Paliskuntain yhteisö. Reindeer Herders' Association – Reindeer Cooperatives - Reindeer Herders' Association - Reindeer
- 2 Jernslettem, Johnny-Leo and Konstatin Klokov (2002). Sustainable Reindeer husbandry. Report to Arctic Council. Centre for Saami studies, UiT. See page 126.
- 3 Holand, Øystein, Tim Horstkotte, Juoko Kumpula and Jan Moen (2022). Reindeer Pastoralism in Fennoscandia. Horstkotte, Tim, Øystein Holand, Jouko Kumpula and Jan Moen (red.) Reindeer Husbandry and Global Environmental Change. Routledge.
- 4 Paliskuntain Yhdistys Reindeer Herders' Association – Reindeer Reindeer Herders' Association - Reindeer Herders' Association - Reindeer
- 5 Reindeer Herding Sámi & Finns – Finland - International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry - ICR
- 6 Reindeer Husbandry Act (848/1990)
- 7 Sara, Mikkel Nils (2009) Siida and Traditional Sámi Reindeer Herding Knowledge. The Northern Review 30. (Spring 2009) 153-178
- 8 Indigenous Navigator (2021). National Survey Finland.



Kárášjohka:

The Sámi Parliament in Norway is situated in Kárášjohka / Karasjok. While the institution was established in 1989, the dedicated parliament building was completed in the autumn of 2001.

*Photo: Anne Henriette Nilut*

# 4.0 Self-determination for Indigenous Peoples and reindeer husbandry

The right to self-determination is an established and international recognized human right, and the right to self-determination for Indigenous Peoples is recognized in the UNDRIP. Norway, Sweden and Finland all voted in favour of the Declaration. The Declaration clarifies that Indigenous Peoples have the right to autonomy or self-government in internal affairs.<sup>1</sup>

**The constitutions of all three countries recognize** the Sámi people's right to self-govern to varying degrees (read more about this in the State of Sápmi 1-2025<sup>2</sup>). The respondents of the Indigenous Navigator survey answered several questions on self-determination among Sámi people in Norway, Sweden and Finland.

**In terms of self-determination**, there is a question as to how, or whether, states recognize Sámi peoples as distinct peoples with collective rights, and how national legislation recognizes Indigenous Peoples as a group with collective rights. The respondents from Sweden and Finland were agreed that the states recognize the Sámi as Indigenous Peoples, and as a group with collective rights, and this is also reflected in the national legislation.

**Interestingly, however**, in Norway the respondents from both the national and community survey answered no to this question, and pointed out that the Constitution of Norway does not mention Sámi as Indigenous People in law. In May 2023, the Norwegian Parliament made amendments to the Norwegian Constitution's article §108 so that it included the words Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous Navigator surveys were conducted prior to May 2023. The change in the Norwegian Constitution may not necessarily change the respondents' answer, however.



**The possibility of reindeer herders** developing their own livelihood is important, and recognition and respect for their self-determination and self-government is a prerequisite for development based on Sámi needs. There are some central articles in the UNDRIP that set out the content of self-determination and self-government.

**In the context of Sápmi**, these articles mean that Sámi people, as Indigenous Peoples, have the right to participate in the decision-making process in issues that are relevant to, and affect them. The right to self-government is related to internal affairs; this means that, for issues that affect not only the Sámi population but also other interests, the national authorities have the final say.

**Article 3**  
*"Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."*

**Article 4**  
*"Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions."*

**Article 26**  
*"1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired."*

*"2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired."*

*"3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned."*



Consultations, 2015:

Consultation between the Sámi Parliament in Norway and the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (OED) at the administrative level regarding the 420 kV power line on the Ofoten-Balsfjord stretch.

Photo: Eirik Larsen

## 4.1 Consultation

**As Indigenous Peoples,** Sámi have the right to consultation, for instance in matters such as the economy, culture and livelihoods. Consultation is a part of self-determination but how is it practised in Sweden, Finland and Norway?

**In Finland,** the respondents answered that consultations are, by law, restricted to the Sámi homeland,<sup>3</sup> and the consultation is between the state and the Sámi Parliament on issues that especially affect the position of the Sámi people. The obligation to consult on matters affecting the Sámi people is fulfilled to varying degrees, and there is no defined obligation to consult other Sámi interests that are affected by these matters.

**In Sweden,** the state must consult on matters affecting the Sámi people. In contrast to Finland, it is not only the state that has to consult Sámi repre-

sentatives on issues affecting them but also the regional and local level governments.<sup>4</sup> The act on consultation states that the Sámi villages (reindeer herding districts) shall be consulted on issues affecting them.<sup>5</sup>

**The right to consultations in Norway** is regulated by chapter 4 of the Sámi Act. The Act provides that the state, regional and local governments must consult the Sámi Parliament and other Sámi interests on issues affecting them. This means that reindeer herding districts must be consulted on issues affecting the reindeer herding community.

**Consultation is a means** of influencing decisions at national, regional and local levels. For this to happen, there must be an intention to reach an agreement between Sámi interests and the authorities. In the end, it is the authorities that make the final decision. In none of the countries are the consultations done with the aim of obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). This issue is described in more detail in State of Sápmi 1-2025.<sup>6</sup>

**Internal rules and decisions are** often made by the district board but the states form the framework for this internal self-government. This is done by law, first of all via the national Reindeer Herding Act. The act, in different countries, determines which tasks the district board has, but national law also determines how self-government is practised and, here, there are some differences between the countries, which can be exemplified by determining the number of reindeer and protecting grazing areas.

## 4.2 Self-government in reindeer husbandry - Finland

**In Finland**, the Reindeer Husbandry Act (848/1990) has many provisions that regulate the internal affairs of the reindeer co-operatives (reindeer herding district). Determining the number of reindeer allowed is one example of how the state and government authorities do not permit Sámi self-government of reindeer husbandry in Finland. Chapter 3 of the Reindeer Husbandry Act describes how the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry shall consult the Reindeer Herding Association and the unions of agricultural producers before deciding on the maximum numbers of reindeer in the different reindeer herding co-operatives for a 10-year period. The reindeer herding co-operatives have no role in establishing the number of reindeer in their own district. The number of reindeer is a determinant of the future income of the herders and, along with the availability of grazing areas, is a central and key condition for the husbandry.

**In relation to grazing areas**, there is no document assigning any role to the reindeer herding co-operatives in terms of stopping or influencing decisions regarding development on reindeer husbandry grazing areas, not even in the Sámi homeland. The Finnish Forest Administration Act (234/2016) states that it will ensure that the conditions for the Sámi people to practise their culture in the Sámi homeland are fulfilled, and that obligation also includes protecting the grazing areas for reindeer husbandry. The respondents from the survey in Finland described a practice whereby the state authorities only negotiate with the Sámi Parliament in Finland on matters regarding the protection of natural resources, including grazing areas for reindeer husbandry. There is no such a practice that includes the Sámi reindeer herders. However, the state has to fulfil its obligation to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament on community plans in the Sámi homeland.<sup>7</sup>

**Since siida are not recognized in Finland**, there is no specific entity in Finland for the Indigenous Sámi reindeer herders from which they can promote and develop their own livelihood and culture.

## 4.3 Self-government in reindeer husbandry - Sweden

**The Sámi Parliament in Sweden** has administrative and expert authority over reindeer husbandry in Sweden but this is restricted to issues unrelated to the number of reindeer, and with a minimal role regarding protection of natural resources. The number of reindeer is determined by the County Administrative Board, without any involvement from the reindeer herding village or the Sámi Parliament in Sweden.

**The Sámi Parliament is described** as having administrative authority over reindeer husbandry but the respondents from the survey in Sweden described the role of the Parliament as being that of a referral body on issues regarding development in reindeer grazing areas.<sup>8</sup> The Sámi Parliament participates in community planning to ensure that Sámi interests, including reindeer husbandry, are secure in their use of land and water.<sup>9</sup> The other means of ensuring reindeer husbandry grazing areas is by consultation between the Samebyer and the local authorities.

**The self-government of reindeer villages** is restricted to internal affairs, with tasks such as constructing fences, corrals or building facilities like slaughterhouses. Samebyer can be consulted on issues that affect the reindeer herders' interests but the survey respondents noted that the law on con-

May 2024:

The Sámi Parliament in Sweden holds its plenary meeting in the Swedish Parliament building in Stockholm.

*Photo: Melker Dahlstrand / Swedish Parliament*



#### 4.4 Self-government in reindeer husbandry - Norway

sultations is fairly new and the local government and institutions are not always aware of the need for consultation.<sup>10</sup> This lack of knowledge can mean that the Samebyer are not being consulted on some issues due to a lack of information.

**The responsible authorities** or extractors must involve reindeer herding villages before any industrial or extractive activities take place that will have an impact on their grazing land. This is regulated by the Mining Act (1991:45) and the Forestry Act (1979:429) but it does not imply consultation, nor live up to the standards recognized in international human rights law or the UNDRIP, and neither the authorities nor any other initiators need to seek consent from the reindeer herding community.<sup>11</sup>

**The reindeer husbandry districts** have self-government in internal affairs. The elected board of the reindeer herding district draw up rules of use. These rules include the use of pasture areas within the district grazing area, determination of the number of reindeer for each siida, rules on the use and maintenance of fences, rules on the use of motorized vehicle such as all-terrain vehicles and rules on investments in the reindeer herding district.<sup>12</sup>

**The rules of use regarding grazing areas** in the district and the rules determining the number of reindeer for each siida have to be drawn up in collaboration with the siidas in the reindeer herding district.



**The rules of use** are rules that the district board shall follow in internal matters. However, these rules have to be approved by the County Governor.<sup>13</sup> The survey respondents pointed out that the authorities thus have the possibility of interfering in internal matters, and that it is the state authorities that take the final decisions in these affairs. This happens if the County Governor does not approve the rules of use, at which time the state governor can then assist or create the rules of use itself.<sup>14</sup>

*Pile o' Sápmi:*

*Pile o' Sápmi* by artist Máret Anne Sara was first installed outside the Inner Finnmark District Court in February 2016, as a protest against the forced culling of reindeer. The artwork coincided with her brother Jovsset Ánte Sara's legal battle against the Norwegian state, and has since developed into an interdisciplinary art movement fostering debate. Today, the work is displayed in the entrance hall of the National Museum in Oslo.

*Photos: Piera Heaika Muotka*



**If the number of reindeer exceeds** the set number of reindeer for the siida in the reindeer herding districts, the siida have to prepare and implement a reduction plan. If the siida do not manage to reduce the number of reindeer, the Reindeer Husbandry Board is responsible for so doing. The Reindeer Husbandry Board is also, in the end, responsible for determining the number of reindeer. Since the ministry has a majority on the board, the reduction plan in most cases follows the authority's proposal for a decision.<sup>15</sup> In certain cases, the County Governor can determine the number of reindeer for each siidaandel, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food issues regulations on how the number of reindeer shall be determined.

**When the section of the Reindeer Herding Act** that gave the County Governor the ability to regulate the number of reindeer went through consultation between the Sámi Parliament, Sámi Reindeer Herders Association of Norway and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, both the Sámi Parliament and the Reindeer Herders Association were opposed to the amendment to the law, believing it to be in violation of international law.<sup>16</sup> The proposal was nonetheless forwarded by the ministry and adopted in the Storinting.

**The siida are acknowledged** by the Norwegian authorities and are also recognized in the Reindeer Husbandry Act. The reindeer herding districts in Norway, or siida in a district, can be consulted on matters that affect their interests, often projects or initiatives that affect their grazing areas. The respondents noted that consultations are conducted between the authorities and reindeer herding districts or siidas but that the authorities do not need the consent of the siida or the reindeer herding district to proceed with their initiatives.<sup>17</sup>

**The Sámi Parliament** is able to raise objections to construction projects affecting reindeer herders' grazing areas but the authorities do not need to respect these objections. The County Governor has the possibility of objecting to construction or initiatives that affect grazing areas but, since the County Governor has various interests to consider, it is often the Sámi interests that are overlooked, and County Governors seldom raise objections on behalf of Sámi.

## Endnotes

- 1 Henriksen, John B. (2009). Samisk selvbestemmelse. Gáldu čála nr. 2/2009.
- 2 Larsen, Eirik (2025) Recognition of the Sámi People in constitutions, the right to self-determination, and to free, prior and informed consent
- 3 The Constitution of Finland (731/1999) and the Sámi Parliament Act (974/1995).
- 4 Lag (2022:66) om konsultation i frågor som rör det samiska folket
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## 5.0 The difference in obligation to consultation

The respondents from the community survey stated that reindeer husbandry is an important livelihood in all three countries.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of Sámi reindeer herders influencing the development and future of husbandry is essential if husbandry is to develop according to Sámi reindeer herders' values.



Storheia, Fovsen-Njaarke:  
Wind turbines at the Storheia wind power industrial area, part of the Fosen case in which the Norwegian Supreme Court concluded that the development violated the human rights of Sámi reindeer herders.

Photo: Anne Henriette Nilut

**One of the biggest** challenges for reindeer husbandry is land encroachment, which affects the grazing area. Respondents noted that reindeer husbandry is suffering a loss of land to different industries, or other kinds of development. Loss of grazing area represents a huge challenge to the reindeer herders, negatively affecting their income. The loss of grazing may affect the possibility of reindeer husbandry facing up to future challenges from climate change, reducing the herders' flexibility during challenging grazing conditions. One of the herders' main strategies during the winter is to move the herd to areas where there are good grazing conditions for the reindeer. During difficult grazing conditions at wintertime, the need for flexibility is important so that the herders in a reindeer herding district have areas where they can move the herd. This is a traditional strategy that has been used for generations among herders.<sup>2</sup>

**An interesting observation** from the survey is that, in Finland, one conflict related to loss of land involves Finnish-led reindeer husbandry expanding into the grazing area of Sámi reindeer herding.<sup>3</sup> This highlights the difference in the situation of Sámi reindeer herders in Finland compared to Sweden and Norway. In Norway and Sweden, reindeer herding is reserved for the Sámi people connected to reindeer husbandry, at least in the northern parts of the countries. Conflict over grazing land, where land encroachment affects the grazing area, has an impact on the social structures of reindeer husbandry.<sup>4</sup> Encroachment onto grazing areas not only leads to a direct loss of grazing land but also affects the social life of reindeer herders. In Norway alone, 89 percent of the Sámi reindeer husbandry grazing area is already affected by land encroachment due, for example, to the construction of buildings and roads.<sup>5</sup>

**The way reindeer herders** can influence initiatives or decisions that affect grazing areas is through consultation. The findings from the questionnaire show that there are differences between the countries. In Finland, the consultations are between the Sámi Parliament and the national authorities; other Sámi interests and institutions have no rights to consultation. In practice, the possibility of the Finnish Sámi Parliament influencing decisions through consultations on the reindeer herders' grazing area is minimal. The authorities can negotiate with the Sámi Parliament on matters regarding natural resources in the Sámi homeland but this does not fulfil the obligation enshrined in the UNDRIP and does not ensure a process whereby the Sámi people in Finland can fully participate and influence decision-making.

**In Sweden**, the right to consultation is not only between the Sámi Parliament and the national authorities but also other Sámi interests, including reindeer herding villages. The consultations are conducted with the aim of reaching an agreement but the authorities do not need to obtain consent from the Sámi community when consulting. Respondents noted that the local authorities lack knowledge of what needs to be consulted, so not all issues affecting the reindeer herding community are put out to consultation. And not all information on the processes reaches the reindeer herding community from the local authorities, thus also violating their right to access information. Reindeer herders are impacted by mining and forestry, and many of these actors are large-scale private companies. Private companies are not held to the same standards, and do not need to consult regarding their initiatives on reindeer herders' grazing land.

**Consultation in Norway** is very similar to Sweden. In Norway, the national, regional and local authorities have to consult Sámi interests affected by their decision-making. This means that reindeer herding districts and siidas have the right to be consulted on issues that affect them. The difference in Norway is that siida are recognized in the Reindeer Herding Act and it is acknowledged that siida are a legal subject when it comes to grazing rights. The consultations are conducted with the aim of reaching an agreement between the Sámi interests and the Norwegian authorities although the authorities do not need any consent from the Sámi community.

**When the Norwegian Parliament** adopted amendments to the Sámi Act in 2019, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development drafted the legislative proposal for the amend-

ments. In this proposal, the Norwegian authorities' position on Sámi peoples' right to self-determination and self-government could be summarized in the following manner: Sámi people as Indigenous people have right to self-governance and autonomy in matters concerning their internal affairs. On the other hand, on issues that affect both Sámi and Norwegian interests, the Sámi have a right to be consulted but the Norwegian authorities take the final decision.<sup>6</sup>

**This summarizes** the consultation processes in both Norway and Sweden, and the question that remains is how far the consultations actually influence the decision-making process, when there is no obligation to obtain the consent of Sámi society.



## 5.1 Self-government and autonomy

**There are differences in how** self-government for reindeer husbandry is implemented in the three countries. The similarity between all three countries is that, in terms of internal management in the reindeer herding community, a Reindeer Herding Act in all three countries has delegated specific tasks that the district boards must comply with. These are rules that govern activities such as gathering the reindeer herd, marking the calves, and rules on what kind of infrastructure the reindeer herding community can build. There are two striking differences that need to be mentioned. First, in Finland, there is no entity in the reindeer herding community that is solely based on Sámi reindeer husbandry, and since *siida* are not

acknowledged, there is no Indigenous institution connected to reindeer husbandry that can ensure autonomy for Sámi reindeer herders. The second interesting finding is that, in Norway, the board of the reindeer herding districts has to write rules of use (*Bruksregler*) to guide the internal management of the reindeer herding district. The rules are made by the herders themselves so one could argue that they create more autonomy. However, the rules have to be approved by the County Governor, and there have been amendments made by the Norwegian Parliament on what the rules should consist of and what they cover. There is a new proposal for more specific rules under consideration that will soon be adopted.

**Sámi reindeer herders have** the right to autonomy and self-government in internal affairs but the interesting finding is that there are differences in all the three countries regarding self-government in reindeer herding. Questions arose during the analysis of the questionnaires. What should form part of the self-government of Sámi reindeer husbandry? What can secure its future autonomy? Reindeer numbers seem not to be considered an internal matter since all countries have national authorities that take the final decision regarding maximum number of reindeer.



### Calf marking:

Each summer, Sámi reindeer herders gather their herds to identify and mark the new calves. A distinctive cut is made in the calf's ear to register ownership, using traditional family marks that are passed down through generations.

*Photo: Susanna Israelsson*

## 5.2 Protecting grazing land with means other than consultations

**Since the authorities** in all three countries do not need to seek consent during consultation, the reindeer herding community's ability to protect its own grazing land is limited. In Finland, the Sámi homeland is specifically intended for reindeer herding, and the land must not be used in such manner that could hinder reindeer herding. And yet, since anyone that is an EU citizen and resides permanently in the municipality that the reindeer herding district belongs to has the possibility of taking up reindeer herding, there is no area solely for the Sámi reindeer herders. Finland does not grant exclusive reindeer herding land rights to Sámi reindeer herders as they do in Norway and Sweden. The Sámi reindeer herders of Finland do not have any formal role in protecting their own grazing land. The Sámi Parliament can influence community plans through negotiations. The authorities must also negotiate conditions that will fulfil the obligation for the Sámi homeland not to be used in such a way that hinders reindeer herding. The negotiation of any adjustment to conditions does not ensure the Sámi people's right to participate in any decision-making.

**Reindeer herders in Sweden** must be involved in processes of development that impact grazing land before they commence. It is for the responsible authorities or extractors to ensure this involvement but this does not mean that authorities or industry developers need to ask for consent to their projects. The Sámi Parliament in Sweden can influence community planning and ensure that reindeer herders' interests are secured in the community planning.

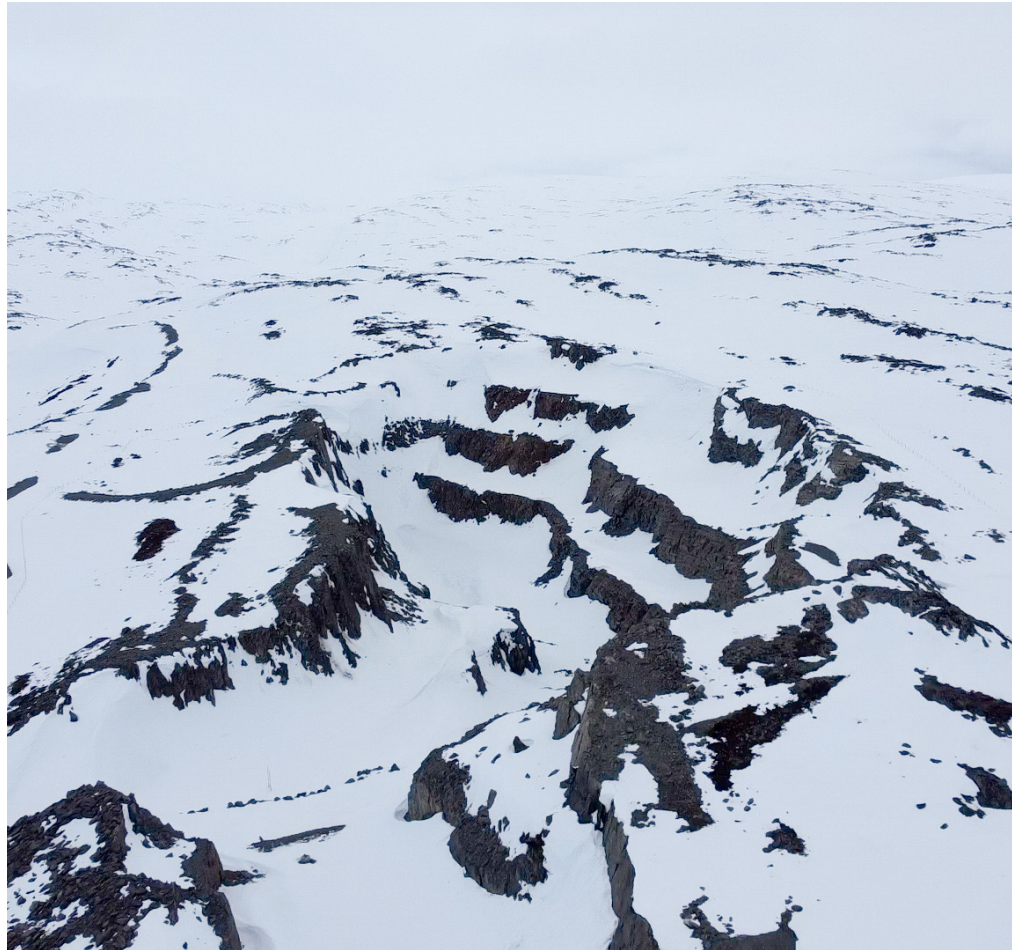
**The Sámi Parliament in Norway** can raise objections on behalf of the reindeer herding community regarding land issues. The same possibility applies to the County Governor but there are often conflicts of interest meaning that the County Governor does not, in practice, raise objections on behalf of the reindeer herding community.

**The role for the reindeer herding community** in safeguarding one of the key factors for their livelihood is therefore minimal. Reindeer herders' grazing area is a key factor in determining the future income of herders, as well as their ability to practise their culture and traditional occupations. With good grazing conditions and less disturbance, the herd can produce more calves during the spring. Reindeer herding communities from all three countries have experienced a loss of grazing land. None of the Reindeer Herding Acts in the three countries has provisions that protect the grazing area for Sámi reindeer herders, and there is no specified role for herders to ensure that they can have effective control over their traditional land. In all three countries, the fragmentation of government has led to a lack of coherence in addressing herders' land rights.<sup>7</sup> This partly explains why none of the three countries are meeting their obligations under UNDRIP Art. 26 on land rights.

### Mines in Sápmi:

The expansion of mining in Sápmi threatens the delicate balance of these ecosystems and the cultural practices that have existed for millennia. Our communities already face the impacts of climate change, and the further degradation of our lands through industrial mining is an additional burden that we should not bear.

*Photo: Anne Henriette Nilut*



## Endnotes

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June 2025

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**Almmuheaddji / publisher:** The Saami Council | Sámi University of Applied Sciences | IWGIA

**Prošeaktajoavku / project group:** Áile Jávo, Eirik Larsen, Piera Heaika Muotka, Liv Inger Somby, Ole-Anders Andersen Turi, Nikita Bulanin, David Nathaniel Berger

**Hábmejeaddji / design:** Piera Heaika Muotka

**Govat / pictures:** Piera Heaika Muotka, IPDB, Kukka Ranta, Anne Henriette Nilut, Ben Powless, Beaska Niillas, Kristoffer Hætta, Gunn-Britt Retter, The Saami Council

**Čállli / author:** Ole-Anders Turi

**Korrekturlohan / editing and proofreading:** Nikita Bulanin, Dwayne Mamo, David Nathaniel Berger

**Prenten / print:** Fagtrykk Alta AS

**This publication is part of the Monitoring Indigenous Peoples' rights in Sápmi project, financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.**



Funded by the  
Nordic Council  
of Ministers

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Sameráđdet  
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The Saami Council

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