

Linking the Indigenous Sami People with Regional Development in Sweden



The Laponia World Heritage Site in Sweden has a co-management model that has meaningfully includes the Indigenous Sami people in decision making. This is a leading practice in the country.

About the OECD's work on Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development

The study *Linking the Indigenous Sami People with Regional Development (2017)* is part of a broader thematic project topic which was launched on 19 September 2017 at Wendake First Nation, Canada. It includes country case studies and a pan-OECD report that offers policy recommendations for OECD member and non-members under the auspices of OECD Regional Development Policy Committee. This project has closely involved Indigenous leaders and communities in Australia, Canada and Sweden—a network which we hope to expand in the future as we continue work on this topic.

It is hoped that this work will provide actionable recommendations on how to better include Indigenous peoples in regional development, learning from and incorporating their own perspectives on sustainable development in the process.

To undertake a country case study or further thematic work with the OECD:

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The Sami are important to the economic development and well-being of northern Sweden

The Sami are an Indigenous people who have lived for time immemorial in an area that today extends across the **Kola Peninsula in Russia, northern Finland, northern Norway's coast and inland and the northern half of Sweden**. The Sami are the only Indigenous people in Sweden and have an estimated population of around 20 000 to 40 000. A more precise population count is unknown as Sweden does not collect any statistical information on ethnicity. A lack of statistical data on the Sami in Sweden makes it difficult to understand the Sami business sector, livelihoods and wellbeing.

Northern Sweden faces **unique challenges** related to **sparsity and remoteness** and at the same time has unique strengths—the collective assets of the Sami form one of these strengths. Many Sami business draw on **traditional knowledge** in the management of the landscape and the production of goods and services. Sami businesses tend to balance market participation with non-market values, stressing the importance of cultural reproduction.

The **main Sami business sectors in northern Sweden** are reindeer husbandry, tourism and the cultural sector and other rural activities.

- The **Sami reindeer industry** is seeing growing demand. With around 3 900 reindeer herders in Sweden, the industry's total turnover is estimated at around 43 million dollars. While there are growth opportunities for this industry, it is also limited by such factors as predators, climate change, and competing land uses.
- The **unique culture and traditions** of the Sami are an important part of regional tourism strategies. However, there are very few Sami entrepreneurs engaged in touristic offerings. A growing **nature-based tourism sector** with activities such as hunting, fishing, skiing, snowmobiling and dog-sledging, has the potential to create new sources of income and future employment opportunities for the Sami.
- Sami **food production and duodji** (handicrafts) also show potential for growth. At present, the Sami cultural sector is relatively small. The prospects for the commercialisation for this sector differ and may require either seed capital or grants in order to thrive.



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Three critical actions to better link the Sami with regional development

The **enabling environment** for Sami businesses is shaped by national sectoral policies (e.g. infrastructure development, natural resources exploitation, environmental policies and supports for business development) and national frameworks for regional and rural development alongside policies and services at the regional/county and municipal levels.

This report offers **recommendations** on how to better link the Sami with regional development in three main areas:

- 1** Improving **data collection and dissemination** on Sami livelihoods and wellbeing
 - Synthesise current data sources and identify data limitations in their use and dissemination.
 - Increase research funding for Sami data collection.
 - Develop ethical guidelines for research related to the Sami.
 - Enhance the role and capabilities of the Sami Parliament in statistics collection.
 - Expand industry codes for Sami businesses.
- 2** **Enhancing policies and programmes** in order to create an **enabling environment for Sami businesses and livelihoods**
 - Make regional and rural development program design more inclusive of the Sami.
 - Address regulatory and financial barriers to Sami business development.
 - Strengthen the role of intermediary institutions in order to build scale and facilitate access to resources and the pooling of expertise.
 - Expand skills and training opportunities for Sami business development.
 - Enhance supports to develop a sustainable Sami-led tourism industry.
 - Acknowledge in programme design that investments in Sami culture and education are investments in Sami economic development.
- 3** **Strengthening the linkages** between the Sami—as a group of diverse individuals and institutions—and regional development efforts
 - Improve engagement with Sami society in the context of regional and rural development plans, governance and programs.
 - Clarify Sami rights to consultation on land use issues and support capacity building for Sami institutions/organisations to be meaningful partners in such engagement.
 - Include Sami land use considerations in regional spatial planning.
 - Move toward the development of **a National Sami Policy** that can:
 - Identify future priorities for the development of Sami society;
 - Assess the current policy framework in an integrated way and identify actions to improve it;
 - Clarify responsibilities for Sami society between different agencies and levels of government;
 - Establish mechanisms to build the capacity of the Sami Parliament (such as MOUs to govern data, information and resource sharing);
 - Establish agreed mechanisms for coordination and dialogue between different levels of government.
 - Establish an annual strategic dialogue between the Swedish Government and the Sami Parliament to assess progress in the implementation of this policy, and to identify priorities for future action.
 - In the medium to longer term, Sweden should consider how the Indigenous rights framework could evolve to meet the contemporary needs of Sami people and to better support their unique cultural identity and self-determination.