



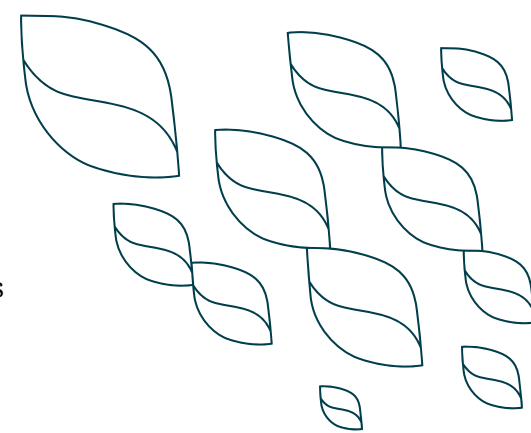
LAPSIASIAVALTUUTETTU
OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

"I'm happy that I get to study this language and it's part of my culture"

The well-being of Sámi children and the realisation of their rights

The survey examined the well-being of Sámi children and the realisation of their rights in the words of the children themselves. The results show that Sámi children enjoy a good life in many respects. The life of Sámi children should be examined from diverse perspectives. Multilingualism, use of Sámi dress and traditional Sámi livelihoods are factors in the lives of many Sámi children.

The survey was carried out in 2022 by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children as part of the National Child Strategy. It was taken by children aged 11–17 who identify as Sámi, both from the Sámi Homeland and other parts of Finland. Six children were interviewed for the electronic questionnaire, which was taken by 83 children.



Results

Close relationship to nature and concern over climate change

The children's accounts of their activities, how they spend their free time and where they feel good, as well as their thoughts on their future and dreams, all reflect a close relationship to nature. The children also talked about the effects of climate change on nature and, thereby, the possibilities of the Sámi to engage in their traditional livelihoods, such as handcrafts, fishing and reindeer herding. The children also discussed the changes wrought by climate change on the natural environment from the perspective of mental well-being.

"The salmon are disappearing, the animals are suffering, we can't live off nature like we used to."

Challenges in mobility and access to services in sparsely inhabited areas

The children often live a long way from each other, so the lack of public transport, long intervals between buses or the cost of public transport prevent them from visiting each other, travelling to leisure activities, or even going to school independently. However, the low population density of these areas is not seen exclusively as a hindrance, but also as unique and special.

"Living here, there are no activities in your free time and it's a hundred kilometres to the nearest health care service."

Sámi identity and rights

Of the rights of the Sámi, the children were most concerned with linguistic rights, but also talked about rights related to teaching and other services. The children are worried about outside attitudes toward their language, culture and the rights of the Sámi. Some of the children felt that their rights are being realised by the language teaching they receive and saw that their language would provide them with future study and work opportunities.

"The right to your own language and culture. The right to services in Sámi in the Sámi homelands."

Possibilities to use Sámi languages

The use of Sámi languages in the children's lives reinforces their Sámi identity and sense of connection to Sámi traditions. Children have more diverse opportunities to use the Sámi languages in the Sámi homeland than elsewhere in Finland. The children's linguistic environments limit their use of Sámi languages. Children avoid using Sámi languages if they are not certain whether the person they are talking to speak Sámi or the same Sámi language, or if they feel that they cannot speak the language well enough themselves.

"I use Sámi in Sámi classes because I don't know anyone else who speaks it."

Suggested measures

Close relationship to nature and concern over climate change

1. Support the children's relationship to nature and right to try and engage in the traditional Sámi livelihoods.
2. Commit to the emissions targets set for mitigating climate change and preserving traditional livelihoods.

Challenges in mobility and access to services in sparsely inhabited areas

3. Provide suitable meeting places for children also in villages and sparsely inhabited areas.
4. Develop public transport and different modes of transport to support the children's independent mobility, both to school and in their free time.

Sámi identity and rights

5. Increase awareness of the Sámi in schools and various communications channels to decrease discrimination and bullying.
6. Train Sámi-speaking teachers to support the children's Sámi identity and guarantee at least general and intensified support in their native language.

Possibilities to use Sámi languages

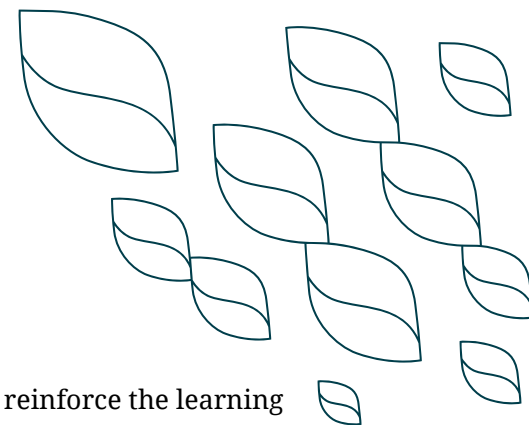
7. Prepare Sámi-language study materials to reinforce the learning and use of Sámi languages.
8. Develop leisure activities in Sámi languages and opportunities to use Sámi languages, especially to reinforce the Sámi identity of Sámi children living outside the Sámi homeland.

Hearing Sámi children

9. Ensure that Sámi children are regularly consulted on issues related to their well-being and the realisation of their rights, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and also in order to collect follow-up data.

Principal ways proposed by the children for improving their well-being and the realisation of their rights

- increasing awareness of Sámi culture;
- more opportunities for using the Sámi languages in their free time;
- Sámi-language study materials and qualified teachers; and
- leisure venues, public and private transport, and driving licences.





The Sámi in Finland

- The Sámi are the only official indigenous people in Europe. The Sámi inhabit regions of four different countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia.
- The Sámi have their own languages and culture, the maintaining and development of which is protected under the Constitution of Finland.
- Three Sámi languages are spoken in Finland: North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi.
- There are approximately 10,000 Sámi in Finland, more than 60 percent of whom live outside the Sámi homeland.
- The Sámi have self-government over their language and culture in the Sámi homeland under the Constitution. Duties under the Sámi self-government are managed by the Sámi Parliament elected by the Sámi. The Village Committee is the traditional, ancient form of self-governance of the Skolt Sámi.
- The Sámi languages are taught and tuition in them is provided at school, also remotely. Early childhood education and care is provided, for example, in Sámi language nests.
- Awareness of the Sámi about their language rights and increase in availability of services have improved the vitality of Sámi languages.
- Sámi National Day is celebrated on 6 February.

Read more:

Elina Weckström, Karri Kekkonen & Outi Kekkonen (2023).

“I’m happy that I get to study this language and it’s part of my culture”:

The well-being of Sámi children and the realisation of their rights.

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