

**SÁPMI-EU**  
strategy



SUOMA  
SÁMI  
NUORAT



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Filling the EU-Sápmi knowledge gaps

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# Introduction

The Saami Council and the Suoma Sámi Nuorat association received funding from the EU Interreg Nord program for the project Filling the EU-Sápmi knowledge gaps, 2019 to 2022. The main objective of the project was to increase the knowledge of and strengthen the strategic relationship between the EU framework and Sámi society.

The project established an interdisciplinary EU-Sápmi-Jurddabeassi, a Sámi think tank, with two key tasks: first, to undertake a strategic planning process for Sápmi's positioning vis-à-vis the EU; and second, to produce a policy document with suggestions on how Sápmi can operate more strategically towards the EU. The EU-Sápmi-Jurddabeassi was composed of Sámi experts appointed in their personal capacities because of their expertise on Sámi society. The work of the Jurddabeassi has resulted in this document - an Sápmi-EU Strategy.

The Sápmi-EU Strategy was launched during the 22nd Sámi Conference in 2022.



## The EU-Sápmi-Jurddabeassi experts:

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# Vision of the strategy

The Sápmi-EU Strategy's vision is a thriving Sápmi for the Sámi as **one people** regardless of state borders.

# Outline of the document

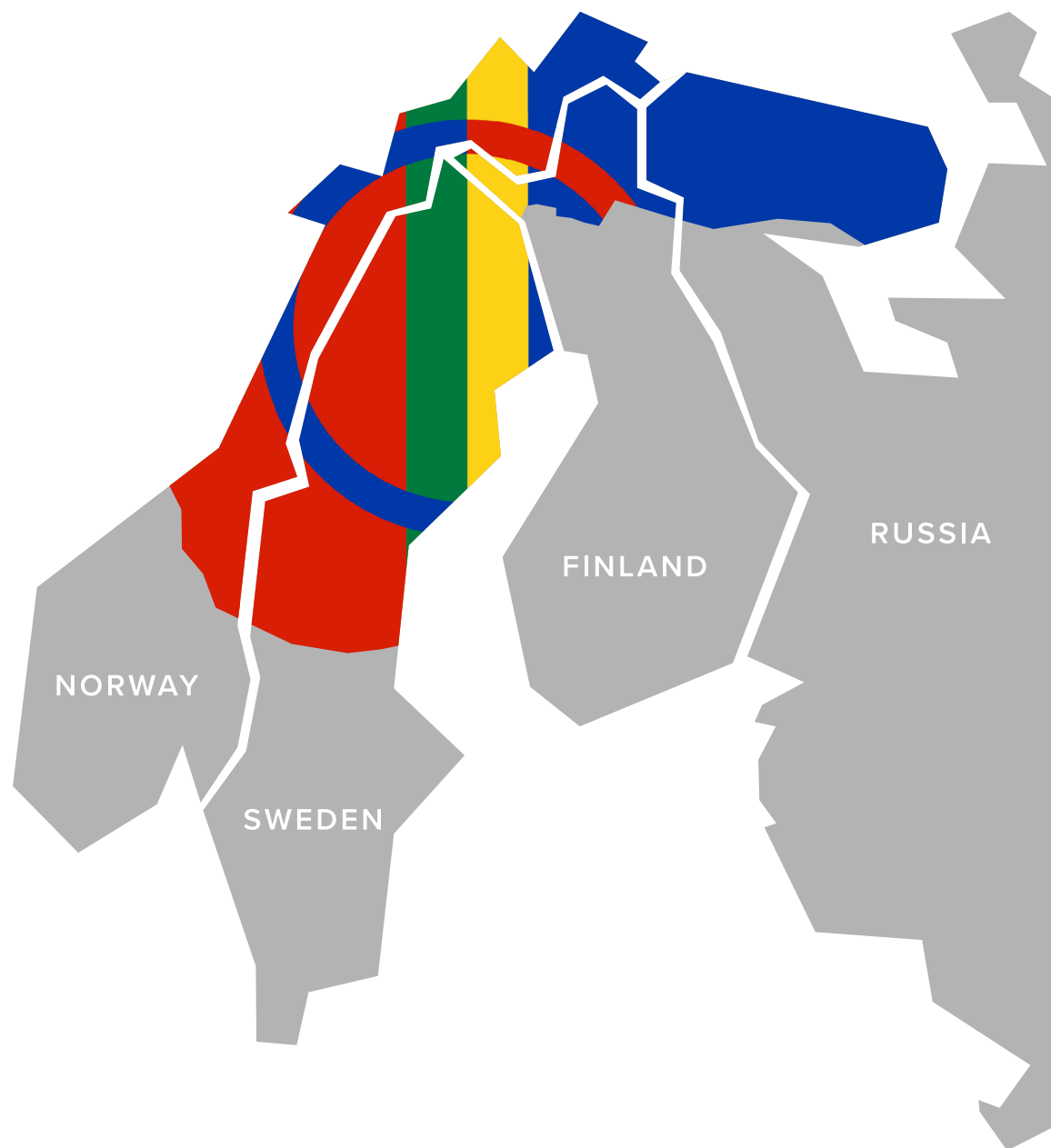
The Sápmi-EU Strategy is a Sámi-led suggestion on how the relationship between the EU and the indigenous Sámi people can be operationalized, with the aim of bringing tangible benefits to the Sámi people. The strategy recognizes that the EU and its policies and regulations – as well as its financial instruments that support Sámi culture – have direct impacts on the day-to-day life of the Sámi people. These impacts touch a wide range of fields such as reindeer husbandry, carnivore policy, land use, food security, forestry, health, cross-border collaboration, and more.

The list of topics and priorities identified in this strategy is not exhaustive, and it is expected to evolve over time. The list reflects the goal of establishing a long-term working partnership between the EU and Sápmi. This fits neatly with the ongoing evolution of the EU itself, which has resulted in increased EU responsibility for policy areas that directly impact the Sámi way of life.

The foundation of the partnership between the EU and Sápmi is the acknowledgement of and respect for Sápmi as the homeland of the Sámi people, including the requirement to obtain the consent of the Sámi people when taking action on traditional Sámi territory. Further, the strategy is based on a holistic worldview in which Sámi culture is understood to be the essential foundation of any actions taken to meet the needs of Sámi society today.

## A note on Sápmi

**Sápmi** is the name for the areas that the Sámi people alone inhabited and used since time immemorial and up to historical times. This area has been the home of the Sámi since before the establishment of national state borders. In this document, 'Sápmi' is used to describe the Sámi areas as a geographical region. 'Sápmi' is also used to describe the common Sámi political representation of the Sámi people across all Sámi areas. Finally, 'Sápmi' is also used as a collective noun for all Sámi people taken together, capturing their shared visions and positions.



# The Sámi people

The Sámi people are recognized as the Indigenous People of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and are also recognized as one of several small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation. An intrinsic link to an identifiable traditional territory is the characteristic that most clearly distinguishes Indigenous Peoples from minority groups. Although the Sámi are divided by the formal boundaries of four countries, we continue to exist as one people. We are united by cultural and linguistic bonds and a common identity, living in areas that, since time immemorial and up to historical times, we alone inhabited and used. This area, called Sápmi, has been our home since before the establishment of national state borders.

Healthy and productive ecosystems, both on land and water, must be secured and strengthened through the sustainable management of natural resources as they are the basis of Sámi culture and identity. Sámi culture must be understood in a holistic way, including, but not limited to, our languages, our knowledge systems, traditional livelihoods, food, governance structures, beliefs and practices, and art. International law, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to protect, promote and support our culture.

As a people, we have the right to freely determine our political status vis-à-vis other peoples, and we have the right to represent ourselves on the international level, including at the EU. However, the Sámi voice is lacking within the EU. This Sápmi-EU strategy proposes a path for translating the ambitions outlined in the updated EU Arctic policy into actions to meet the objectives of promoting Indigenous Peoples' rights and freedoms in line with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169. Further, the EU Arctic policy encourages full consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, bearing in mind the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), before adopting and implementing measures that may affect them directly.

# Sámi democracy

Sámi society is cross-border in its nature and is as complex as other societies. Sámi society includes traditional governance structures, inter alia in the reindeer herding communities and Saa'mi siidsaábbar, the Skolt Sámi siida council, which is the traditional system of self-government of the Skolt Sámi in Finland. There are also autonomous and self-governing arrangements within the states, including the three Sámi parliaments situated in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. In addition, associations play a crucial role in the public discourse in Sápmi. The status of the democratically-elected Sámi parliaments is regulated by law, while the traditional governance structures are based on customary law.

In addition to this, the Sámi Parliamentary Council was established in 2000 by the three Sámi parliaments in the Nordic countries (the Sámi from the Russian side of Sápmi participate as observers). The Sámi Parliamentary Council is tasked to enhance cross-border cooperation in Sápmi, and to serve as the common voice of the Sámi parliaments in international fora.

The Saami Council, the first pan-Sámi organisation, was established in 1956 as a coalition of Sámi national organisations. It currently includes organisations in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The Saami Council is mandated by the nine member organisations, which represent all sectors of Sámi society, to promote and protect the Sámi people's rights on a local, regional, national and international level.

# Recognition of the Sámi people within the EU framework

The EU has adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right that pertains to Indigenous Peoples and is recognised in the UNDRIP. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect them or their territories.

EU commitments under UNDRIP also apply to the Sámi people. However, the EU has not created an internal European Indigenous Rights instrument, but rather placed the portfolio of relationships with Indigenous Peoples in the hands of the European External Action Service. This creates a vacuum for Sámi issues within the framework of the EU. The EU's lack of awareness and knowledge of Sápmi is hampering the implementation of Sámi people's rights. A prerequisite for a true partnership between the EU and Sápmi is the recognition of the Sámi people as an Indigenous People within the EU framework.

## Actions:

- ◆ The EU shall recognize the Sámi people as an Indigenous People within the EU and, when referring to the Sámi people, shall use the following terminology: "The Sámi people, an Indigenous People recognized by the EU".
- ◆ The EU shall fund a Sámi mechanism within the framework of the EU, in order to establish the Sámi representation that is necessary for securing the Sámi people's access to the EU's institutional set-up and funding programs.

# A partnership agreement between Sápmi and the EU should be in place by 2028

A partnership agreement between Sápmi and the EU will be an important milestone for the recognition of the bilateral relationship between the two parties. The goal is to have the partnership agreement between EU and Sápmi in place by 2028, as the next EU multiannual financial framework will be launched then.

The objective of the formalisation of the partnership is to further strengthen the relations and cooperation between the EU and Sápmi in different areas, and to allow for the development of a proactive agenda and the pursuit of mutual interests. The partnership agreement will provide a framework permitting regular discussions on matters of interest to both the EU and Sápmi, such as global issues, where an exchange of views and an aligning of perspectives could benefit both parties. In particular: the increasing impacts of climate change; the use of natural resources; and research and innovation are three areas in which dialogue and enhanced cooperation is needed.

## Action:

- ◆ Sápmi and the EU shall sign a partnership agreement by 2028.

# An EU-Sápmi program in place by 2028

An SEU-Sápmi program will address specific Sámi needs in EU policy-shaping. The objective of an EU-Sápmi program is to tailor EU policies in such a way that they also accommodate Sápmi – the only Indigenous region in the EU – as well as breaking down silos between internal and external Indigenous Peoples policies. A strong EU-Sápmi program will strengthen economic, social, and territorial development in Sápmi and bring tangible benefits to the Sámi people as well as to the EU. Focus will be on promoting cross-border cooperation among the Sámi people living in four countries, as well as building a strong feeling of unity in the region. An EU-Sápmi program based on a holistic approach to regional development will help to address the administrative obstacles to economic growth and development on Sámi terms.

## Action:

- ◆ Sápmi and the EU shall establish an EU-Sápmi program that strengthens Sámi economic, social, and territorial development.

## Theme: Sámi capacity building

Strong Sámi institutions are a necessary precondition for Sápmi to be a stable and robust partner for actors on regional, national, and international levels. Capacity-building initiatives are needed both to increase the robustness and efficiency of internal processes within Sápmi and to improve the ability of the Sámi people to participate in policy-making process at the EU level. This will build a steady partnership between Sápmi and the EU.

Access to long-term funding will help to guarantee that the Sámi people actively participate in and function with the EU. Earmarked funding will be a prerequisite for translating EU priorities to the Sámi context. There is a need to tailor the EU financial instruments to also include the Sámi people.

## Action:

- ◆ The EU shall tailor its financial instruments to include the Sámi people in order to support Sámi institutions.



## Theme: Sámi research

A knowledge foundation in accordance with the Sámi worldview and ways of life is crucial in a time of rapid societal, environmental, and economic changes. As knowledge underpins societies, the Indigenous knowledge system of the Sámi must be respected and recognized as parallel to the academic knowledge system.

The academic knowledge system is also important for Sámi research, Researchers at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences and other academic institutions who conduct classic research in various disciplines serve as important pillars supporting research on, and by, the Sámi people. This strengthens the comprehensive knowledge foundation and can help to bridge the two knowledge systems.

The EU, as one of the largest funders of research in the world, should develop a tailored EU-Sápmi research program. An EU-Sápmi research program based on the knowledge gaps identified by the Sámi people will increase understanding. It will also help to raise awareness of Sámi perspectives in research and support the co-development of funding schemes. The architecture of such a program should also encourage the bridging of different knowledge systems and the securing of Sámi inclusion as equal partners in all phases of research. The research program should prevent knowledge extraction and ensure that research conducted in Sápmi, and on issues related to the Sámi people, brings tangible benefits to Sápmi. An EU-Sápmi research program shall respect Sámi ownership of research data. Dissemination of research results funded by the program must be conducted in Sámi languages and disseminated back to Sámi society.

### Action:

- ◆ The EU shall establish an EU-funded EU-Sápmi research program.

## Theme: Sámi culture and art

A thriving Sámi society is based on a strong and vibrant culture. Sámi culture is the foundation for our collective Sámi identity and well-being. Hence, cultural support mechanisms must acknowledge Sámi sovereignty in terms of defending, developing, and utilising our common Sámi heritage. Awareness-raising within the EU of the need to protect Sámi cultural expressions is critical. A strong legal framework must be developed to protect our common collective property rights and prevent misuse of Sámi culture expression by outside actors.

Public funding is needed to support and strengthen Sámi culture and to allow us to express our culture. Public funding includes financial support for developing cultural and art institutions, but might also mean providing opportunities to Sámi cultural workers to explore Sámi cultural expression. An EU funding program shall also promote cross-border cooperation within Sápmi.

### Action:

- ◆ The EU shall develop a funding program for Sápmi as a region designed to meet the needs of the Sámi culture and art field.

## Theme: Sámi languages

Languages identify Indigenous Peoples' origin or community membership, and carry knowledge, culture, values, and expressions of worldview. The United Nations has declared an International Decade of Indigenous Languages to begin in 2022. The EU as a multilingual institution should acknowledge the International Decade of Indigenous Languages as a cross-cutting topic in their policy shaping, and should secure support to strengthen Sámi languages through targeted measures.

There is a need for the EU to provide funding to support the strengthening and revitalization of Sámi languages. There is also a need for the EU to spread information and provide opportunities to use Sámi languages.

### Action:

- ◆ The EU shall provide funding to strengthen Sámi languages and Sámi culture in accordance with its commitments under the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

## Theme: Sámi youth

Sámi youth are carriers of the future of Sápmi. There is a need to empower Sámi youth and enhance youth participation in EU processes.

Sámi youth need possibilities to live their lives in Sápmi, which entails access to relevant educational opportunities and work, including within traditional Sámi livelihoods. An EU Youth Policy that incorporates Sámi youth is an important measure for building a strong and inclusive community.

Access to traineeships in the various EU institutions, agencies and bodies is an example of a way to gain valuable experience. Such traineeships can be the first step in an EU career. Increasing Sámi youth participation in EU traineeships at the EU Commission will build individuals' capacity, but will also increase the overall base of knowledge and capacity in Sápmi on EU issues. This will, in the long term, open up more opportunities for Sápmi within the EU system.

### Action:

- ◆ The EU shall develop and implement an inclusive EU-Sámi Youth Policy and shall tailor existing EU youth programs to include and accommodate Sámi youth.

## Theme: Sámi entrepreneurship

A targeted EU policy on Sámi entrepreneurship is a key vehicle for supporting a thriving Sámi society in the EU. Such a policy must reflect the unique features of the Sámi economy, and must acknowledge that Sápmi is a cross-border region. Further, an EU policy on Sámi entrepreneurship must be inclusive, respecting the right for Sámi business not to seek constant growth. An EU policy must also be constructed in such a way as to support development on Sámi terms. As one example, the policy should address border obstacles such as custom regulations and taxes, and the lack of funding opportunities that stimulate mobility, both of which inhibit the free movement of goods, capital, and persons, and limit the freedom to establish and provide services.

### Action:

- ◆ The EU shall develop and implement an EU policy on Sámi entrepreneurship in collaboration with the Sámi people.

## Theme: Climate Justice for Sápmi

The consequences of climate change on Sámi society and livelihoods are severe, and there is an urgent need for an EU-Sápmi partnership in advancing effective climate action to cope with current and future changes. This should be acknowledged in the implementation of the European Green Deal. Further, the EU needs to ensure that mitigation policies and actions do not negatively affect Sámi culture and traditional Sámi livelihoods. A holistic understanding of the changes occurring in Sápmi requires equitable inclusion of the Sámi people in assessment processes and decision-making.

EU climate change actions should be based on the principles of climate justice, safeguarding a just transition that both respects and protects human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. We need our territories and ecosystems healthy to ensure a prosperous and resilient Sápmi for the coming generations.

### Action:

- ◆ The EU shall respect the rights of the Sámi people in the implementation of the European Green Deal by upholding the FPIC principle in decision making, securing Sámi access to climate financing, and including Sámi traditional knowledge in climate adaptation research, strategy development and policy implementation.

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