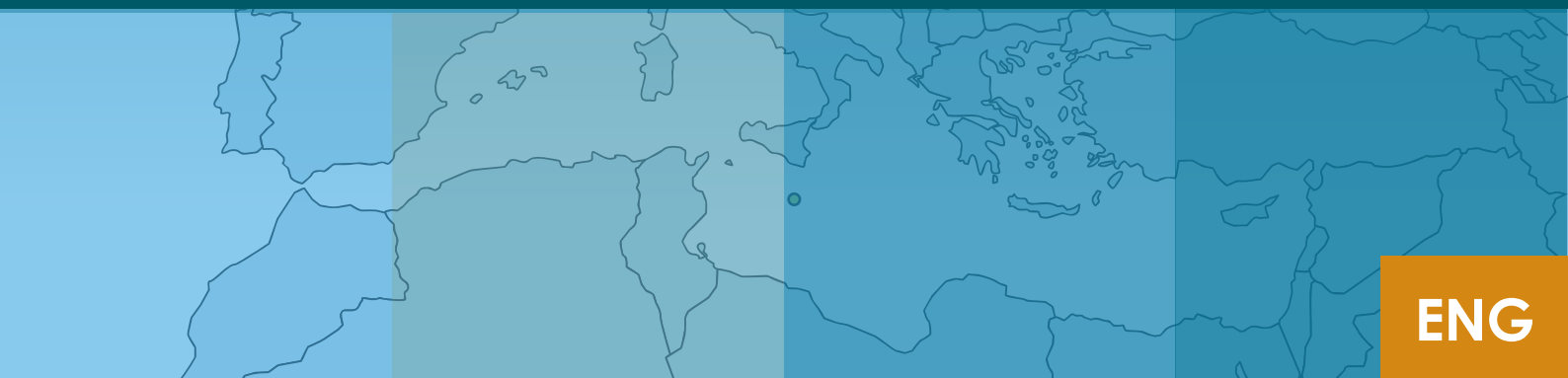




Regional or minority languages in Norway: a case study



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Introduction

Norwegian – Norwegian is used by 95% of the population as a first language and has two separate written standards, Nynorsk, which is about 160 years old, and Bokmål, which is closely similar to Danish. Speakers of Norwegian as a first language must learn both written varieties at school.

First and national minority languages – The two varieties of Norwegian, three Sámi languages, and Norwegian Sign Language are recognized as first languages indigenous to Norway. Three other languages are recognized as national minority languages and equal in value to Norwegian: Kven, Romani (spoken by Travellers, estimated to number a few thousand), and Romanes (spoken by a few hundred Roma who mostly live in the Oslo area).

Key provisions of the Language Act – According to the [Language Act](#), public bodies are responsible for using, developing and strengthening Bokmål, Nynorsk and the Sámi languages, and for protecting and promoting Kven, Romani and Romanes. Public bodies are required to use the Sámi languages in their daily work in the Sámi language administrative district (see Chapter 3 of the [Sami Act](#)). The Language Act does not provide for the national minority languages to have a corresponding role in society, but it does not prohibit it either.

Geographical challenges – Because Norway is geographically a large country, its population of 5.4 million is quite thinly spread, and this creates challenges when it comes to providing students with the language education they are entitled to.

This case study focuses on the **three Sámi languages** and **Kven**.

The Sámi languages

Varieties and number of speakers, ancestral territory – Three distinct Sámi languages are spoken in Norway: Northern Sámi (between 15,000 and 20,000 speakers), Lule Sámi (about 500 speakers), and Southern Sámi (about 300 speakers). The ancestral territory of the Sámi languages is Sápmi, a [region](#) covering the middle and north of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola area of Russia.

Domains of use – All three Sámi languages adhere to part III of the [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#), which focuses on promoting the use of regional or minority languages in public life. The Sámi languages are used in the home and the

¹ Compiled by David Little on the basis of information provided by Kim Buxton, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

community, in leisure activities and sport, in the arts and entertainment, at work, and in public life, politics, religion and education.

Print media – *Ávvir*, a newspaper in Northern Sámi, is published five days a week and has a circulation of approximately 1,200 per edition. Three local newspapers published in Norwegian receive funding from the Media Inspectorate (Medietilsynet) to include occasional articles in Sámi: *Sággat* (Northern Sámi), *NordSalten Avis* (Lule Sámi), and *Snåsnungen* (Southern Sámi).

Broadcast media – The state broadcasting company NRK has a radio station in the Sámi languages, NRK Sápmi. From Monday to Friday NRK also broadcasts a daily television news programme in Sámi, *Ođđasat*.

Print publishing – Davvi Girji (‘Northern Book’) is the largest Sámi publishing house, specializing in fiction, text books and dictionaries. ABC-Company E-skuvla AS is a Sámi publishing house, established in 2000, with mainly books in Sámi languages, but also some titles translated into other languages. ČállidLágádus is a Sámi publisher committed to disseminating knowledge of relevance to the Sámi people written in the Sámi languages. *Idut* publishes children's books, fiction and the Sámi youth magazine *Š*; it also publishes books in Kven. *Diedut* is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Nordic Sámi Institute (Guovdageaidnu, Norway); it appears at least once a year and features articles on social sciences, linguistics, and law. *Sámi Dieđalaš Áigečála* is an open-access peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal published by the University of Tromsø Arctic University Centre for Sámi Studies in Tromsø and the Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu, Norway; it features scientific articles, book reviews, sample lectures, and academic histories in Sámi languages.

Online publishing – The Northern Sámi newspaper *Ávvir* is published online as well as in print. NRK, the Norwegian Broadcasting Company, has a [website](#) that covers news and current affairs in all three Sámi languages. All official information on state websites is published in the Sámi languages. In areas of Norway where Northern Sámi is used, information from county councils and local councils is also published online in Northern Sámi.

Civil society/politics – The Sámi languages are the predominant languages used by Sametinget, the Sámi Parliament, which is premise giver in the formulation of the state's Sámi policy and an advisory body on Sámi policy issues.

The Sámi languages in the Norwegian education system – The [Education Act](#) guarantees pupils' rights to receive instruction in languages other than Norwegian. Northern and Southern Sámi are taught at pre-school, primary, lower and upper secondary, and tertiary levels and outside formal education; Northern Sami is also taught online. A few schools use one of the Sámi languages to teach all subjects, or most of the subjects that pupils must take to complete their education. Pupils can choose to study one of the Sámi languages as their first language and Norwegian as their second language; alternatively,

they can choose to study one of the Sámi languages as their second language and Norwegian as their first language. A pupil studying Northern Sámi as a second language receives 608 hours of tuition from grades 1 to 7, 228 hours from grades 8 to 10, and 309 hours total from grades 11 to 13. The Sámi Languages can also be studied as foreign languages.

Teacher education – Sámi teacher education programmes are taught in Sámi and are offered by Sámi University College (Sámi Allaskuvla). The programmes are flexible: teaching is both in person and online. Sámi University College offers a master's degree in education to Sámi teacher education programmes. Nord University offers MA degree programmes in both Lule Sámi and Southern Sámi for those wishing to qualify to teach grades 1-7 in those languages.

Teaching/learning materials – Teaching and learning materials are neither approved nor recommended by the national authorities; each school decides which materials to use in the classroom. Publishers can apply to Sametinget (the Sámi Parliament) for financial support to develop teaching and learning materials.

Key challenges – The main challenges are the lack of qualified teachers and the relatively low numbers of language users. Many Sámi lost the opportunity to learn their language as a result of the Norwegianization policy, the consequences of which are still apparent in society. In order to increase the number of Sámi language users, language revitalisation is needed in areas where the language is weak.

Features of your policy and/or practice that could usefully be applied to other RMLs – Exam developers in the Sámi languages work together as one group and develop a template for exams which can be adjusted and used for each of the Sámi languages. Texts and tasks are adjusted from the template version to make them more relevant to the language in question.

Kven

Number of speakers and ancestral territory – Kven is closely related to Finnish; estimates of the number of speakers range between 2,000 and 10,000. The ancestral territory of the language is [Nordkalotten](#) (The Cap of the North), which embraces the regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland north of the Arctic Circle. Nowadays the language is found all over Norway, but predominantly in the two northernmost counties, Troms and Finnmark.

Domains of use – Kven is used in the home and the community, in leisure activities and sport, in the arts and entertainment, at work, and in religion and education; it is not used in public life/politics.

Print media – None.

Broadcast media – Radio Nord Norge broadcasts a one-hour programme in Kven once a week.

Print publishing – None.

Online publishing – NRK, the Norwegian broadcasting company, has a [website](#) covering news and current affairs in Kven, as well as news concerning Kven affairs in Norwegian.

NGO – Kven is supported by [Kvensk Institutt](#), [Norske Kveners Forbund](#) and [De kvenske språksentrene](#).

Kven in the Norwegian education system – The [Education Act](#) guarantees pupils' rights to receive instruction in languages other than Norwegian. Kven is used as a first or second language in a few kindergartens. From years 1 to 13, pupils can choose to study Kven as a second language, with Norwegian as their first language. No previous knowledge of Kven is required when starting. A pupil studying Kven as a second language receives 608 hours of tuition from grades 1 to 7, 228 hours from grades 8 to 10, and 309 hours from grades 11 to 13. Kven is taught at pre-school, primary, lower and upper secondary and tertiary levels, outside formal education, and online.

Teacher education – The Arctic University of Norway offers a one-year full-time course in Kven. This can be integrated into a teaching degree and qualifies graduates to teach Kven as a second language. Kven can also be combined with Finnish in a Master's degree. Combined with a pedagogical degree, this also qualifies graduates to teach Kven.

Teaching/learning materials – As with the Sámi languages, teaching and learning materials are not approved or recommended by the national authorities. Each school decides which materials to use in the classroom. Publishers can apply to The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet) for financial support to develop teaching and learning materials.

Key challenges – The main challenges are the lack of qualified teachers and the low number of language users. In the past a policy of Norwegianization deprived many of the opportunity to learn Kven, and the consequences of that policy are still apparent. In order to increase the number of Kven language users, language revitalisation is needed in areas where the language is weak.

Please tell us about an interesting initiative in which you are or have been involved – The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training gives funding to projects to promote and develop Kven in kindergartens. We have also developed a digital learning platform for distance learning which is used for Kven (DigiLær).

Features of your policy and/or practice that could usefully be applied to other RMLs – Exam developers in Kven and Finnish work together as one group and develop a template for exams which can be adjusted and used for both languages. Texts and tasks are adjusted from the template version to make them more relevant to the language in question.