

# MINORITY RIGHTS ARE STRENGTHENED

## FACT SHEET

*In March 2009 the Swedish government presented a new minority rights strategy in the government bill From Recognition to Empowerment – the Government's Strategy for the National Minorities (no. 2008/2009:158). The strategy contains a number of changes to strengthen the rights of national minorities and to raise the level of ambitions for the implementation of the minority rights policy. The government allocates 70 million Swedish crowns for the reform which is to take effect January 1, 2010. The budget for the minority policy will be more than 80 million crowns in total. The Parliament adopted the bill on June 10, 2009.*



### BACKGROUND

The current minority policy was adopted in 2000 in connection to Sweden's ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The objective of the minority rights policy is to protect the national minorities, strengthen their power to influence and support the historical minority languages in order to promote and preserve them. Sweden's national minorities are the Jews, Roma, Sami, Swedish Finns and Tornedalers. The minority languages are Yiddish, Romany Chib, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli. Experience show that the objectives of the minority rights policy have been difficult to reach and that the needs of the national minorities have not been sufficiently met.

Based on the findings from its monitoring of the Swedish minority policy, the Council of Europe has recommended that Sweden take action in different fields in order to improve the implementation of the conventions.

The government's minority strategy thus contains actions to:

- secure improved implementation of the Council of Europe minority conventions
- improve national follow-up of the minority policy
- counteract discrimination and marginalization of national minorities
- empower the national minorities and strengthen their influence
- promote the preservation of national minority languages.



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### NEW ACT ON NATIONAL MINORITIES

A new Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages (Swedish Code of Statutes 2009:724) replaces the current legislation on the right to use Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli (Swedish Code of Statutes 1999:1175, 1999:1176). The Sami Parliament Act is also amended (No. 1992:1433) as well as the Social Services Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 2001:453). The new legislation enters into force on January 1, 2010. In accordance with Sweden's international obligations, some minority rights are to be implemented in the entire country and not only in certain regions like the previous legislation. All five national minorities are also included in the new act. The authorities are to inform the national minorities about their rights according to the new act. A new legal obligation is to protect the minorities and to promote the minority languages. The authorities are to promote the national minorities' opportunities to preserve and develop their culture in Sweden, as well as children's possibilities to develop a cultural identity and their minority language.

### ADMINISTRATIVE AREAS ARE EXPANDED

Today, special minority rights protection is given for Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli in administrative areas comprising seven municipalities in Northern Sweden. The administrative areas for Sami and Finnish will be expanded. This gives more individuals the right to use Sami and Finnish in their dealings with the authorities and also the right to pre-school and care of the elderly partly or completely in the minority language. The administrative area for Finnish is expanded to an additional 18 municipalities: Botkyrka, Eskilstuna, Hallsthammar, Haninge, Huddinge, Håbo, Köping, Sigtuna, Solna, Stockholm, Södertälje, Tierp, Upplands Väsby, Upplands-Bro, Uppsala, Älvkarleby, Österåker and Östhammar.

The current municipalities, Gällivare, Haparanda,

Kiruna, Pajala and Övertorneå, will remain part of the administrative area.

The administrative area for Sami is expanded to an additional 13 municipalities: Arvidsjaur, Berg, Härjedalen, Lycksele, Malå, Sorsele, Storuman, Strömsund, Umeå, Vilhelmina, Åre, Älvdalen and Östersund. The current municipalities, Arjeplog, Jokkmokk, Gällivare and Kiruna, will remain a part of the administrative area.

The administrative area for Meänkieli is not expanded and consists of Gällivare, Haparanda, Kiruna, Pajala and Övertorneå.

The municipalities within the administrative areas are allocated government funding for the additional costs due to the new legislation. Other municipalities may also voluntarily become a part of an administrative area and thus be entitled to government funding. Decision is made by the Government after application by the municipality in question.

### STRENGTHENED RIGHTS OUTSIDE THE ADMINISTRATIVE AREAS

Individuals have the right to use Finnish, Meänkieli or Sami in their dealings with administrative authorities if their case can be handled by personnel proficient in the language. Individuals are also to be given the right to care of the elderly in Finnish, Meänkieli or Sami if the municipality has employees proficient in the language.

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Administrative authorities are to promote the employment of personnel with proficiency in Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami if such skills are needed in dealings with administrative authorities or in the care of the elderly. Individuals always have the right to use Finnish and Sami in their dealings with the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Tax Agency and the Equality Ombudsman in cases where the individual is a party or a representative of a party.

### CLEARER GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

The implementation of the minority conventions needs to be improved through a clearer responsibility for government authorities. The County Administrative Board in Stockholm and the Sami Parliament (which is also a government authority) is to follow up the realization of the new minority policy. These government agencies are also to aid other administrative authorities through advice and information in the application of the new act and to coordinate the expansion of the administrative areas in cooperation with the municipalities in question.

The County Administrative Board in Stockholm and the Sami Parliament are to improve the general knowledge and awareness on national minorities and Sweden's international obligations regarding national minorities. The Sami Parliament is also to establish a homepage on national minorities.

The Sami Parliament is to stipulate the objectives as well as lead the work with the Sami language. The Swedish Parliament and Government are to stipulate the comprehensive objectives for national language policy. The responsibility for developing the goals for the Sami language policy will hereafter be placed on the Sami Parliament.

The Equality Ombudsman's work with the national minorities to promote equal rights and opportunities needs to continue. The new Discrimination Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 2008:567) provides a good foundation for this work through, for instance, the raising of awareness on discrimination issues among the national minorities.

### STRENGTHENED INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

Empowerment of the national minorities and strengthening of their influence will improve the implementation of the minority conventions. Improved participation in decision making will highlight the needs of the minorities and thus raise the general awareness in society on national minorities.

The new Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages regulates the national minorities right to participation. It is especially important to facilitate consultation on the local level since many decisions affecting individuals are made at this level.

The allocations of financial support to organizations representing the national minorities will increase from the fiscal year 2010. A priority will be to support the national minorities' conditions to create appropriate consultation practices within the administrative areas.

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### PROMOTION OF MINORITY LANGUAGES

The future of national minority languages is uncertain. Some of the languages, such as South Sami, are severely threatened. Resolute measures are needed to strengthen, preserve and revitalize the national minority languages.

In addition to the measures to increase individuals' use of minority language in dealings with administrative agencies, two Sami language centers are to be established in Östersund and Tärnaby in the South Sami region. The Sami Parliament will be in charge of these language centers that are to actively promote and stimulate the use of the Sami language.

From 2010 the government will also allocate funding for various revitalization measures. The funding is directed towards language initiatives for the general public.

Additional funding is also provided for language planning of national minority languages. Language planning of Meänkieli is a priority.

In order to promote the Sami language, the funding for Integrated Sami Education will increase from 2010. Integrated Sami education is provided within municipal schools through teaching in Sami in addition to mother tongue teaching.

### PLACENAMES IN MINORITY LANGUAGES

Placenames in minority languages are a valuable part of the Swedish cultural heritage that needs to be actively promoted by society. In order to do so, the Swedish Road Administration will be given an assignment to increase the number of road signs with placenames in minority languages.

Government agencies and municipal administrative authorities should promote the use of minority language placenames and signs in minority languages.

Minority language placenames should also be used in postal codes.

### MORE INFORMATION

More information on national minorities, minority policy, minority conventions and the bill on national minority strategy is available at [www.manskligarattigheter.se](http://www.manskligarattigheter.se) and [www.regeringen.se/integration](http://www.regeringen.se/integration).

The bill can be purchased in Swedish from the Swedish Parliament, phone no. +46-8-786 5810 or downloaded from [www.regeringen.se](http://www.regeringen.se).

For questions regarding the bill, please contact the Division for Discrimination Issues, Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality, phone no. +46-405 10 00.



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