

# Fact Sheets on Sweden

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## The Lapps in Sweden

The Lapps (*Sami*) have inhabited Sweden since ancient times. It appears most likely that they migrated from the east in various stages and groups during the pre-Christian era. They reached southern Finland, the shores of the Arctic Sea and the interior of the Finnish-Scandinavian land mass. We do know that they established themselves in northernmost Sweden at such an early date that their claim to these northern territories can be regarded as based on ancient prescriptive right.

The area of Lapp settlement extends nowadays over the entire Scandinavian arctic region and stretches along the mountain districts on both sides of the Norwegian-Swedish border down to the northernmost part of the province of Dalarna in Sweden.

The Lapps were originally hunters and fishermen. The capturing of wild reindeer was a dominant feature of their hunting culture. After the Lapps began taming wild reindeer, various forms of reindeer breeding developed, but this was a process that extended over a millennium.

Area (shaded) inhabited by the Lapps (*Sami*).



Source: Gunnar Rönn, *The Lapps in Sweden*, 1961

### Reindeer breeding

The number of Lapps (*Sami*) is estimated at 40-50,000, of which 15-17,000 live in Sweden. There is no single criterion, however, for determining if a person is a Lapp. Reindeer breeding, kinship and language are all possible criteria, and each of them yields a different total. Of the 15-17,000 Lapps currently living in Sweden, only about 2,500 (600-700 households) are directly engaged in reindeer breeding or entirely or partially dependent on reindeer breeding for their livelihood.

Most Lapps therefore earn their living by other means. They are found within different professions both in the Lapp territory and in other parts of Sweden. Their ties with Lapp culture vary all the way from strong identification with the Lapps as an ethnic group to total assimilation within the Swedish majority. But in recent years, self-awareness seems to have grown much stronger among the Lapps, partly as a result of several decisions by the Swedish government that have benefited the Lapp minority, and partly because of growing international interest in minority problems as a whole.

Two different systems of reindeer breeding have evolved in Sweden. One is a more stationary system in which the reindeer are

*Lapp*, which is not a native term, is gradually being replaced in Fennoscandia by the indigenous minority's own name for itself, *sámme* or dialect variations thereof. In Swedish and Norwegian, the word *same* is often used, in Finnish *saamelainen*. These changes in usage have been brought about largely by pressure from the Lapp community as the term *Lapp* is felt by them to have strongly negative overtones.

Efforts have been made to seek a suitable equivalent in the English language. *Same*, it is thought, can be too easily confused with the English adjective *same*, and two other variations are slowly gaining ground: *Saami* or *Sami*. The latter alternative is favoured by the Lappers and is being introduced in English translations of their institutions and organizations.

allowed limited freedom of movement within a forest region. The other system, known as mountain reindeer breeding, is more nomadic and geographically spread out. It is characterized chiefly by relatively long migrations between summer grazing lands in the mountains and winter pastures in the forest region or along the coast.

Reindeer breeding Lapps are members of a "sami village" or community (known as *čearru* in Sami), which is both an administrative and economic unit and a geographical grazing area. The *čearru* is a kind of co-operative society, responsible for reindeer breeding within the grazing area of the village. It plans, constructs and maintains common facilities as well as distributing the costs among its members. The introduction and spread of mountain reindeer breeding gave these communities their characteristic physical shape—long, narrow and strung out over a line running northwest to southeast. The reason, of course, is that the migrations of the reindeer generally follow the main river valleys and lake systems. The grazing lands came to be divided into three main regions: summer pastures in the high fells, spring and autumn grazing lands in the low fells and adjoining birch forest belt, and winter pastures in the coniferous forests.

In the low fell region, where the mountain reindeer have their mating and calving places, the Lapps gradually established their most permanent *visten* (encampments). The spring and autumn *visten* were most often one and the same. This tendency resulted in an increasingly permanent degree of settlement in the lower fells, followed by a gradual decrease in the extent of migrations. Some of the more permanent Lapp settlements have, on the other hand, been built in the forested lands (in the winter pasture areas), which are often more convenient from the standpoint of modern social services. The type of nomadism where whole families moved about has therefore largely ceased; instead, only those who are actively involved in herding the reindeer will follow the animals. Aircraft, automobiles and snow scooters are some of the modern means of communication used nowadays in reindeer herding.

Until the 1920s, so-called intensive reindeer breeding was the general rule. This was a method characterized by small herds of reindeer with a relatively high degree of tameness. Reindeer were used for milking and as beasts of burden, and entire families



migrated along with their herds. Today the extensive method of reindeer breeding is almost completely predominant. It entails keeping the reindeer in larger herds without continuous surveillance. Only during the wintertime are the reindeer assembled in smaller herds. Reindeer breeding is nowadays entirely oriented towards meat production.

One of the most important issues is how reindeer breeding can be rendered more profitable. At present there are some 250,000 reindeer in Sweden. It is estimated that, to support a family on an average income it is necessary to have a herd of 500 reindeer, but few families own so many. As income from reindeer breeding is poor, as is income from agriculture in sparsely populated areas, supplementary income (from hunting, fishing, handicrafts and tourism on a minor scale) is of considerable significance for families. Reindeer breeding is considered to be most profitable in the southern-most areas, that is, in the provinces of Västertotten and Jämtland.

### Reindeer husbandry legislation

The Reindeer Husbandry Law (*Rennärlingslag*) of 1971 was passed partly with a view to improving the economic situation for reindeer breeding. The law regulates reindeer husbandry in Sweden and indicates the legal framework in which reindeer husbandry can be pursued.

The Reindeer Husbandry Law also contains provisions designed to safeguard the interests of reindeer breeders. For example, reindeer breeding is a privilege reserved for the Lapps (*Sami*) and may be carried out in certain regions. The law does, however, give the government the power to initiate moves to close off certain areas to reindeer breeding if they are needed for "purposes of essential importance to the general welfare." The government also reserves the power to transfer such rights as hunting and fishing.

Legal controversies, involving the thorny problem of guaranteeing the Lapps a voice in deciding their future relationship with the non-Lapp population, are kept in the limelight by the continued encroachments being made on reindeer breeding areas. Increased highway traffic, extensive water-control projects, heavy tourism, intensive forest utilization, legal protection of certain predatory animals, etc., all place increasing demands on reindeer-breeding Lapps to adjust to new conditions.

A government commission is currently working on a proposal concerning how the Lapps' land and water rights in their regions could be strengthened vis-à-vis other interests which are in direct conflict with the needs of reindeer breeders.

### Education

Lapp (*Sami*) children can complete their nine-year compulsory schooling either in the regular state-supported schools in their home districts or at one of the seven state-run nomad schools. The choice of school is left entirely to the parents, and instruction is free throughout the nine-year period. The goals of the nomad schools are generally the same as those of other primary schools, except that the Lapp language and culture are also taught.

For those children who do not attend special Lapp schools, tuition is available in their native language and culture under the auspices of the home language programme which extends special language teaching to all children in Swedish schools who use a

language other than Swedish at home.

Public-supported education among the Lapps dates from the early 17th century. It began as part of the campaign to convert the Lapps to Christianity while at the same time asserting the northern territorial claims of secular Swedish authorities.

Since 1942, there has been a special residential folk college for the Lapps which has given especially older groups some degree of compensation for their previous, inadequate schooling. By providing joint instruction together with non-Lapp students and offering special courses in Lapp culture, the school is expected to remain in existence and to expand its activities.

An institute for research, public information and educational work among the Lapps throughout the Nordic countries has existed at Kautokeino in northern Norway since 1974. The main goal of the Nordic Sami Institute is to give the Lapps a voice in determining the use of research grants and to help decide the order of priorities for research projects.

### Cultural life and language

One form of Lapp (*Sami*) cultural expression which has received increasing interest in recent years is Lapp handicraft. Lapp home handicrafts have partly changed character because of the transformation of everyday household objects into souvenirs. Handicrafts play an important economic role for many Lapps as a source of extra income. Several homecraft designers have developed new forms of decorative art which, in a sense, have brought about a revival of the Lapp handicraft tradition. *Same-Átnam*, the Lapp cultural association, preserves this tradition by such means as public exhibitions.

The language of the Lapps belongs to the Finno-Ugric group and can be divided into three main dialects or language sub-groups: Central or North Sami (the largest group), East Sami and South Sami.

South Sami is spoken in areas of central Norway and north central Sweden. Further north in Sweden and Norway and in the extreme north of Finland the Central or North Sami dialect is most common. East Sami is spoken in eastern Finland, from Lake Inari and eastwards to the Kola Peninsula in the Soviet Union.

The language issue is naturally an important one. The main concern has been to determine how the Lapp language can best be preserved and renewed. An increasing number of language courses are available. A large part of the literature which has been published is written in North Sami (which is spoken by approximately 75% of the Lapps) and is based on an orthography adopted by both the Swedish and Norwegian Lapps.

The Lapps do not have an extensive written literature. As in the case of other arctic peoples, "oral literature" has played a more prominent role. Among the Lapps, this oral tradition takes the form of "yoiking," a sort of singing. After occasional periods of suppression, the art of yoiking has recently undergone a new renaissance. Within the realm of Lapp literature, one of the classic works is Johan Turi's book *Muitalus sámii birra* (Tale of the Lapps), first published in 1910. Another work which is also eventually sure to rank as a classic is Andreas Labba's tale *Anta*, published in 1969, a partially autobiographical book full of stories from the old way of life. New departures in Lapp literature are apparent in Erik Nilsson Mankok's *Mitt lassokoppel* (My Lasso, 1962), Margareta Sarri's *Då Simon Fjällborg med flera kom till insikt*

(When Simon Fjällberg and Others Came to a Realization, 1971), *Under hallonträdet* (Under the Raspberry Tree, 1980) and *Du fjällhöga Nord* (Thou Mountainous North, 1983). Both writers have approached the situation of the nonpastoral Lapps from different angles and have tried to show how difficult it can sometimes be to be a Lapp—even among other Lapps.

A new element in the cultural endeavour of the Lapps emerged when they began to establish contact with other ethnic minorities, for example at the Conference of Indigenous Minorities held in Canada in 1975. Such contacts have shed new light on domestic concerns and the Lapps have been represented at several such conferences since. The Swedish Laplanders are also members of the World Council for Indigenous Peoples via the Nordic Sami Council.

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