

As a parliamentary democracy Norway has a very positive human rights record. Only a few abuses in mismanagement of asylum cases and a sensible increase in racism against foreigners or asylum seekers have been reported.

But discrimination and racism also is an issue among the 40.000 indigenous Sami people living in the far north of the country. The Sami experience ten times more discrimination than ethnic Norwegians. Three and a half percent of the Norwegian majority population is convinced that they are subject to discrimination. The number for Sami suffering from discrimination is up at 35 percent according to a comprehensive study of the Centre for Sami Health Research which was published in 2011 by the Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Tromsø. Among Sami living outside the defined indigenous language area, discrimination even is more important, amounting to half of the population. Results showed that the more Sami markers you have, and if you live outside the defined Sami areas, the more discrimination you will experience in your community.

Society for Threatened Peoples welcomes Norway's initiative that the Sameting has been included in 2013 in an Anti-Bullying campaign in schools and kindergartens. Furthermore we are welcoming that the Norwegian Centre against Racism recently has launched a website listing major prejudices against indigenous Sami. But discrimination and prejudices still are persisting.

New research regarding the health situation of Sami has proven that marginalization is leading to more cardiovascular disease among the indigenous population in northern Norway. A recent study published by the Department of Medicine at the University Hospital of Northern Norway in Harstad in 2013 indicates that marginalized Sami living in Norwegian dominated areas were more than twice as likely to report cardiovascular diseases as non-marginalized indigenous people from Sami majority regions. No sex difference was found in the effects of marginalization on the disease. Chronic stress exposure following marginalization may be a plausible explanation for the increase in the disease.

Certainly the Sami legal situation sensibly has improved in Norway in the last three decades. After decades of a deliberate denial of Sami culture and rights, the Sami Rights Commission was established in 1980 to deal with political and economic issues. The Commission has failed to address major legal problems of land and fishing rights, but it has contributed to the establishment of the Sameting, the Norwegian Sami Assembly, which was inaugurated in 1989. The Assembly may raise Sami concerns and should ensure that Norway respects its international legal obligations. In 1990 Norway has ratified the ILO Convention 169 on the rights of indigenous peoples. However, Norway has interpreted narrowly the question of land rights. In 2005 the controversial Finnmark Act provided the Sami and the majority population living in Finnmark rights to the land and water in the region and transferred 95% of the area to local administration.

Unfortunately this was no sustainable solution to the complicated land rights issue. The county of Finnmark today is with its coastline of 6.844 kilometers the largest county in Norway. The indigenous Sami are representing only half of the population in Finnmark. Every decision on new mining projects incites new tensions between the Norwegian majority population and the Sami. The Sameting clearly has stated that the indigenous people are not in favor of new mining projects in northern Norway. They have learned from the disastrous effects of mining in northern Sweden on Sami, especially for reindeer herders, and are urging the authorities in Finnmark to respect the principle of free, informed and prior consent of the indigenous population before starting new mining projects. But the Norwegian government, industry and the majority population are encouraging new investments in mining in northern Norway. The former Industry Minister Trond Giske has announced in October

2010 a huge increase in funding for mining exploration in northern Norway. Norway has committed to provide \$ 17 million to support the exploration of new gold deposits in Finnmark. Major mining projects have been launched despite the criticism of Sami people. The Swedish based Arctic Gold AB hopes to reopen the Biedjovaggi gold and copper mines in Kautokeino and they are planning to double the size of the existing mine. Mineral deposits in the coastal Kvalsund area in the county of Finnmark discovered in 2008 contain 35 million tons of copper worth at least 2.5 billion Euros. Furthermore the deposit contains gold, silver, platinum and palladium. Therefore there is an urgent need to clarify the land rights issue and to ensure the respect of traditional land rights of indigenous Sami in northern Norway.

Reindeer husbandry in northern Norway is suffering massively from climate change. Declining sea ice and longer summers have facilitated the access of arctic regions and increased human presence. The development activities are a threat to reindeer husbandry as competition for land use results in a direct loss of pasture resources. Temperature changes influence freeze-thaw cycles, causing rivers to freeze later in autumn and to melt earlier in spring and to massively influence reindeer migration. Mild weather during wintertime, rain followed by snow and ice has disastrous effects on the access to food of reindeers.

In Norway some 240.000 semi-domestic reindeer are herded over an area of 146.000 square kilometers, which is about 40 % of the country's mainland area. Some 2.900 Sami still practice reindeer husbandry. Under the Norwegian Reindeer Herding Act of 1978 Sami exclusively, with the exception of one concession area, are allowed to practice reindeer husbandry. This economic activity demands free access to land. Any new mining and industrial activities or the construction of new towns and villages immediately are effecting reindeer husbandry and threatening the livelihood of the indigenous population. Economic growth driven by new investments in the mining industry has resulted in increased pressure for housing and commercial development. Proposed constructions of huge windmill farms and powerlines further will hurt the herding activity.

Finnmark has traditionally been a fisheries dependent region. Fisheries still are an important industry even though the numbers of employees and vessels have dropped significantly in last years. Today people of different ethnic origin live together in coastal areas and fjord communities and fish on the same ground. While the Sami have gained land rights in northern Norway, their rights to marine resources still are unclear. The Norwegian Sami Assembly requests a legal protection of the fishing rights of Sami living in the coastal areas and on the islands. Since several years the Norwegian government, parliament, fishing industry and the Sameting have been in dispute regarding the fishing rights of the local indigenous people. Society for Threatened Peoples welcomes that in 2013 the Finnmark Commission has opened up applications for fisheries to submit priority claims to the fjord. This amendment allows Sami fishers to apply for priority water rights. It's not a final solution to the fisheries conflict in northern Norway but an important step forward to ensure a better access for Sami traditional fishers to the wealth of the sea.