

White Paper no. 12

(2020–2021)

Report to the Storting (White Paper)

National minorities in Norway

A comprehensive policy

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1. Introduction

A national minority is an ethnic, religious and/or linguistic minority with long-standing ties to the country. Kvens/Norwegian Finns, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani/Tater people have national minority status in Norway.

A White Paper on national minorities has been presented previously, White Paper no. 15 (2000–2001) *National minorities in Norway – About state policies in respect of Jews, Kvens, Roma, Romani and Forest Finns*. This White Paper was a follow-up Norway's ratification of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (the Framework Convention) in 1999. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (the Minority Language Charter) came into force for Norway in 1998. Kven, Romanes (the language of the Roma) and Romani (the language of the Romani/Tater people) are recognised as minority languages in Norway under the Minority Language Charter. White Paper no. 15 (2000–2001) was the first comprehensive review of policy in respect of national minorities. It also presented the principles that would form the basis for policy in this respect.

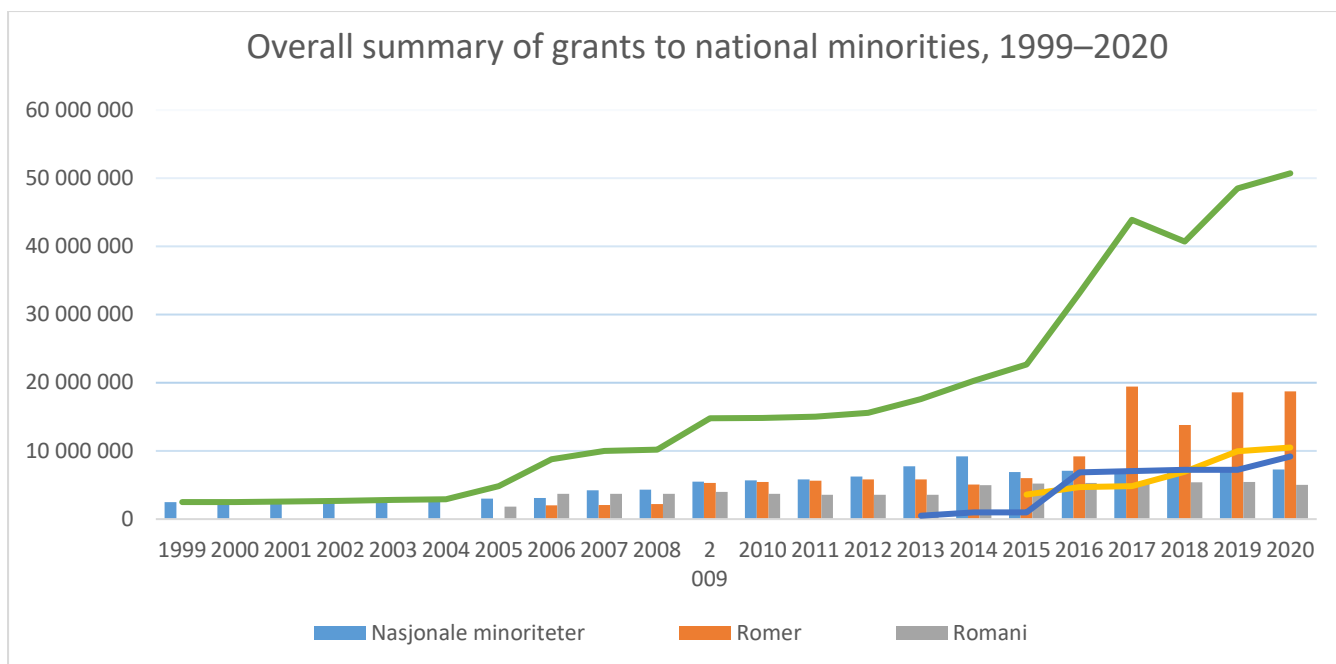
International protection of minorities is based on the non-discrimination principle and the principle of equal treatment. This means that states are obliged to make efforts to ensure that national minorities are placed on a par with the majority population, both formally and in practice. The formal rights of national minorities are largely in place in Norway at present. One challenge, however, is presented by the fact that these rights are not always followed up in practice.

The purpose of this White Paper is to describe developments in policy in respect of national minorities over the past two decades and to outline how the Government can help to reinforce the languages, culture and situation of national minorities in Norwegian society going forward.

The main objectives and principles of policy in respect of national minorities are rooted in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and other international conventions, and are applicable in general. (See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of the objectives.) The three main objectives are as follows:

1. National minorities participate actively in society and can express and develop their language and culture.
2. National minorities participate in public decision-making processes
3. National minorities receive fair and equivalent services.

That said, there has been positive development over the past two decades. Grants relating to the policy area have increased significantly over the period. The ministries have gained experience in both developing and managing policy instruments, such as grant schemes, compensation schemes and meeting places for discussions between national minorities and central authorities. National minorities are also organised to a greater extent and largely put forward their cases, both in public in general and public and with the authorities. This is in line with the policy's objectives.



Grants to national minorities during the period

The total allocation of grant items to national minorities in the budget for the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation has increased significantly over the two decades; from NOK 2,5 million in 1999 to NOK 50,7 million in 2020.

Annual funding is also provided for measures via the budgets of other ministries. Inter alia, the Ministry of Education and Research provides funding for teaching in Kven and Finnish and funding for Kven language initiatives in preschools. The Ministry of Culture provides annual operating aid to The Kven Institute and the Kven newspaper Ruijan Kaiku. The Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway also receives annual funding from the Ministry of Culture.

In 1998, the Government made a decision to establish a centre for dissemination of the culture and history of the Romani/Tater people. This centre was sited at Glomdalsmuseet in Elverum. The Ministry of Culture provides annual funding to Glomdalsmuseet, and these funds also help to run the Romani department at the museum. In 2004, funding was allocated to construction of an administration building at Kventunet, now known as The Kven Institute. In 2019, a commitment of funding was issued for the redevelopment of the NRK building in Vadsø. This building will be controlled by the Varanger Museum and serve as a national centre for Kven/Norwegian-Finnish culture. Furthermore, various grants have been awarded by other ministries to individual projects relating to national minorities, and via other government grant schemes.

The Government also wishes to help promote the culture of national minorities in the community in line with its objective of facilitating increased diversity in cultural expressions and cultural offerings. Romano Kher – Romsk kultur- og ressurscenter [the Roma Culture and Resource Centre] opened in Oslo in 2018. With the Government's award of NOK 106 million in funding to the recently constructed Finnskogens Hus in Grue in the national budget for 2021, there are now museum buildings or culture centres for all five of the national minorities. Museums and culture and resource centres are crucial venues for dissemination