



The Norwegian Kven Association – Ruijan kvääniliitto

Shadow report to Norway's sixth periodical report to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Introduction

The Norwegian Kven Association – Ruijan kvääniliitto (Nkf-Rk) is Norway's largest Kven advocacy organisation with 1,800 members across the country. We advocate for Kvens' interests at the local, national, and international levels, and work to preserve and develop the Kven language and culture, and to strengthen Kven identity. We have 18 active local chapters across the country, as well as the youth organisation Kvääninuoret – Kvenungdommen. The youth organisation works to promote pride in and awareness of Kven identity among young Kvens.

The Kven people are a traditional ethnic group with deep roots in the North Calotte region. The ancestral lands of the Kven people stretch from the Bothnian Bay through the Torne Valley and north to the Arctic Ocean. In Norway, Kvens have traditionally inhabited large parts of Finnmark and Troms counties, as well as northern parts of Nordland County. However, Kvens now reside throughout the country.

The Kvens were recognised as a national minority alongside Jews, Forest Finns, Roma, and Romani people/Taters in 1998 when Norway ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit our comments on the Norwegian government's implementation of its obligations under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Summary

While we are optimistic about the future of Kven culture, we recognise that the Kven language is in a critically endangered state. The shortage of Kven teachers is a serious obstacle to ensuring that more Kven children, young people and adults have the opportunity to learn the Kven language.

In the coming years, it is essential that the Norwegian authorities prioritise the following measures for the Kven people:

- Grant schemes for the Kven language and culture must be strengthened, become more long-term and apply to work for the Kven language and culture nationwide.
- More Kven language centres must be established throughout the country, and the workforce of the centres must be scaled up.
- A separate scheme must be established for Kven pathfinders, similar to the schemes for Sami and Jewish pathfinders.
- The Kven media services must be strengthened, particularly in terms of media content targeted at Kven children and young people.
- To increase the recruitment base for the Kven teacher training programme, Kven children and young people must be offered Kven language education throughout their educational pathway, and pupils in upper secondary school must be motivated through financial incentives to choose Kven.
- The differential treatment of Kven pupils must cease. All Kven children and young people – both those residing within and outside traditional areas of settlement – must have a right to Kven language education.
- The Act relating to personal names (*navneloven*) must be amended to allow the Kvens to reclaim their ancestral Kven family names.
- A Kven representative body must be established to ensure that Kvens have genuine influence over matters that affect us.

Comments on individual articles and recommendations

Below, we have commented on the Norwegian government's follow-up of relevant articles in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and recommendations from the Advisory Committee's fifth opinion on Norway.

Article 5

1. The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.

2. Without prejudice to measures taken in pursuance of their general integration policy, the Parties shall refrain from policies or practices aimed at assimilation of persons belonging to national minorities against their will and shall protect these persons from any action aimed at such assimilation.

Recommendation 77. The Advisory Committee welcomes the funding granted to national minorities, and encourages the authorities to continue their positive approach in this respect, in active consultation with minority organisations and persons belonging to national minorities.

Recommendation 89: The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to continue working with Kven/Norwegian Finn organisations and representatives to continue to provide project and operating grants, as well as working with Kven/Norwegian Finns outside the traditional area of settlement to ensure their access to funding for the promotion of their culture.

Grant schemes for Kven language and culture

In recent years, there have been positive developments in the Norwegian authorities' perception of the Kven language and culture. However, we call for the implementation of long-term and targeted efforts. In its report, the government refers to the grant scheme for national minorities.

We note that the 2025 grant for national minorities is just over NOK 12 million. We emphasise that these funds are to be distributed to actors that work for all five national minorities, and are far from sufficient for the organisations to have an adequate number of employees and for remuneration for offices. As a result, the national minorities lack adequate opportunities to participate in the various processes that affect their ethnic group.

In its report, the Norwegian government refers to grant schemes for the Kven language and culture. A significant share of these Kven grant schemes is project-based. This prevents long-term initiatives, including for Kven media and teaching of the Kven language in kindergarten. To ensure the possibility of hiring personnel proficient in the Kven language, permanent positions must be offered.

Article 8

The Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to manifest his or her religion or belief and to establish religious institutions, organisations and associations.

Kven church life

The Church of Norway has not established a separate church council or similar body for Kven. The church has not prepared a complete liturgy in Kven. The Church of Norway has also been unclear about the use of Kven as a Norwegian minority language. Instead, they have opted for Finnish, which is one of the national languages of Finland. We want both languages to be used in ecclesiastical contexts, but it is imperative that a liturgy be developed in Kven.

Article 9

1. The Parties undertake to recognise that the right to freedom of expression of every person belonging to a national minority includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language, without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers. The Parties shall ensure, within the framework of their legal systems, that persons belonging to a national minority are not discriminated against in their access to the media.

2. Paragraph 1 shall not prevent Parties from requiring the licensing, without discrimination and based on objective criteria, of sound radio and television broadcasting, or cinema enterprises.

3. The Parties shall not hinder the creation and the use of printed media by persons belonging to national minorities.

In the legal framework of sound radio and television broadcasting, they shall ensure, as far as possible, and taking into account the provisions of paragraph 1, that persons belonging to national minorities are granted the possibility of creating and using their own media.

4. In the framework of their legal systems, the Parties shall adopt adequate measures in order to facilitate access to the media for persons belonging to national minorities and in order to promote tolerance and permit cultural pluralism.

Recommendation 180: The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to increase funding of Kven language media to ensure its sustainability and presence in the digital media. Long term investment in journalism courses for Kven speakers needs to be considered by the authorities to ensure the viability of Kven as a language of communication in the media.

Kven media

In Norway, the level of knowledge about the Kven population is very low. The Norwegian national public television broadcaster (NRK) has a special responsibility to disseminate knowledge about the ethnic groups in Norway to the rest of the population, and to provide adapted media services to users of national minority languages.

Unfortunately, this is not currently the case. NRK operates the online newspaper NRK Kvääni, which publishes podcasts and Kven news stories in both Kven and Norwegian. We welcome this initiative, but believe that NRK Kvääni is severely understaffed, resulting in new stories rarely being published on the site.

The Kven magazine Ruijan Kaiku is published online and in paper format. It publishes ten paper editions a year, in addition to daily news stories online. The magazine is currently run with minimal funds. The magazine has the potential to become an essential source of information about Kven society. However, it needs increased funding to hire more journalists, translators, and to fund travel so that the journalists can be present at important Kven events in different parts of the country.

We welcome the work on Kven-language content in the children's newspaper Aftenposten Junior. There is a need to further develop this service and create more Kven-language material for children and young people. NRK Kvääni and Ruijan Kaiku's target groups are adults, and Kven children and young people do not have access to media content for children and young people in Kven. This is necessary so that they can receive media content that represents their ethnic group and language, and to motivate language learning.

We recommend that NRK enter into a collaboration with the Swedish national public television broadcaster (SVT) which has produced children's programmes in Meänkieli. For Kven children in Norway, it would be of considerable linguistic benefit to have access to such programmes via NRK. In addition, NRK should dub its children's productions into Kven.

Article 10

1. The Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to use freely and without interference his or her minority language, in private and in public, orally and in writing.

2. In areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, if those persons so request and where such a request corresponds to a real need, the Parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible, the conditions which would make it possible to use the minority language in relations between those persons and the administrative authorities.

3. The Parties undertake to guarantee the right of every person belonging to a national minority to be informed promptly, in a language which he or she understands, of the reasons for his or her arrest, and of the nature and cause of any accusation against him or her, and to defend himself or herself in this language, if necessary with the free assistance of an interpreter.

Recommendation 190: The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to look into the specific language dynamics and preferences within the Kven/Norwegian Finn minority, including in the education system and other areas of public life, and use this as a basis for future language policy.

Qualification of Kven teachers

The measures implemented to date are not sufficiently ambitious to ensure the survival of the Kven language. We particularly require more teachers of the Kven language. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that all Kven children and young people throughout the country are offered Kven language education in kindergarten, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school. Furthermore, it is essential that school and kindergarten teachers, employees in the cultural field, museum staff, and others working with children and young people are given the opportunity to study the Kven language without incurring financial burdens. To achieve this, the grant schemes for Kven language studies must be expanded to cover all these occupational groups.

One-year study programmes in Kven at university level are only offered every other year. To increase the number of people proficient in the Kven language, such programmes must be offered every year and in locations beyond Tromsø. We propose that one-year study programmes in Kven be offered every other year in Tromsø, and every other year as an itinerant programme, for instance in Alta and Oslo.

In 2023, a new Education Act was adopted in Norway. When the Act was adopted, the Norwegian authorities chose to disregard the recommendations put forward by representatives of the Kven people. We argued that the right to Kven language education should apply to all Kven pupils throughout the country and in both primary/lower secondary school and upper secondary school.

The right to Kven language education throughout Norway

The Norwegian authorities also disregarded the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training's recommendation to extend the right to apply nationwide. The Directorate stated that making the right to Kven language education nationwide could create incentives for more people to train as Kven teachers, thereby helping to counteract the teacher shortage. At the same time, they pointed out that the teacher shortage can be addressed with alternative teaching methods, such as in-class and/or online education. The government chose to disregard the recommendation from its directorate and limited the right to Kven language education to the country's two northernmost counties.

We are aware of only one municipality south of Troms County that currently offers Kven language teaching to its pupils. The municipality's application for funding for Kven language education was rejected. The reason for the rejection was that the grant scheme is tied to the right to Kven or Finnish language education, which only applies to pupils in the counties of Troms and Finnmark. The consequence of only municipalities in the two northernmost counties receiving funding is that individual Kven pupils' opportunities to learn the language depend on the home municipality's financial situation and willingness to prioritise Kven language education.

Extending the right to Kven language education to the whole of Norway would ensure that Kven children receive equal treatment regardless of their location, and would increase the number of Kven pupils who are proficient in Kven. In turn, this would help attract more potential students to Kven teacher training programmes, which, in the long term, would help solve the shortage of Kven teachers. As an immediate measure to address the teacher shortage, we propose increasing the use of alternative methods for Kven language education, such as digital Kven and Meänkieli language education, as well as in-person weekend and camp gatherings.

The language Meänkieli is spoken by Tornedalians, Kvens, and Lantalaïset in Sweden. This is the same ethnic group as the Kvens in Norway, and their language is very similar to Kven. Between 50,000 and 80,000 people in Sweden speak Meänkieli, whereas Kven is only spoken by between 2,000 and 8,000 people in Norway.¹ Digital distance education and in-person gatherings for Meänkieli language education for Kven pupils in Norway would be an effective measure to compensate for the shortage of Kven teachers.

The right to Kven language education throughout schooling

The right to Kven language education is limited to primary and lower secondary school. This entails that the pupils are not entitled to Kven language education in kindergarten or upper secondary school. Norwegian pupils start primary school in the year they turn six, and by commencing Kven language education at the beginning of primary school, Kven children miss out on learning the Kven language in the years when they are most receptive to learning a new language.

Pupils who receive Kven language education during the first ten years of school lose this right when they transition to upper secondary school. As a result, pupils experience a three-year gap in Kven language education, and the absence of such education during this period leads to stagnation and, in the worst case, a decline in their language skills. Furthermore, there is a risk that pupils will lose interest in the language during the three years without Kven language education, which would reduce the recruitment base for the Kven teacher training programme.

Recommendation 191: The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue working with Kven/Norwegian Finn organisations to continue to revitalise the Kven language, for example by developing a new action plan with targeted measures for revitalisation, including further language nests and language centres, promoting the use of Kven in local administrations and further innovative methods to bring the language into everyday use.

Action plan for the Kven language

Work on a new action plan for the Kven language was initiated in the spring of 2025. The government has established a reference group comprising Kven representatives to develop a new action plan. We look forward to this work and hope that a new action plan will contain concrete and long-term measures to ensure the survival and further development of the Kven language.

Kven language centres

Where they exist, Kven language centres serve as key arenas for learning, using and raising the profile of the Kven language for all age groups. Increased funding must be allocated to all Kven language centres to enable them to expand their workforce.

In addition, new language centres must be established throughout the country, both within and outside the Kvens' traditional areas of settlement. There are currently no Kven language centres outside the counties of Troms and Finnmark. Outside the Kvens' traditional areas of settlement, it would be beneficial to establish new Kven language centres in the largest cities, where the activities of the centres would reach a large number of Kvens.

¹ Store norske leksikon [Great Norwegian Encyclopedia]: <https://snl.no/meänkieli> and <https://snl.no/kvener>

Article 11

1. The Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to use his or her surname (patronym) and first names in the minority language and the right to official recognition of them, according to modalities provided for in their legal system.

2. The Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to display in his or her minority language signs, inscriptions and other information of a private nature visible to the public.

3. In areas traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of persons belonging to a national minority, the Parties shall endeavour, in the framework of their legal system, including, where appropriate, agreements with other States, and taking into account their specific conditions, to display traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications intended for the public also in the minority language when there is a sufficient demand for such indications.

Recommendation 197: The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Forest Finns and Kven/Norwegian Finns about the possibilities for amending the Personal Names Act, and allowing the minorities concerned to reclaim their ancestral names.

The Act relating to personal names (*navneloven*)

During the process of forced assimilation known as the ‘Norwegianisation Policy’, it was common to change Kven surnames to Norwegian surnames to gain access to all social domains. We are pleased to note that more people wish to reclaim their Kven names. However, the administration of Norwegian legislation prevents Kvens from reclaiming names written according to Kven spelling rules.

For a person to reclaim the family’s Kven name, they are currently required to provide documentation of this name in censuses or other public records. Previously, Norwegian-speaking civil servants were often responsible for these records, and the names were therefore written according to Norwegian spelling rules. It is therefore difficult to find documentation of Kven names written according to Kven orthography, which means that Kven people who want to reclaim their Kven family names have to settle for Kven names written according to Norwegian spelling rules. The Norwegian authorities must amend the Act relating to personal names to allow Kven people to write their Kven family names in their language.

Recommendation 203: The Advisory Committee strongly encourages the authorities to promote close consultations among local authorities with representatives of national minorities and the Sami regarding the display of multilingual topographical indications as a demonstration of the diverse character of the region, traditionally and at present.

The Kven place-name service

The Kven place-name service has been severely understaffed in recent years. The position has been vacant for long periods. This causes prolonged processing times for Kven name cases and may prevent some from being considered. The authorities must establish additional positions for work on Kven place names to ensure that Kven name cases are processed within a reasonable timeframe.

Article 12

1. The Parties shall, where appropriate, take measures in the fields of education and research to foster knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of their national minorities and of the majority.

2. In this context the Parties shall inter alia provide adequate opportunities for teacher training and access to textbooks, and facilitate contacts among students and teachers of different communities.

3. The Parties undertake to promote equal opportunities for access to education at all levels for persons belonging to national minorities.

Recommendation 215: The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to take active steps to increase societal awareness about national minorities and the Sami, for instance by expanding the 'Pathfinders' scheme to other national minorities, while working with national minorities and the Sami, as well as educators and schools, to ensure the existing curricula, plans and resources in place are implemented in practice and to ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives in fostering knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of national minorities and the Sami.

Kven pathfinders

Between 2014 and 2016, the Norwegian Kven Association – Ruijan kvääniliitto conducted a pilot project with Kven pathfinders. The project demonstrated a significant need for information about Kvens among pupils and highlighted that Kven pathfinders made a valuable contribution to meeting this need. However, it was unsustainable to place the responsibility for this work on a voluntary organisation with limited resources. Therefore, it is necessary for the Norwegian authorities, in co-operation with one or more Norwegian universities, to establish a Kven pathfinder scheme modelled on the Sami and Jewish pathfinder schemes. We recognise that the implementation of our pilot project took place several years ago, but the need remains unchanged.

Article 14

1. The Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language.

2. In areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, if there is sufficient demand, the Parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible and within the framework of their education systems, that persons belonging to those minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving education in this language.

3. Paragraph 2 of this article shall be implemented without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language.

Recommendation 241: The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide long-term and structural funding to Kven language kindergartens, to provide incentives – including financial – to continue to learn Kven or Finnish beyond grade 8, and to ensure that there are trained teachers able to provide high-quality teaching at kindergarten, primary and secondary levels. The production of teaching materials should also be expanded to ensure there is sufficient, high-quality provision at primary and secondary levels of education.

To ensure the availability of qualified Kven teachers, we need more people to learn Kven. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that all Kven children and young people throughout the country are offered Kven language education in kindergarten, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school.

Kven language education in kindergartens

The grant scheme for the Kven language in kindergartens is restricted to kindergartens in the two northernmost counties, creating a financial obstacle for institutions elsewhere in the country seeking to promote the Kven language through relevant projects. This restriction means that Kven children living south of the two northernmost counties do not have the opportunity to learn Kven in kindergarten. To provide all Kven kindergarten children with the opportunity to learn the Kven language, the guidelines for the grant scheme must be revised to enable kindergartens nationwide to receive grants to promote Kven at their institutions.

To ensure the possibility of hiring personnel proficient in the Kven language, there is also a need for multi-year, secure funding schemes. Thereby, kindergartens would be able to offer permanent positions for the educational work related to the Kven language and culture.

Incentives for Kven language education after Year 8

Currently, there is one upper secondary school that offers Kven language education. However, only two pupils are receiving Kven language education at the school. It appears that differences in grants for upper secondary pupils studying Kven compared to Sami may be a reason for the low numbers. Pupils receiving Sami language education receive higher grants than pupils receiving Kven language education. This may be a reason why pupils with both Kven and Sami backgrounds prioritise the Sami languages based on financial considerations. In our opinion, this puts Kven language education in an unfavourable situation.

We also refer to our comment on the right to Kven language education throughout schooling under Article 10, Recommendation 190.

Qualification of Kven teachers

We refer to our comment on measures to strengthen recruitment to Kven teacher training programmes under Article 10, Recommendation 190.

Teaching materials

We welcome the efforts to further develop digital teaching aids for Kven. However, we call for a greater focus on developing teaching aids for in-person gatherings for intensive Kven language instruction over several days, such as weekend gatherings and camp gatherings. Currently, the shortage of qualified Kven teachers is a barrier to ensuring that all Kven pupils have access to Kven language education. This applies to pupils residing within and outside the Kvens' traditional areas of settlement. Therefore, it would be appropriate to bring together Kven pupils from different municipalities to participate in intensive Kven language teaching over several days. Such an initiative would reinforce the pupils' collective Kven identity and promote more effective utilisation of limited teacher resources.

According to the Regulations to the Education Act, pupils receiving Kven language education are entitled to alternative teaching methods, such as distance education, intensive education, or school camps when the school's staff is unable to provide such education. For intensive gatherings and camps to be a genuine alternative, the authorities must take responsibility for developing teaching methods adapted to such gatherings.

Recommendation 242: The authorities should also take steps to assess the level of demand for Kven or Finnish language education in areas outside the traditional area of settlement where Kven/Norwegian Finns may live in substantial numbers, and on this basis decide on appropriate measures relating to Kven or Finnish language education in such areas.

Kven language education outside traditional areas of Kven settlement

Today, the Kvens reside throughout the country, with active Kven communities both within and outside the traditional areas of Kven settlement. Outside the traditional areas of settlement, Kven communities are particularly visible in and around the largest cities. The Norwegian Kven Association – Ruijan kvääniliitto has local chapters in Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, and Bodø. Kven children and young people living in these cities are not entitled to Kven language education, despite several parents expressing a desire for their children to receive Kven language education in kindergartens and schools. All Kven children and young people must have the opportunity to learn the Kven language, and extending the right to Kven language education is a prerequisite for achieving this.

At a minimum, the grant schemes for Kven language education in kindergartens and schools must be revised so that kindergartens and schools all over Norway can receive funding for Kven language teaching. We refer to our comment under Article 10, Recommendation 190 about the grant scheme being limited to pupils in the counties of Troms and Finnmark.

Extending the right and the grant schemes for Kven language education to the whole of Norway would ensure that Kven children receive equal treatment regardless of their location, and would increase the number of Kven pupils who are proficient in Kven. In turn, this would help attract more potential students to Kven teacher training programmes, which, in the long term, would help solve the shortage of Kven teachers. As an immediate measure to address the teacher shortage, we propose increasing the use of alternative methods for Kven language education, such as digital Kven and Meänkieli language education, as well as in-person weekend and camp gatherings.

Article 15

The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.

Recommendation 267: The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to pursue work with national minority organisations to improve the Contact Forum, and to continue to hold bilateral meetings and to maintain an open and ongoing dialogue with each national minority group, respecting the diversity, including diversity of views, of each group in preparation for the annual Contact Forum. Adequate opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to have their voice heard and have a substantial influence on all decisions and issues affecting them should be ensured in this regard.

Influence on issues affecting Kvens

We find that it is easier to engage in dialogue with government officials now than it was a few years ago. However, we still lack a Kven body that ensures that Kvens have genuine influence on issues affecting us. Kven participation and co-determination are crucial in the work to rectify the damage caused by the Norwegianisation Policy. The continued workload is substantial, and establishing a representative body would facilitate co-operation with national authorities and ensure that Kvens speak with a unified voice on matters that concern us.

Article 17

1. The Parties undertake not to interfere with the right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish and maintain free and peaceful contacts across frontiers with persons lawfully staying in other States, in particular those with whom they share an ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, or a common cultural heritage.

2. The Parties undertake not to interfere with the right of persons belonging to national minorities to participate in the activities of non-governmental organisations, both at the national and international levels.

Article 18

1. The Parties shall endeavour to conclude, where necessary, bilateral and multilateral agreements with other States, in particular neighbouring States, in order to ensure the protection of persons belonging to the national minorities concerned.

2. Where relevant, the Parties shall take measures to encourage transfrontier co-operation.

Recommendation 290: The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to step up their support for Kven/Norwegian Finnish international cooperation.

International co-operation

The Kvens have historical ties to large parts of the North Calotte, and the Norwegian Kven Association – Ruijan kvääniliitto has, among other things, co-operated with our sister organisation in Sweden on the shared Kven history, irrespective of current national borders. This has highlighted the fact that the same Kven people reside on both sides of the border between Norway and Sweden.

It is long overdue for Norwegian–Swedish co-operation to extend to media and language education. NRK should co-operate with the Swedish national public television broadcaster (SVT) on children’s programmes in Kven and Meänkieli, and the Norwegian authorities must facilitate in order for Kven pupils in Norway to receive digital and in-person, gathering-based Meänkieli language education from teachers residing in Sweden.

We also refer to our comment on the use of Swedish Meänkieli teachers to compensate for the shortage of Kven teachers in Norway, under Article 10, Recommendation 190.