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# Experience of observation of indigenous minorities and ethnic minorities of Karelia

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**Abstract:** The article discusses some specific aspects of indigenous peoples' rights exercise by Karelians, Vepsians and Finns - small-numbered peoples and ethnic (national) minorities located at the Republic of Karelia. As part of the study, a tool for assessment their rights exercise at the Republic of Karelia was developed. A so called observational passport of indigenous minorities was developed. This paper is based on indigenous peoples' survey results organized in autumn 2017 in all municipalities of the Republic of Karelia. Difference in indigenous peoples' rights exercise is substantiated in terms of 4 sectors (economic, social, cultural, and religious) and 3 levels (low, medium, high). The indigenous people survey results has showed that despite difficult economic situation 61.5% would not want to leave the Republic of Karelia. Among those who expressed a desire to leave the region - 42.5% - would like to go to another country (not Finland), 30% would like to leave Karelia for another region of the Russian Federation; 12.5% would move to another region inside the Republic of Karelia. Rather unhealthy lifestyle of indigenous people was identified at surveys' social bloc. Religious bloc is predominated by Orthodox religion exercise and participation at traditional religious wedding ceremonies. Survey results for the cultural bloc have recorded a strong preservation of traditions and culture - half of respondents regularly cook national meal. The research found that Vepsians are dissatisfied with their rights exercise in each of the 4 sectors of the study; Karelians and Finns are characterized by an average degree of satisfaction in their rights exercise.

## 1. Introduction

A peculiar and accurate indicator of state democracy development is the degree of realization of the rights of its indigenous minorities and ethnic minorities. Indigenous small-numbered peoples are the peoples that live in the territories of their ancestors' traditional settlements, preserve their usual way of life, the specifics of economic management and crafts and perceive themselves as self-conscious ethnic communities.

At the same time, the mentioned characteristics are not constant. Intensively developing processes of globalization, acculturation, assimilation, urbanization, economic activities of organizations of all forms of ownership, as well as individuals, damage the original habitat of indigenous small-numbered peoples, transform their traditional way of life.

We designate as ethnic minorities the part of the ethnos, which falls outside of its main body (or the same-name state) and is characterized by a developed feeling of internal unity and a desire to preserve its cultural identity.



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In accordance with the Unified Register of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation, approved by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 24, 2000 No. 255 (with amendments of August 25, 2015), the Vepses were included to the representatives of such peoples in the territory of the Republic of Karelia [RF Government Decree 2000, No. 255]. We note here that, in the Republic of Karelia, the Vepses are not the only ones referred to as indigenous peoples. Therefore, the State Program of the Republic of Karelia "Ethnic Social and Cultural Development of the Traditional Territories of Indigenous Peoples", approved by the Government of the Republic of Karelia Decree No. 22-R of January 24, 2018, states that "the indigenous peoples of Karelia are the Karelians and the Vepses, as well as the ethnic local groups of the indigenous Russian population like the Zaonezhans, the Pudozhans and the Pomors," and notes that, in the current context, they have got unfavorable social and economic and demographic conditions [*Decree of the Government of the Republic of Karelia, 2018, No. 22-P*]. The settlements belong to the rural areas, where the standard of living and the demographic situation level is much lower than the level of social development of urban areas. This situation is unfortunately typical for the Arctic regions, and therefore requires appropriate public policy to level development of urban and rural areas [Efremova et al., 2017] and reduce their poverty [Rudenko et al., 2015].

Let us pay attention to the fact that the Program focuses on "indigenous peoples" only while national minorities remain unconsidered. The historical justification of attributing the Karelians to the indigenous peoples of the Republic stems from deep antiquity. It is known that the Finno-Ugric tribes like the Lapps (the Saami), the Korela (the Karelians), and the Ves (the Vepses), lived in the territory of Karelia. At the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium AD the Novgorod Slavs appeared here while exploring the northern lands. The Russian population initially became established on the shores of the White Sea and Lake Onego (in Pomorye and Zaonezhye), and then spread throughout Karelia. The preponderance of the Karelian population was also recorded in the 20th century since the establishment of the Karelian labor commune, the Karelian autonomy within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (June 8, 1920). Its population was 147.3 thousand people, including about 60% of the Karelians and 37% of the Russians. The Finnish diaspora was formed due to the migrants from Finland.

Let us recall that in the Constitution of the Republic of Karelia adopted on February 7, 2001, it was declared that "measures are being taken to revive, preserve and grant free development of the Karelians, the Vepses and the Finns living in its territory" [*Constitution of the Republic of Karelia, 2001*]. Obviously, the Finns belong to such an ethnic (national) minority. However, today, the existing legal and categorial vagueness makes it possible for the opposition organizations activists of the republic to consider the Finns as another "indigenous" people of Karelia.

The subject of this article is the peculiarities of the rights realization potential of the Karelians, the Vepses and the Finns, the representatives of the minority peoples and the ethnic (national) minorities of Karelia.

## **2. The fundamental bases of the potential for minority peoples' rights realization**

The Constitution guarantees realization of the minority peoples' rights in Russia. The Constitution of the Russian Federation (Article 69) establishes that "the Russian Federation guarantees the rights of indigenous small-numbered peoples in accordance with the generally recognized principles and norms of the international law and the international treaties of the Russian Federation". Complementing this provision with the norms ensuring the right of the population to self-government, to participation in local affairs management, the Constitution forms the primary, highest level of protection of the minorities' rights.

The institutional basis for guaranteeing the small-numbered peoples' rights is the Constitution and other legal acts of the Russian Federation, as well as those adopted in accordance with the generally accepted principles and norms of the international law and the international treaties. The most comprehensive international reference document on the rights of indigenous peoples today is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13,

2007. 45 articles of the Declaration define the minimum standards for ensuring survival, respect for dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world, including the rights to identity, language, health, education, preservation of the lifestyle of indigenous peoples, their traditions and culture [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007].

At the same time, real opportunities for realization of the declared minorities' rights are created by a number of specific circumstances: the degree of national legislation development related to regulation of livelihoods and protection of the rights of indigenous small-numbered peoples at federal, regional and local levels; the complexity of solving problems of social, political, economic and cultural levels not only in the territories of minorities' traditional residence, but also throughout the territory of Russia; the effectiveness of local governments, the human rights commissioners in the regions to create conditions for realization of the rights of these peoples, protection of the original habitat, traditional way of life, business and trade of small-numbered peoples. These circumstances are set by the state policy in relation to small nations. In its relations with minorities, the Russian state has evolved from the dictatorial imperative methods and protectionism to the policy of partnership.

On September 22-23, 2014, the First World Conference on Indigenous Peoples was held. Its participants shared the best practices on implementation of indigenous peoples' rights. The conference confirmed the significant role that indigenous peoples can play in social and economic development and environmental protection, practicing traditional sustainable farming methods, including traditional seed supply systems, and having access to credit and other financial services, markets, land ownership protected by legal guarantees, medical care, social services, education, vocational training, knowledge and appropriate low-cost technologies, including irrigation technologies, as well as water harvesting and storage [Resolution of the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, 2014].

The UN General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. In the world today there are about 7 thousand languages, one of them dies every two weeks. 96% of linguistic diversity is the indigenous languages spoken by only 4% of the world's population. According to the Atlas of the World's Languages, 90% of the languages of these peoples are endangered.

This problem is topical in Russia, too. At present, there are 28 regions in the country where indigenous peoples live. According to the 2010 census, it was recorded that the following peoples resided in the Republic of Karelia: the Russians – 82.2% (507,654 people), the Karelians – 7.4% (45570 people), the Belarusians – 3.8% (23345 people), the Ukrainians – 2% (12677 people), the Finns – 1.4% (8577 people), the Vepses – 0.5% (3423 people), the representatives of other nationalities – 2.7% (16422 people) (Russian Census, 2010). Currently, there are 3 municipalities in the Republic of Karelia with a higher concentration of the Karelians – Olonetsky municipal area (58% of the Livvies), Pryazhinsky municipal area (37% of the Lyudiks) and Kalevalsky municipal area (36%).

To solve the highlighted problems in the Republic of Karelia, the following regional targeted programs have been developed and implemented: “State Support for the Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages in the Republic of Karelia for 2006-2010”; “Harmonization of the National and Confessional Relations, Development of Civil Consent in the Republic of Karelia for 2007-2011” (“Karelia as the Territory of Consent”); “Preservation of the Unity of the Peoples and Ethnic Communities of Karelia for 2012-2016” (“Karjala is Our Home”); “Development of Education in the Republic of Karelia in 2011-2015”; “Development of the Cultural Sphere of the Republic of Karelia for the Period up to 2013”; “Youth of Karelia” for 2012-2015. We especially note the significance of observance of the Year of Vepsian Culture in 2012, and the Year of the Karelian Language and National Culture in 2013. The ideas on realization of the rights of the indigenous peoples living in Karelia, in particular, to education, are provided by the data of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Karelia (table 1), which contain information on teaching of the Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages at the schools of Karelia [Ministry of Education of the RK, 2014-2016].

Table 1. Data on teaching the Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages at the schools of Karelia, 2014-2016.<sup>a</sup>

Academic year	Karelian language			Вепсский язык Veps language			Финский язык Finnish language		
	Num-ber of schools	Number of educators	Number of stu-dents	Num-ber of schools	Num-ber of educa-tors	Num-ber of stu-dents	Num-ber of schools	Num-ber of educa-tors	Num-ber of stu-dents
2014/2015	25	37	2311	4	6	235	31	65	4433
2015/2016	26	37	2128	4	6	256	32	61	4393
2016/2017	25	37	2243	4	6	267	28	55	4330

<sup>a</sup> Ministry of Education of the Republic of Karelia

Table 1 shows that the number of the schools in Karelia where Finnish and Karelian are taught is declining. The number of the schools teaching the Karelian language (25 schools) and the Vepsian language (4 schools) is insufficient and unable to ensure preserving and protecting the identity, culture, languages and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Republic effectively.

### 3. Methodology

Being based on the fundamental principles, let us analyze how the Republic of Karelia applies the constitutional declaration on implementation of the measures to revive, preserve and freely develop the Karelians, the Vepses and the Finns living in its territory.

*The methodology of this analysis* involves monitoring of the indigenous minorities in four sectors, conducting a survey of the representatives of these peoples, creating an infographic tool “Observation Passport of the Indigenous Minorities of the Republic of Karelia”.

*The Observational Passport of the Indigenous Minorities* of the Republic of Karelia is an infographic tool which represents the results of monitoring and analysis for assessment of the potential for realization of the rights of the indigenous peoples that live in the Republic of Karelia.

The scope of monitoring comprises 4 information sectors – social, economic, cultural, and religious. Within the sectors, various indicators are defined (at least two for each sector and aggregators).

*The technology for developing the “Observational Passport for the Indigenous Minorities of the Republic of Karelia”* includes three stages:

1) the preliminary stage, which includes the analysis of the regional context in 4 sectors to explore – social, economic, cultural, and religious; gathering data from open sources; identification of the factors and measures to develop the potential of indigenous peoples.

2) the theoretical stage, involving substantive development of the methodology for formation of the “Observational Passport of the Indigenous Minorities of the Republic of Karelia”, establishment the list of 5 quality indicators, including:

- national identity of indigenous peoples;
- small indigenous peoples in the labor market;
- cross-cultural communication of small indigenous peoples;
- immersion in religious practices;
- morbidity rates of small indigenous peoples.

5 indicators are presented in more detail in Table 2 with regard to the study sectors – social, economic, cultural, and religious.

3) the main stage, which includes conducting a survey of the indigenous minorities in the Republic of Karelia, processing the obtained data on 5 declared indicators and creating the infographic tool “*Observational Passport of the Indigenous Minorities of the Republic of Karelia*” which represents the results of monitoring and analysis to assess implementation of the rights of the indigenous Finno-Ugric peoples.

Table 2. Study sectors of the indigenous peoples of Karelia and their corresponding indicators<sup>a</sup>

Social sector	Economic sector	Cultural sector	Religious sector
list of the diseases peculiar to indigenous peoples, access to health care,	indigenous peoples' unemployment rate	assessment of the right to ethno-cultural development (daily use of language, traditions presence)	religion
benefits for indigenous peoples in the field of education (upon entering educational institutions)	professions practised	indigenous national identity (costumes, cuisine)	participation in the religious rites
legal literacy of indigenous peoples		cross-cultural communication (interaction with other nations)	
level of education		development of traditional industries (kyukkya, fishing, reindeer herding)	

<sup>a</sup> compiled by the authors on the basis of expert assessments.

#### 4. Results

By December 1, 2017, 250 respondents from all municipalities of the Republic of Karelia took part in the survey with 67.2% of the Karelians, 23.7% of the Vepses, 8.3% of the Finns.

The respondent's profile is a man with a higher education. The respondents participating in the survey are of middle age: 16.2% are 36-40 years old; 14.2% - 31-35 years old; 10.7% - 41-45 years old; 9.5% - 46-50 years old. Half of the respondents live in Petrozavodsk, 14.6% reside in the Olonetsky District, 10.3% – in the Prionezhsky District.

The survey results were grouped in the following sectors - social, economic, cultural, and religious.

**Social sector of the survey.** It has been determined that the respondents know practically nothing about the privileges for indigenous minorities, out of all the respondents, only 4.3% used the benefits in the field of education.

Half of the respondents (41.5%) rate their state of health as satisfactory, 41% – as good. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that not only young respondents took part in the survey (the majority of respondents are over 35 years old). The majority of surveyed respondents do not lead a healthy lifestyle: 71.5% smoke, 52.6% drink alcohol, 80.6% are intolerant to protein, 74.3% are intolerant to milk and dairy products, 33.2% have chronic diseases.

**Economic sector of the survey.** In the economic sector, the data show the economic situation of the indigenous peoples of the Republic of Karelia. It was revealed that 38.7% of the respondents are employed in budget organizations, 17% work for private-sector firms, 13.8% are retired. 65.3% of the respondents are completely dissatisfied with the salaries and only 22.5% expressed their satisfaction with them. The respondents characterize their families financial status as minimal (“there is enough money for food and utilities” (46.6%), and acceptable (“enough for everything except expensive things” (42.3%).

The survey of indigenous minorities showed that despite the difficult economic situation 64.8% of them do not want to travel (in search of a better conditions) outside the Republic of Karelia. Among those who expressed a desire to leave the region, 31.6% would like to go to another country (not to Finland) or another region of Russia, 3.2% are ready to move to another region of the Republic of Karelia. We believe that this situation is a sufficient reason to draw attention to the problems of the labor market in the northern territories, described in [Zaychenko et al., 2016], and to take appropriate government policies that mitigate the negative impact of the geopolitical factors.

**Cultural sector of the survey.** As the result of the survey, the following situation emerged in this sector: the majority of the indigenous minorities living in Karelia consider Russian as their native language (66%), 30.8% see Karelian as their mother tongue, 2.4% of the respondents noted that their native language is Finnish, and 0.8% think it is Vepsian. 48.2% communicate in their native language every day, 15.8% use it several times a week, 6.7% practice it 1 time a month. Basically, the majority

of the respondents communicate in their native language at home (44.7%), at the workplace (17.8%), and at cultural events (19%).

The specificity of cooking national dishes is considered to be an important attribute of national identity. The results of the survey showed that the opinions regarding the characteristics of the national diet of the indigenous minorities living in Karelia differed. Thus, about the half of the respondents regularly prepare national dishes (36% do that several times a month, 15.8% – several times a week). At the same time, the other half of the respondents (33.6%) cooks less than 1 time per month, and 8.3% never do it.

It has been recorded that the majority of the indigenous peoples of Karelia have a wide range of traditional life items: 35.2% possess costumes, almost 50% have saved kitchen utensils, 53.4% use some pieces of decor.

Religious sector of the survey. Most of the indigenous peoples of Karelia who took part in the survey (70.8%) consider themselves Orthodox. 20.2% do not profess any religion, 4.3% are Lutherans, 1.2% are pagans. At the same time, 35% of the respondents take part in religious practices of their nationalities, in particular, at weddings.

## 5. The Observational Passport of the Indigenous Minorities of the Republic of Karelia

All data obtained for 4 sectors of the study were ranked with a score from 1 to 3, where 1 would correspond to the low potential for realizing the rights of indigenous peoples, 2 would be for the medium potential, and 3 would correspond to the high potential. The data for the ranking were based on the answers of the Karelians, Vepses, and Finns to all questions.

Due to the scoring ranking, it is possible to identify the low / medium / high potential for realization of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the Republic of Karelia in 4 sectors (cultural, social, economic, and religious).

Table 3. Scoring ranking of assessment of the potential for realization of the rights of the indigenous minorities of the Republic of Karelia <sup>a</sup>

Question in the questionnaire	Karelians / points		Vepses / points		Finns / points	
№2 (social sector)	56,5%	2	41,7%	1	81%	3
№3 (social sector)	55,4%	2	64,8	3	35,5%	2
№4 (social sector)	1,8	1	0%	0	0%	0
№5 (social sector)	5,9%	3	1,7%	2	0%	0
№6 (cultural sector)	35,9%	2	38,3%	3	33,3%	1
№7 (cultural sector)	44,1%	3	3,3%	1	19%	2
№8 (cultural sector)	69,4	2	45%	1	71,4%	3
№9 (cultural sector)	46,5%	2	39,7%	1	47,6%	3
№10 (cultural sector)	25,9%	3	10%	1	19%	2
№11 (cultural sector)	26,%	1	29,7%	2	33,3%	3
№12 (cultural sector)	42,9%	3	36,1%	2	42,9%	3
№13 (cultural sector)	58,2%	3	56,7%	2	42,9%	1
№14 (cultural sector)	22,4%	3	16,7%	1	19%	2
№16 (religious sector)	36,5%	2	28,3%	1	52,4%	3
№17 (economic sector)	20%	1	23,3%	2	38,1%	3
№18 (economic sector)	57,6%	2	56,7%	1	66,7%	3
№19 (economic sector)	1,8%	3	0%	0	0%	0
№20 (economic sector)	60%	1	68,3%	3	66,7%	2
<b>Total points</b>		<b>39</b>		<b>27</b>		<b>35</b>

<sup>a</sup> compiled by the authors on the basis of expert assessments.

As a result of the scoring ranking, it became obvious that in the Republic of Karelia the rights of the Karelians and the Finns are being implemented more fully, the national data scored a total of 39 and 35 points respectively. The Vepses scored only 27 points on the basis of ranking. Based on the

Vepses' answers to the questions, it became obvious that they are not very satisfied with the implemented policy of the Republic of Karelia regarding indigenous peoples.

As a result, table 4 was formed, demonstrating the low / medium / high potential for realization of the rights of indigenous minorities (the Vepses, the Karelians, and the Finns) in the Republic of Karelia separately by the research sectors.

Table 4. Assessment of the potential for realization of the rights of the indigenous minorities in the Republic of Karelia by sectors <sup>a</sup>

Indigenous people's name	Economic sector	Social sector	Religious sector	Cultural sector
Karelians	medium	high	medium	high
Vepses	low	medium	low	low
Finns	high	low	high	medium

<sup>a</sup> compiled by the authors on the basis of expert assessments.

As a result of the study, a system diagram was obtained, formed on the basis of the results of the monitoring and analysis of the potential for realization of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the Republic of Karelia (Figure 1). The diagram characterizes the features of realization of the rights of the indigenous small-numbered peoples and ethnic minorities. Thus, the Vepses demonstrate a low potential for realization of their rights in almost every sector of the research, the Karelians and the Finns are characterized in general by the potential for realization of the average level. It seems reasonable to make the distinction between the potential for realization of the rights of the indigenous peoples (the Karelians, the Vepses, and the Finns) in the context of 4 sectors in 3 levels - low / medium / high.



Figure 1. Observational passport of the indigenous peoples of the Republic of Karelia (based on the results of indigenous peoples' surveys)

## Conclusion

The study made it possible to form the Observational Passport of the Indigenous Minorities of the Republic of Karelia, which recorded varying degrees of satisfaction with the results of the current policies among the indigenous peoples. In particular, due to the ranking of the survey results, it was revealed that the low potential for exercising their rights in almost every sector of the research is typical for the Vepses; the Karelians and the Finns are characterized in general by the realization potential of the average level.



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