



Population

The Arctic's inhospitable weather and other environmental challenges have limited human activity and settlement. The region represents one of the least populated areas in the world, with sparse nomadic communities and very few large cities and towns. Approximately half of the Arctic population lives in Russia. The three most numerous population centers above the Arctic Circle lie in Russia: Murmansk (population 325,100), Norilsk (135,000), and Vorkuta (85,000). Tromsø, Norway has about 62,000 inhabitants, and Reykjavík, Iceland has roughly 200,000. There are no permanent settlements above 78° north latitude.

Most of the roughly four million inhabitants live on lands bordering the Arctic Ocean. The population is a mix of Caucasians and several major groups of indigenous peoples who have lived on north polar lands for centuries. Caucasians make up sizable fractions of Siberia's and Greenland's populations, and a near-majority in Iceland. During the 20th century, immigrants flocked to the Arctic, attracted mostly by job opportunities in natural resource development. This influx significantly altered the balance between non-indigenous and indigenous people in many areas. The native population now ranges from about 80 percent in Greenland to 15 percent in Arctic Norway, and as little as three to four percent in Russia.

Native peoples

The earliest evidence for humans dwelling in the North American Arctic dates to around 2500 BC. More recently, indigenous groups believed to be descended from Mongolic people migrated northward from central Asia to the Arctic following the last glacial recession (about 12,500 years ago). Because of their common ancestral background and a general lack of intermarriage with other cultural groups, Arctic peoples possess generally similar physical characteristics, cultures, and social organization.

Among European peoples, Russians were the earliest settlers of the Arctic. Ethnic groups of Russians that formed in the Arctic include the Pomors, Ust-Tsilems, Markovtsy, Kolymchans, and Gizhigians. The current populations of these groups are small.

The chief modern-day aboriginal groups include the Kola Saami (Lapps) of Europe; the Samoyedes of western Russia; the Yakuts, Tungus, Yukaghirs, and Chukchis of eastern Russia; and the North American Eskimos-Aleuts, whose many sub-groups inhabit the coastline from the Bering Sea to Greenland and the Chukchi Peninsula in northeast Siberia. The longstanding term "Eskimo" is still used as a general name for western Arctic groups. However, today many of these native peoples - such as the Inuit of northern Canada, Kalaalit of Greenland, Inupiat of Northern Alaska, and Yupik of southwestern Alaska, prefer to be called by their specific

indigenous names.

Once completely nomadic, these groups now are mostly sedentary or seminomadic, practicing traditional methods of hunting, fishing, reindeer herding, and indigenous arts and crafts. Many individuals are taking up employment in urban areas and slowly incorporating into the societies of the countries in which they live. However, many others favor a move toward self-governance. As well, there are strong concerns over industrial development on Arctic lands and its potential impacts on traditional activities such as reindeer herding.

Six indigenous councils are represented on the Arctic Council. In April 2009, the Arctic Council unanimously endorsed the Tromsø Declaration, which, in part “[recognizes] the rights of indigenous peoples and the interests of all Arctic residents, and [emphasizes] the engagement of indigenous peoples as being fundamental to addressing circumpolar challenges and opportunities....”

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