

# SWEDISH IN FINLAND





# The Swedish-speaking Population of Finland

According to the Finnish Constitution, Finnish and Swedish are the two national languages of Finland. The Swedish language therefore enjoys strong constitutional protection. Finland formed a part of Sweden until 1809, when Russia conquered Finland. During the Russian period, Swedish endured as one of the languages of administration and education, and when Finland declared its independence in 1917, the equality of the two languages was established due to the deep roots of the Swedish language in the history of the country.

In Finland, the mother tongue of every citizen is registered. The earliest language statistics date from 1880. At the time, Swedish-speakers numbered just under 295,000, which equalled 14 per cent of the population. Up until the middle of the 1900s their number increased to roughly 350,000, which was then followed by a decrease due to a wave of emigration to Sweden.

The population development has changed over the last few decades. Emigration has come to a halt, and interest in Swedish has increased significantly in families with a mixed linguistic background. Nowadays, marriages across the language divide increasingly become bilingual, and approximately two thirds of children from such families are registered as Swedish-speakers. An even greater share is placed in Swedish-speaking schools. This change is one of the reasons why the population decrease has come to a virtual standstill. However, the large number of marriages across the language boundaries also fosters a new kind of bilingual identity.



Today the Swedish-speaking population numbers roughly 290,000 (in 2014), which equals 5.3 per cent of the country's population. The latest forecasts indicate that the number of Swedish-speakers will remain at this level for the next few decades.

The Swedish language remains a vibrant force in Finnish society, culture and identity. Strong Swedish-speaking political influence at the national level, combined with support from the Finnish-speaking side, have created good conditions for maintaining a bilingual Finland.





# Identity and Culture

Swedish-speakers in Finland, also called Swedish-speaking Finns, form a language group of their own. They perceive themselves as Finnish people who speak Swedish as their mother tongue. The identity is formed from the language and cultural traditions of the group. Swedish-speakers have their heart in Finland, but through the Swedish language there are also strong bonds to Nordic culture.

Within the sectors of education and culture, the Swedish-speaking population of Finland enjoys a kind of cultural autonomy, with institutions that function in Swedish in parallel with the Finnish. Every child in Finland has the right to attend daycare, preschool and school in their own language, either Finnish or Swedish. This applies to the entire country. For the Swedish-speaking population, this right is a precondition for the language and culture to remain vibrant. All school pupils are also taught the other national language as compulsory – Swedish in Finnish schools, and vice versa. Some municipalities also arrange language immersion at daycare facilities and schools. The demand for language immersion is currently greater than the supply.

It is possible to continue studying in Swedish also following the end of primary education. In Finland, second-level education is divided into upper secondary school and basic vocational education. University-level education is arranged at regular universities and polytechnic universities. Apart from unilingually Finnish universities, there are both bilingual and unilingually Swedish ones. The largest university in the country, the University of Helsinki, is bilingual.



Finland has compulsory military service for men, and Swedish-speaking men as well as women volunteers may choose to do their military service in the garrison of Dragsvik at the Brigade of Nyland. The Evangelical-Lutheran church in Finland also has a Swedish-speaking diocese with its own bishop, the Diocese of Borgå, in which all the country's Swedish-speaking congregations are included.

Swedish culture in Finland is rich and varied in literature, theatre, film and music, among other fields. Many of Finland's greatest authors and musicians have worked in Swedish. The supply of Swedish-speaking media outlets is also large in Finland. Ten daily newspapers and a large number of magazines are published in Swedish. The national TV and radio broadcasting company YLE has a Swedish unit consisting of two radio channels in Swedish and, since autumn 2001, also a TV channel in Swedish.

The Swedish-speaking population of Finland is slightly more active in various associations than Finns on average. Associations are considered important to the sense of community and identity.





# Basic Linguistic Rights

According to the Constitution, Finnish and Swedish are the national languages of Finland and society is committed to catering equally to the social and cultural needs of both the Finnish and Swedish-speaking population. This means, for instance, that the authorities are liable to arrange education, healthcare and social services, as well as provide information, in both Finnish and Swedish.

The basic linguistic rights are described in greater detail in the Language Act. The basis of the Act is the right of the individual to use his or her own language. The authorities are to ensure, on their own initiative, that the right of every individual to receive service in Finnish and Swedish is secured in practice. The Act applies to courts of law, other state authorities and the municipal authorities of bilingual municipalities.

According to the Language Act, municipalities are unilingual or bilingual with either Finnish or Swedish as the majority language. A municipality that has both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking residents is bilingual if the minority accounts for at least eight per cent of residents or at least 3,000 people. Approximately 15 per cent of Finland's municipalities are bilingual or unilingually Swedish-speaking. The linguistic status of the municipality determines the level of services provided in Swedish.

In bilingual municipalities, residents have the right to receive healthcare and utilize public social services in both Finnish and Swedish. The municipality is also obligated to ensure that forms and other written material, including signage, are available



in both languages. Even if the language of a municipality is Finnish, Swedish-speakers are permitted to use Swedish in dealings with state authorities. This applies to e.g. the police, emergency services and the tax office. The right to speak Swedish also extends to the courtrooms. State companies such as the postal services (Posti) and the state-owned railways and transport company (VR), are also obligated to provide services and information in Swedish, although not to as great an extent as the state authorities themselves.

The Language Act does not apply to private companies, however, many companies still take pride in offering service in Swedish. The Act also does not apply to universities or the Church, as they are governed by their own Acts.

The Language Act is not applied in the unilingually Swedish-speaking region of Åland, which is autonomous.





# Regions Where Swedish is Spoken

Most of Finland's Swedish-speaking residents live in the coastal areas of Uusimaa/*Nyland*, Turunmaa/*Åboland* and Pohjanmaa/*Österbotten* (Ostrobothnia). The largest number of Swedish-speakers lives in Uusimaa, which is also the most densely populated area of Finland. However, due to the large number of residents, Uusimaa is mainly bilingual with a Finnish-speaking majority. There are approximately as many Swedish-speakers in Ostrobothnia as in Uusimaa, but Ostrobothnia is more sparsely populated and there the Swedish-speaking population is in majority. This means everyday life differs greatly between these regions as far as the linguistic landscape is concerned.

The majority of Swedish-speakers in Uusimaa, especially in the capital region, work in Finnish-speaking workplaces and live in a bilingual environment where Finnish is on the increase. Swedish remains a vibrant language in Uusimaa thanks to the education system and range of media outlets in Swedish. Many bilingual families wish for their children to become bilingual, which is why the children most often attend school in Swedish. However, getting other public services in Swedish in the capital region is often difficult.

In contrast to Uusimaa, Swedish is strongly present everywhere in Ostrobothnia. Over half the population of the region of Ostrobothnia speak Swedish as their mother tongue. There, it is possible for both one's private and professional lives to be lived out exclusively in Swedish – a reality that is unheard of in most other parts of Finland. Ostrobothnia is also home to three unilingually Swedish-speaking municipalities.



The archipelago south of Turku, Turunmaa, is bilingual with a Swedish-speaking majority, but in the city of Turku the share of Swedish-speakers is just over 9,200 inhabitants or approximately 5 per cent. Swedish is not very visible in the life of the city, but strong Swedish-speaking institutions such as the Swedish-speaking university of Finland, Åbo Akademi University, contribute to maintaining its presence.

There are also groups of Swedish-speakers that do not live along the coast but in unilingually Finnish-speaking cities. These cities, such as Pori, Kotka, Tampere and Oulu, are sometimes referred to as ‘language islands’ from a Swedish-speaking perspective.

When Finland declared its independence in 1917, a conflict arose between Finland and Sweden regarding ownership of the Åland Islands. The League of Nations ruled that the region should belong to Finland, but be governed as an autonomy that guaranteed the status of the Swedish language. The regional government of Åland is responsible for legislation and administration in areas such as education, culture, healthcare, social services, municipal administration, the postal service, radio, TV and matters of business and finance. Matters outside the jurisdiction of Åland’s regional autonomy include foreign and defence policies and taxation. This means that the Finnish State manages customs and border patrolling in Åland. The official language of the region is Swedish, and contact between the authorities in Åland and the Finnish State takes place in Swedish.





# Society and Politics

Even though the laws and structures necessary for the preservation of service in Swedish are in place, it does not always work in practice. It has become increasingly difficult to supply Swedish-speaking citizens with equal services, especially in areas where the Swedish-speaking population is small. This is why it is greatly important that there are politicians and organisations actively promoting a vibrant bilingualism in Finland.

At present every party represented in Parliament, save one, are active also in Swedish to varying degrees. The Swedish People's Party was established in 1906 for the express purpose of being a gathering political force for the country's Swedish-speaking population, and today approximately 70% of Swedish-speakers vote for the party. Of the other parties, Swedish is most prominently represented within the Social Democratic Party. Its Swedish Party District was established in 1899 and is the oldest of the currently active party organisations in Finland. The National Coalition Party, the Centre Party, the Green League, the Left Alliance and the Christian Democrats are all bilingual. These parties target their message also at Swedish-speakers, and Swedish-speakers have held leading positions within the parties. Several of the parties also have Swedish party districts or delegations.

The Swedish Assembly of Finland (*Folktinget* in Swedish), established in 1919, is a statutory organisation of co-operation for the Swedish-speaking population of Finland. Folktinget operates across political lines, and all parliamentary parties with operations in Swedish are active within the organisation.



According to the Act on the Swedish Assembly of Finland, its mission is to guard and promote the rights and interests of the Swedish-speaking population as well as actively inform about the Swedish language in Finland and the bilingualism of the country. Folktinget is also working to support and strengthen the status of the Swedish language and culture in Finland.

Protecting linguistic rights in Swedish is a core assignment of Folktinget. The public is able to contact the organisation in issues relating to linguistic rights and the liability of the authorities to fulfil these rights. Folktinget is actively working to secure the rights of Swedish-speakers within state and municipal administration and the education sector, as well as within social services and healthcare in Finland. Folktinget is a recognized referral body and issues statements to various authorities. It has thereby been able to impact the drafting of legislation and reforms that are of central importance to the Swedish-speaking population. The parliamentary committees consult Folktinget on a number of issues regarding the Swedish-speaking population.



# Linguistic Diversity in Europe

The linguistic situation in Finland, with two national languages, is by no means unique. Linguistic diversity is one of the core values of Europe and is today seen as an asset. The European Union has 24 official languages and between 60-80 regional and minority languages, spoken by close to 50 million EU citizens. These languages enjoy varying degrees of official recognition.

Apart from Finland there are several European countries with two or more national languages, or official languages as they are sometimes called: Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland and Switzerland. All these countries have obligatory studies of the other official language for everyone, on a national level. There are also several EU countries, for instance Spain, where the minority language is obligatory at the regional level.

The language and minority policies of the EU are part of the area of competence of the Member States, which is why the scope of influence of the European Union is limited in terms of policy and legislation. However, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights establishes that the EU is to “respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”, which means that the EU has a legal obligation in this area.

Several EU programmes currently support projects that promote regional and minority languages. Folktinget is a full member of the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD), the leading European network for language planning. NPLD has worked to strengthen the position of regional and minority languages in Europe by promoting linguistic diversity proactively. Folktinget is also an associate member of FUEN (the Federal



Union of European Nationalities), an organisation gathering some ninety national minorities and linguistic groups across 32 countries in Europe.

The purpose behind the international activities of Folktinget is to exchange concrete ideas and experiences with European co-operation partners in language planning, and the promotion of linguistic diversity.

Folktinget also shares information about its best practices and co-operation with authorities, as well as informs other countries about the bilingualism of Finland. In addition, the organisation provides regular reports on the status of the Swedish language in Finland for the follow-up of the implementation of Council of Europe conventions on languages and minorities.



DÉCRYPTAGES

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attent de la pertinence du projet in-

ationalisme éc

A l'occasion de la sortie de son livre "Le monde est un village" (éd. Grasset), le journaliste et écrivain français Jean-François Revel revient sur son parcours et sur son engagement en faveur de la liberté individuelle.



## Titel Wir sind kein

Schulstra, Bewegungsmangel, Computernutz -  
heute in Deutschland aufzuwachen? Keineswegs!

**E**ines Tages, es muss etwa an  
seinem Jahre hat sein, fällt es  
Martin Dornes auf, "Was ist  
ihren Zeitungen über den Zu-  
stand des Landlebens und die  
Lage von Kindern nicht, noch  
ist es seinen eigenen Ein-  
sichten - von "Kampfr" - er sind

kaum mehr mehr als  
sollten nicht auf die  
nach Dornes Befunde  
konstet er sich vor-  
langen Euro-Integration  
sowas wie wirtschaftl  
Frage, "Aber heißt es  
Eingelassen sind die  
Dann was Mann  
ungen und sparten  
Nach Die Minder

## RGÅBLA

## Dålig koll p

Forst resa, plugga och föräldr  
klattar. Sådant ska inte bara  
merst många i dag - snart kommer de  
att det blir fler än någonsin.



Le Monde

ÉCO

## Netflix débarque: « Kill yo

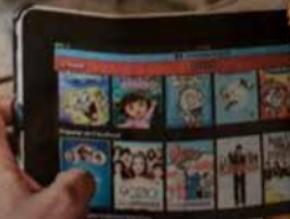
Le leader  
mondial de la vidéo  
à la demande  
ouvre ses services  
en France  
le 15 septembre

L'offensive du  
groupe américain  
survient alors que  
la consommation  
de programmes se  
fait de plus en plus  
individualisée

Les algorithmes,  
utilisés pour  
analyser les usages  
suscitent  
un grand débat

LES PAGES 2-3

Déficits



10 minuter webb-tv  
varje vardag kl.  
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