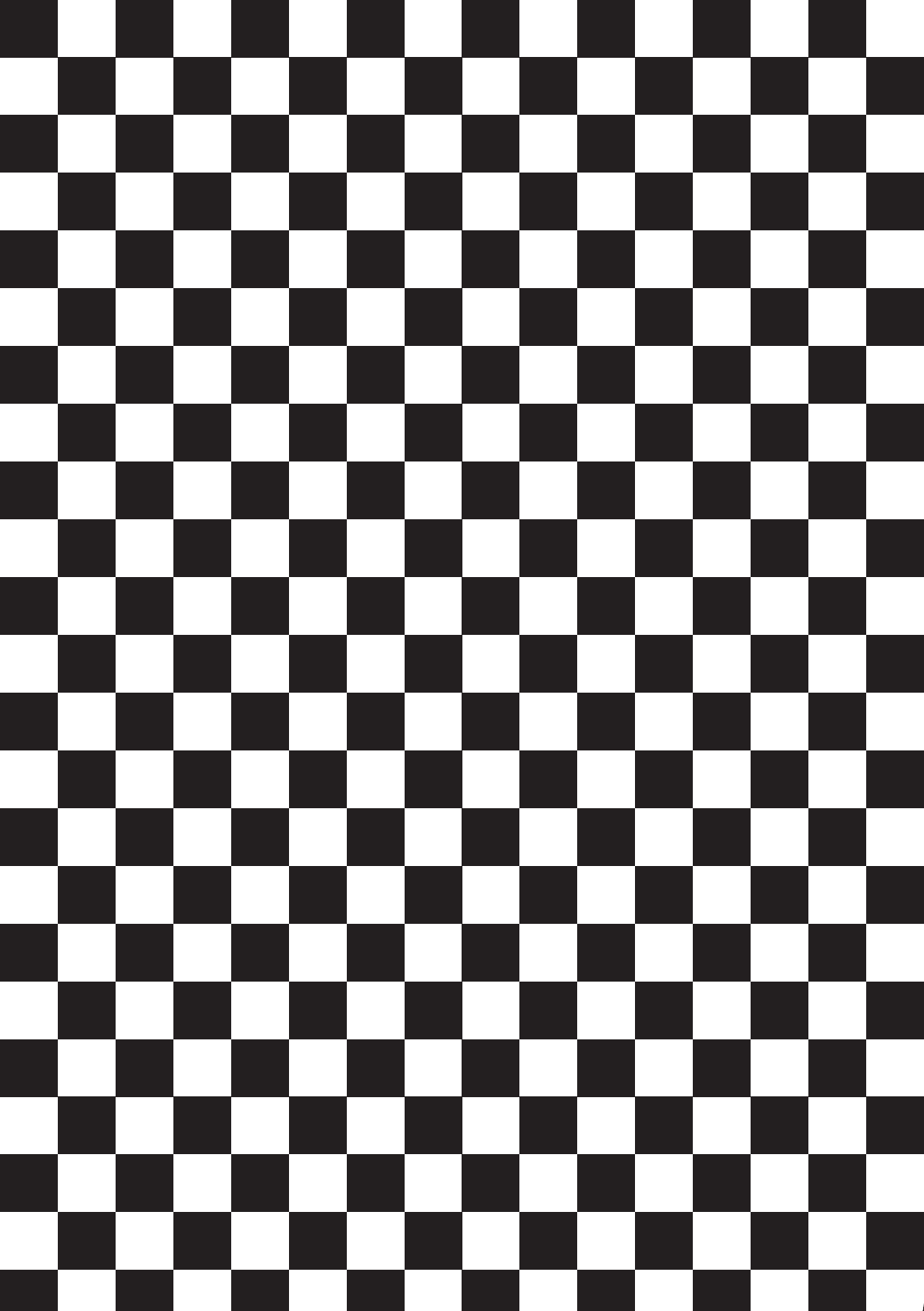


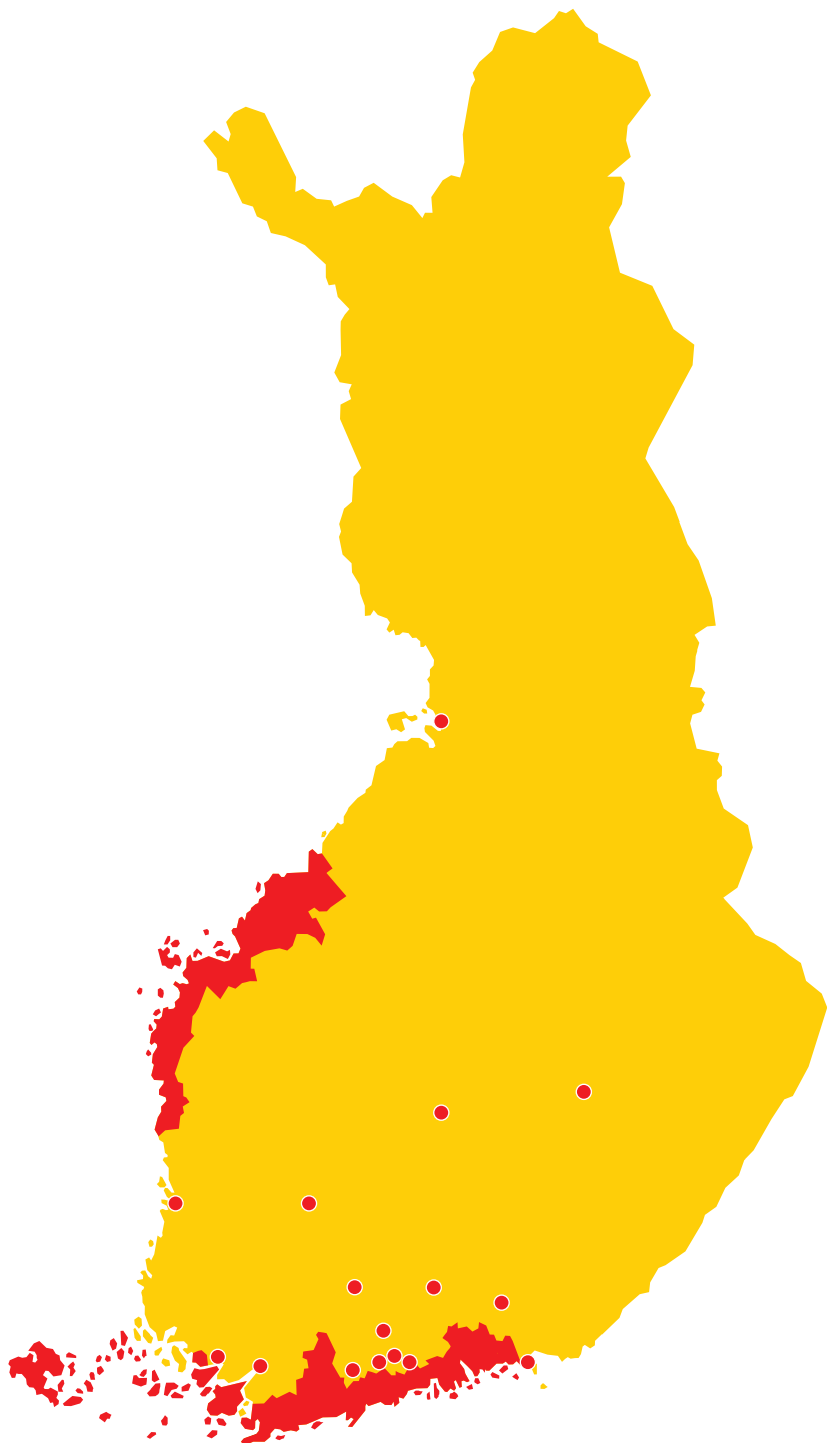
# **Swedish in Finland**



# This is Folktinget

Folktinget, The Swedish Assembly of Finland, is a political cooperation body for the Swedish-speaking population of Finland. Its mission is to promote the rights and interests of the Swedish-speaking population. Folktinget's work also includes supporting and strengthening the status of the Swedish language, culture in Swedish in Finland and a good linguistic climate.

This means that Folktinget is in contact with politicians and authorities, issues statements, is consulted by parliamentary committees, informs of and receives inquiries about linguistic rights and arranges seminars and events. The work is governed by the Act on the Swedish Assembly of Finland.



A stylized map of Finland where the coastal regions are highlighted in red and the interior is yellow. The red regions include Österbotten, Åboland, Åland, and Nyland. The yellow region covers the rest of the country.

**ÖSTERBOTTEN**  
(Pohjanmaa,  
Ostrobothnia)

**ÅBOLAND**  
(Turunmaa)

**ÅLAND**  
(Ahvenanmaa,  
Åland islands)

**NYLAND**  
(Uusimaa)

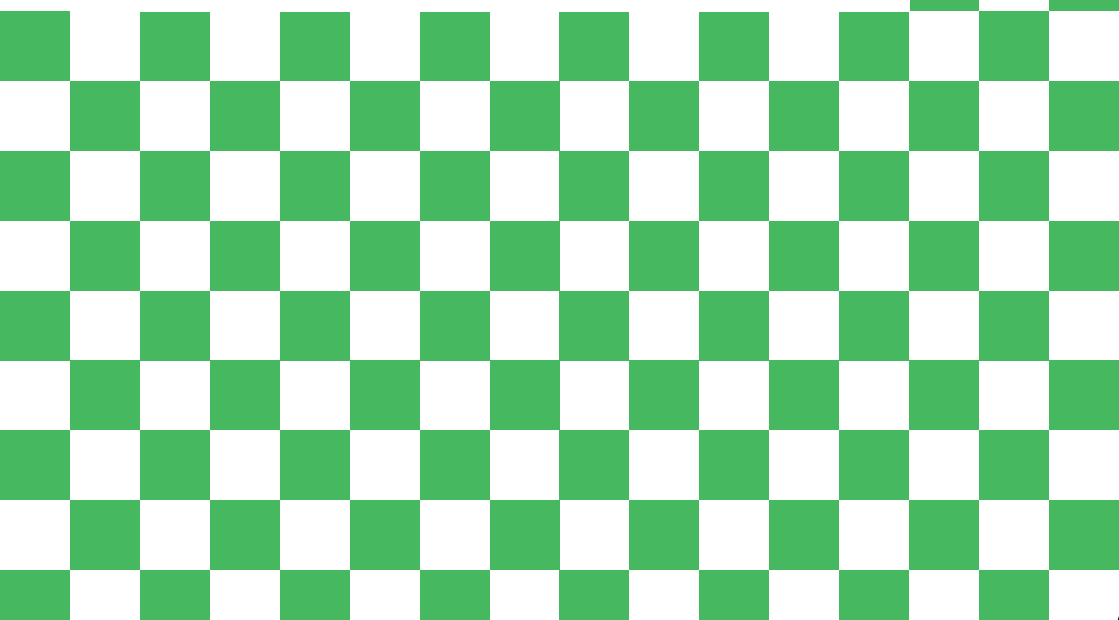


# Swedish in Finland

There are two national languages in Finland: Finnish and Swedish. The population is 5.5 million and Swedish is the mother tongue of about 300,000 people.

The reason Finnish and Swedish are spoken in Finland is that the country was part of Sweden for roughly 700 years. This is why the Finnish public administration, judicial administration and education system bear a great resemblance to their counterparts in Sweden. After the war between Sweden and Russia in 1808-1809 Finland became an autonomous part of Russia. During the Russian period the existing social structures helped Finland preserve its autonomy and the Swedish language survived in administration and education. As a result of the Russian Revolution, Finland became an independent republic on 6 December 1917.

The Swedish language is a significant reason why Finland is one of the Nordic countries. Nordic cooperation is politically, economically and culturally important.



# Basic linguistic rights

Finnish and Swedish are the national languages of Finland. According to the Constitution, the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking population is entitled to cultural and social services on an equal basis.

Even if you do not speak Finnish or Swedish, you can choose whether you want to live your life in Finland in Finnish or Swedish. The basic rights apply to everyone who resides in Finland, or is in contact with Finnish authorities, regardless of nationality or citizenship.



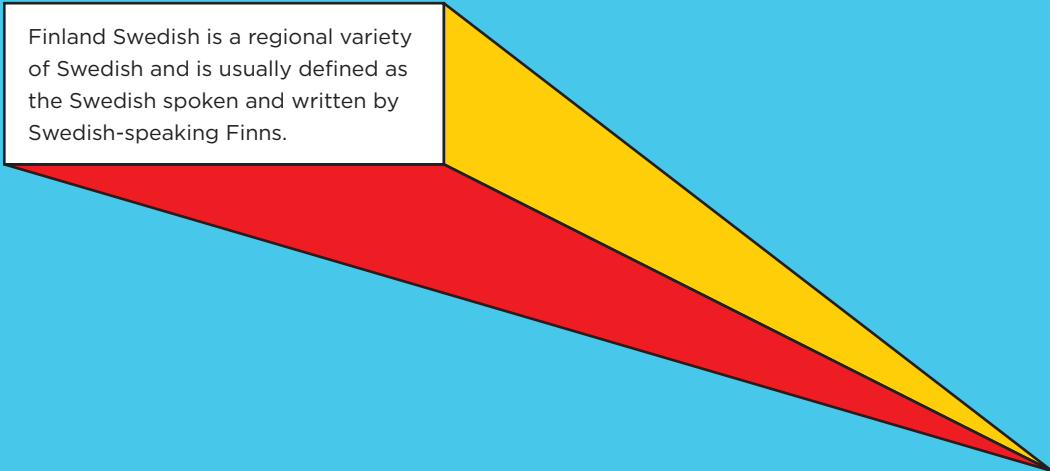
Finnish Swedish Heritage Day is celebrated on 6 November as a Finland-Swedish national day. Finnish Swedish Heritage Day is an official flag-flying day, and is celebrated in various ways throughout the country. Folktinget's main Finnish Swedish Heritage Day celebration is broadcast live on TV by Yle, the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

# Contacts with authorities

The legislation on language decides in which situations you have the right to use Swedish in your contacts with various authorities (e.g. the local tax office, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland and the Digital and Population Data Services Agency). In addition to the Constitution and the Language Act, there are provisions also in dozens of other acts and decrees. The main rule is that you are entitled to use Swedish or Finnish in your contacts with bilingual municipal authorities and with state authorities. A private company does not have to offer you service in Swedish, but many do it anyway.

Municipalities are uni- or bilingual with either Finnish or Swedish as majority language. A municipality is regarded as bilingual if the minority is made up of at least 8 percent of the inhabitants, or 3,000 people. A municipality can also be bilingual by choice.

The authorities are obliged to, of their own accord, make sure that your linguistic rights are implemented. The Swedish language should also be clearly visible for instance on websites, signs and in leaflets.



Finland Swedish is a regional variety of Swedish and is usually defined as the Swedish spoken and written by Swedish-speaking Finns.



## **Mother tongue and contact language**

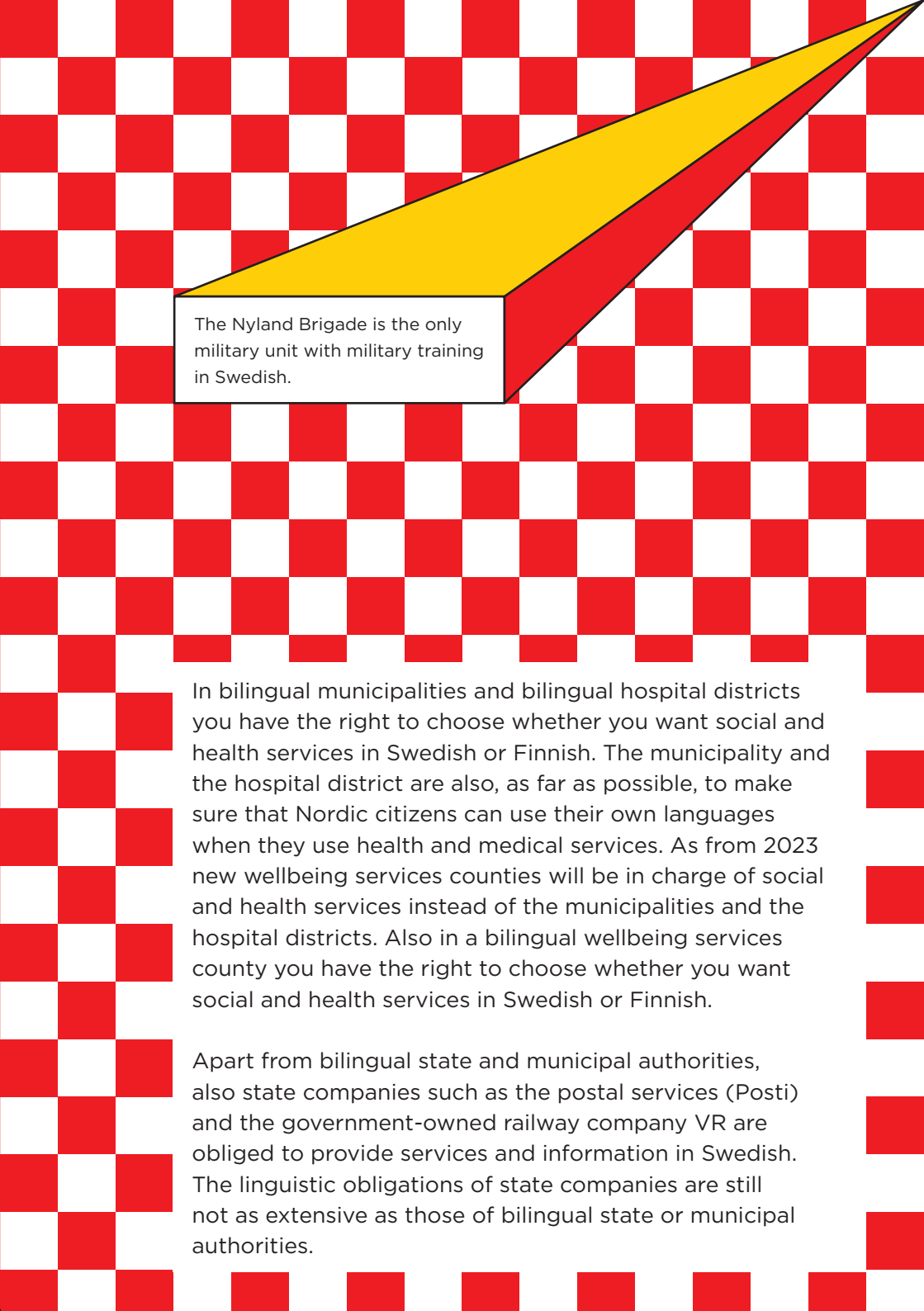
Your mother tongue is registered in the Population Information System. You can change your mother tongue in the system. You can choose whether you want Swedish or Finnish as your contact language regardless of your mother tongue. When an authority offers you service it is your registered contact language that determines which language the authority will use.

If your mother tongue is a language other than Swedish or Finnish, you need to declare Swedish or Finnish as your contact language in the Population Information System. Then your contact language is regarded as your own language in your contacts with bilingual authorities.

# What does the Language Act signify for everyday life?

Every child in Finland has the right to attend day care, preschool and school in its own language, either Finnish or Swedish. This is seen as one of the mainstays of bilingualism in Finland and it applies to the whole country. All pupils are also taught the other national language, except on the Åland Islands, where Finnish is not compulsory. After the basic education, the student can attend upper secondary school education or basic vocational education in Swedish. Higher education is provided by vocational universities and regular universities. There are unilingually Finnish and unilingually Swedish as well as bilingual universities. The largest university in the country, the University of Helsinki, is bilingual.

Many newspapers and magazines are published in Swedish. The public service company Yle offers two radio stations, broadcast TV and digital material in Swedish.



The Nyland Brigade is the only military unit with military training in Swedish.

In bilingual municipalities and bilingual hospital districts you have the right to choose whether you want social and health services in Swedish or Finnish. The municipality and the hospital district are also, as far as possible, to make sure that Nordic citizens can use their own languages when they use health and medical services. As from 2023 new wellbeing services counties will be in charge of social and health services instead of the municipalities and the hospital districts. Also in a bilingual wellbeing services county you have the right to choose whether you want social and health services in Swedish or Finnish.

Apart from bilingual state and municipal authorities, also state companies such as the postal services (Posti) and the government-owned railway company VR are obliged to provide services and information in Swedish. The linguistic obligations of state companies are still not as extensive as those of bilingual state or municipal authorities.

# Finland Swedish today

Everyday life in Swedish in Finland varies depending on where you live. Most of the close to 300,000 Swedish-speaking Finns live in the coastal areas of Nyland (Uusimaa), Åboland (Turunmaa) and Österbotten (Pohjanmaa, or Ostrobothnia in English). Apart from the coastal areas, there are also municipalities with a small Swedish-speaking minority, the so-called language islands. The Åland Islands is an autonomous and unilingually Swedish region.

Many Finns live and work across the language borders, which has resulted in a distinct bilingual identity. It is a great advantage for those who work in Finland to know both national languages.

In Ostrobothnia, Swedish is strongly present in everyday life. You will manage quite well in Swedish both in your contacts with authorities and when using different services in most Ostrobothnian municipalities. In the capital region, service in Swedish is not always problem-free, despite a large Swedish-speaking population in the area. In the bilingual municipalities in Western and Eastern Nyland everyday life in Swedish works well. The archipelago south-west of Åbo (Turku) is a Swedish-speaking area, whereas everyday life in Åbo mainly goes on in Finnish. Strong Swedish-speaking institutions such as Åbo Akademi University and the theatre Åbo svenska teater contribute to maintaining the Swedish language in Åbo.

Places for meeting up in Swedish in Finland are many and important. Societies are important for the Swedish-speakers' community and identity. Many Swedish-speaking Finns are active members of several societies, e.g. sports clubs and choirs.

As for Finland-Swedish culture, there is an ample choice for both children and adults, which interests the Finns. An increasing number of bilingual Finns as well as Swedes in Sweden partake in Finland-Swedish culture in the form of literature, theatre, film, song, music and mass media.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has a Swedish-language diocese, the Diocese of Borgå. The Diocese of Borgå is led by a Swedish-speaking bishop.

On 13 December Lucia (Saint Lucy's Day) is celebrated mainly by Swedish-speaking Finns.

## **The Åland Islands**

Åland is a group of islands located between Finland and Sweden. The only official language in the Åland Islands is Swedish.

When Finland gained its independence in 1917 there was a conflict whether Åland should belong to Finland or to Sweden. In 1921 The League of Nations (today the UN) ruled that Åland should be an autonomous part of Finland. The autonomy would guarantee the status of the Swedish language in Åland. The Åland autonomy and self-government is unique in the world. Ålands lagting is the popularly elected Parliament, with the right to make its own laws. The Government of Åland is responsible for the administration in issues related to e.g. education, social and health services and municipalities. When authorities in Åland and the mainland are in contact, they are to use Swedish.

## Language islands

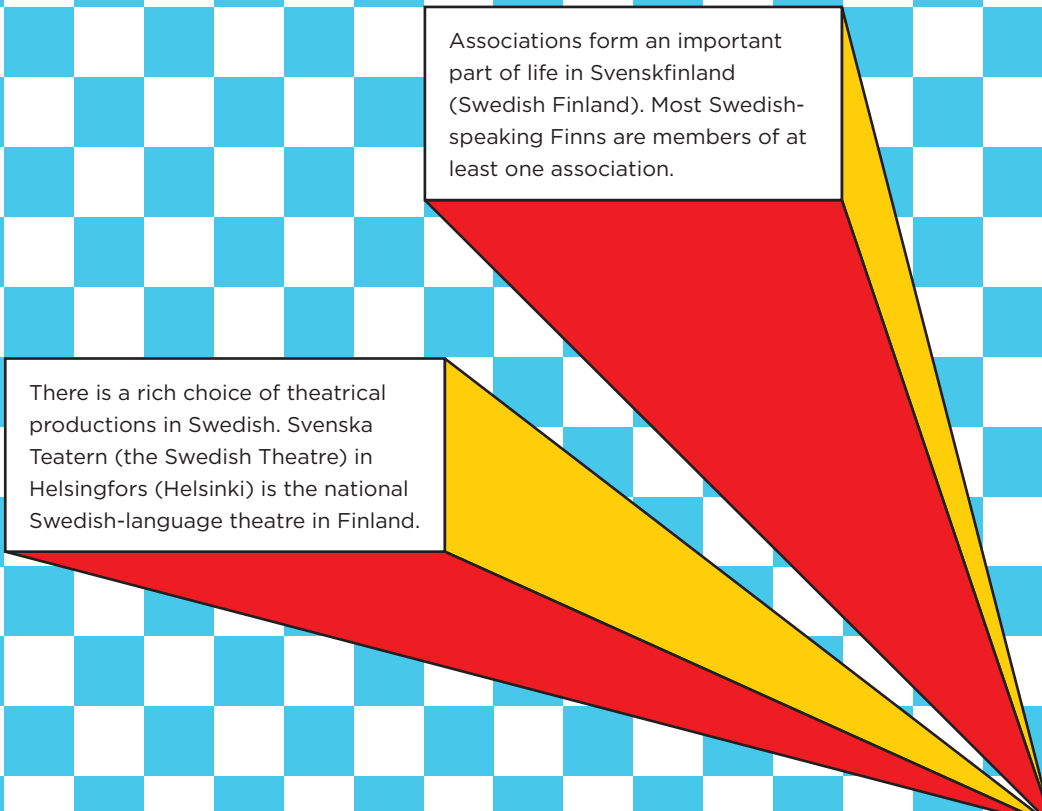
A language island is a place which, from a legal point of view, is unilingually Finnish, but which has a Swedish-speaking minority. Usually, the minimum requirement for the concept language island to apply to a place is that there is a Swedish-language school.

The four largest language islands are Kotka, Björneborg (Pori), Tammerfors (Tampere) and Uleåborg (Oulu). In these four places you can attend compulsory school and upper secondary school in Swedish. Other language islands are Hyvinge (Hyvinkää), Jyväskylä, Kervo (Kerava), Kouvola, Lahtis (Lahti), Nurmijärvi, Salo, S:t Karins (Kaarina), Tavastehus (Hämeenlinna), Tusby (Tuusula), Varkaus and Vichtis (Vihti).

# Integration in Swedish

A person who has moved to Finland has the right to integrate in Swedish. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration offers the possibility to choose whether to integrate in Swedish or Finnish. There is integration education in both Swedish and Finnish. The municipalities play an important role in the integration of a newly arrived person and some municipalities have, or share with other municipalities, an integration coordinator who offers support and advice in connection to the integration process. Swedish-speaking organisations and associations play a crucial role in social inclusion.

For more information: [infofinland.fi](http://infofinland.fi)



Associations form an important part of life in Svenskfinland (Swedish Finland). Most Swedish-speaking Finns are members of at least one association.

There is a rich choice of theatrical productions in Swedish. Svenska Teatern (the Swedish Theatre) in Helsingfors (Helsinki) is the national Swedish-language theatre in Finland.

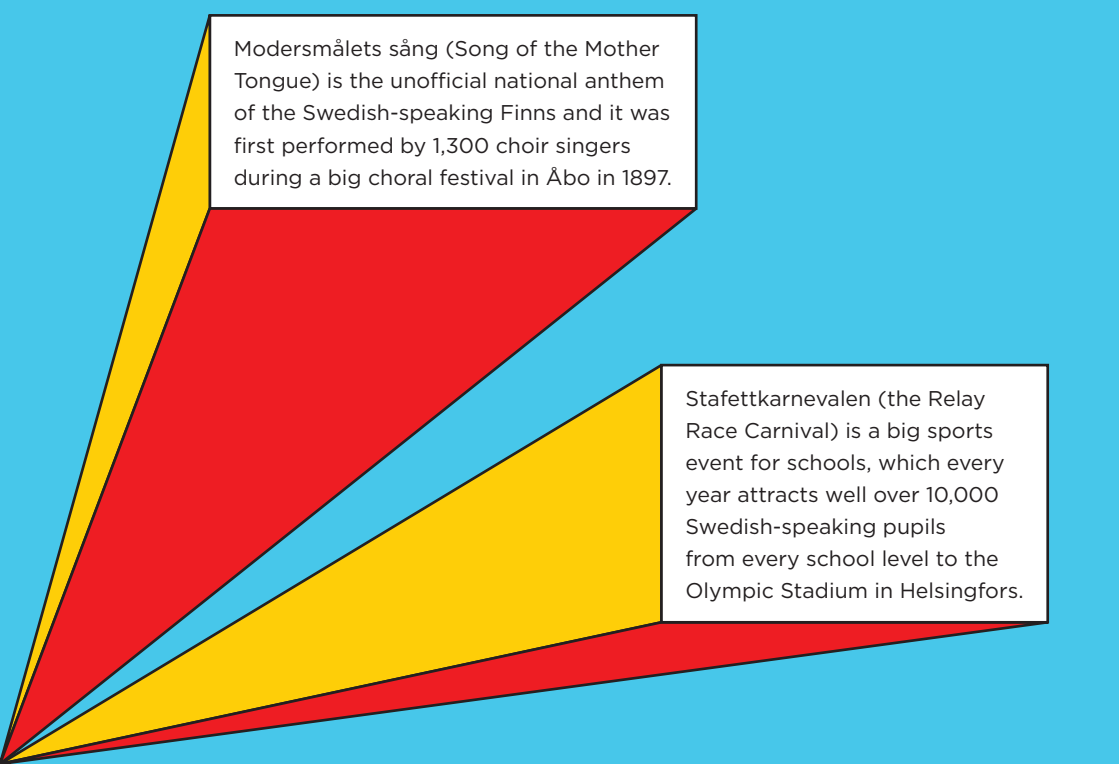


# Linguistic diversity

Many other languages than Swedish and Finnish are also spoken in Finland. There are about 10,000 Sámi in Finland. The Sámi people are the only indigenous people in the EU and three Sámi languages are spoken in Finland: Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi and Northern Sámi. The Sámi languages has an official status within the Sámi native region in Lapland, and there the Sámi people have the right to use their own language in their contacts with authorities and medical services.

Romany, Karelian and the Finland-Swedish and Finnish sign languages are minority languages. The major immigrant languages in Finland are Russian, Estonian, Arabic, Somali and English.

SOURCE: [www.kotus.fi/en](http://www.kotus.fi/en)



Modersmålets sång (Song of the Mother Tongue) is the unofficial national anthem of the Swedish-speaking Finns and it was first performed by 1,300 choir singers during a big choral festival in Åbo in 1897.

Stafettkarnevalen (the Relay Race Carnival) is a big sports event for schools, which every year attracts well over 10,000 Swedish-speaking pupils from every school level to the Olympic Stadium in Helsingfors.

# Countries with more than one language in Europe

It is not unique for a country to have more than one official language. There are 24 official languages within the EU and more than 60 regional and minority languages. In total, close to 225 languages are spoken in Europe.

Apart from Finland, there are several other European countries with more than one national or official language: Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland and Switzerland. In each of these countries it is compulsory to study the official languages. In some EU-countries, such as Spain, it is compulsory to study the minority language in certain regions.

SOURCE: [www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu) [www.europeandatajournalism.eu](http://www.europeandatajournalism.eu)

Do you have questions about Swedish in Finland?

Please, contact us at  
email: [folktinget@folktinget.fi](mailto:folktinget@folktinget.fi)  
phone: +358 9 6844 250  
social media: [@folktinget](https://twitter.com/folktinget)



Moomintroll is perhaps the most famous Swedish-speaking Finn in the world. But there are many more. Can you name five? Send them by e-mail to [folktinget@folktinget.fi](mailto:folktinget@folktinget.fi) and we will mail you a surprise.



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