



PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE  
FINLAND

# STRATEGY FOR THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES OF FINLAND

Government resolution



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**Abstract**  
The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is one of the flagship projects under Prime Minister Katainen's Government Programme. It focuses on the national languages of Finland – Finnish and Swedish – and it is the first government language strategy. The legal background of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland consists of the Constitution and the more specific language legislation.

In line with the Government Programme, the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is divided into two parts: a long-term language strategy and concrete measures for the Government's term of office 2011–2015.

The Strategy for the National Languages is a development project which aims to safeguard a future Finland with two viable national languages. The Government's position is that the existing language legislation on Finnish and Swedish is for the most part up to date. However, there are shortcomings in the practical implementation of this legislation. The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is based on the realisation that the current situation concerning the Finnish and Swedish languages is not satisfactory over the long term. The Strategy does not include proposals for reform of legislation.

The starting points of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland are the basic linguistic rights of individuals and the benefits and strengths arising from a bilingual society. The responsibility for the implementation of the strategy is divided among a number of bodies, with the Ministry of Justice carrying the general responsibility for monitoring. The Appendix provides practical tools for different kinds of administrative situations in order to improve the application of language legislation.

**Keywords**  
national languages, Finnish, Swedish, bilingualism in Finland, Government Programme, strategy, measures for the Government's term of office

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Vision

Finland builds its national and international future as part of a stable and secure Northern European community. Participation in this community, with which Finland has strong historical, cultural, linguistic, legal and economic ties, is one of the country's strengths. Throughout their history, Finns have used their national languages, Finnish and Swedish. As a bilingual country, Finland is responsible for ensuring that both languages remain viable and will be used in our country in the future as well. Individuals using both national languages strengthen Finland's bilingualism and also act as bridge-builders between the language groups.

The objective of the Strategy for the National Languages is a Finland where

- the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, are seen, heard and approved;
- the national languages are used in all sectors of society;
- the benefits brought by the national languages are put into use for society and individuals;
- everyone has the opportunity to live and be active in their own country in their own language, whether Finnish or Swedish;
- everyone has the opportunity to become familiar with both Finnish-language and Swedish-language culture and traditions in our country and with our common history, and to benefit from them.

To enable this

- Finland secures everyone living in Finland the right and the opportunity to learn their mother tongue, either Finnish or Swedish;
- Finland secures everyone living in Finland the right and the opportunity to learn the country's other national language, Finnish or Swedish;
- Finland develops Finnish and Swedish vocabulary and promotes the opportunities to use these languages.

## 1.2 The need for a Strategy for the National Languages of Finland

The need for a Strategy for the National Languages of Finland arises from the inadequate application of the legal statutes concerning our national languages, Finnish and Swedish. This jeopardises the basic

linguistic rights of the Finnish-speaking and, in particular, the Swedish-speaking population.

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is also needed so that Finland would be able both to utilise its strengths emanating from the two national languages and to promote citizens' well-being and broad education. In this way, Finland can be an active and competitive player and a cooperation partner inspiring confidence, for instance, when working together with the other Nordic countries.

The vision of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland defines the preconditions for a future Finland with two viable national languages. The core ideas include appreciation for and utilisation of the mother tongue, the other national language, and Finland's bilingual culture, and ensuring that all inhabitants of Finland have the opportunity to learn both languages. The vision also contains core ideas to increase encounters and opportunities for language use between people speaking Finnish and Swedish and would raise the visibility of both languages. The above ideas are also reflected in this strategy: in the measures outlined by the Government for the current government term and in the proposals for longer-term actions.

The objective of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland – to create a Finland with two viable national languages – needs to be supported by practical measures. The purpose of the measures presented in the strategy is to create conditions for *de facto* equality of Finnish and Swedish as viable national languages now and in the future.

Until now, Finland has not had a strategy for its national languages. Nor is there a language strategy for other languages used in Finland, whose legal status, actual spheres of use and needs differ from the national languages and also from one another. The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland can serve as a basis for a potential future language strategy that would encompass all or some of the languages spoken in Finland.

## 1.3 The nature and background of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is a strategy for two viable national languages. Since it is likely that Finnish and Swedish will be spoken in Finland in the future as well, the strategy reaches out to span many decades. At the same time, Finland welcomes all languages, and all language groups have the right to maintain and develop their own language.

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is a project under the Government Programme. As indicated by its name, it applies to both national languages, Finnish and Swedish, which by virtue of Section 17 of the Constitution have an equal status as Finland's national languages. The legal background of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland consists of the Constitution and the supplementary language legislation.

The Government's position is that the existing language legislation on Finnish and Swedish is for the most part up to date. There are still shortcomings in the practical implementation of this legislation, as indicated by the Government, for instance, when submitting its Report on the Application of Language Legislation to Parliament in 2006 and 2009.

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is not primarily a project for legislative reform but a *development project* based on the realisation that the current situation concerning the Finnish and Swedish languages is not satisfactory over the long term. For this reason, in accordance with an entry in the programme of Prime Minister Katainen's Government, "a long-term language strategy will be prepared under the lead of the Prime Minister in order to develop two viable national languages, and, on this basis, concrete measures will be specified for the Government's term of office. The implementation of linguistic rights will be developed, taking into account the proposals made by the Ahtisaari working group."

Learning other languages is important in the ever more international world, and also in Finland, which in practice is a multilingual country. Finnish and Swedish are the languages in which most people in Finland think and express themselves. For this reason alone, the national languages need to be nurtured. The level of proficiency in both national languages, especially writing skills, both as the mother tongue and as the second national language, has been declining for years. Swedish is being learned much less than Finnish. The above phenomena will lead to limited opportunities for the use of national languages in the various sectors of society, and the practical responsibility for the maintenance of Swedish, in particular, will rest on the shoulders of only a few people proficient in Swedish.<sup>1</sup>

The Ahtisaari working group mentioned in the Government Programme refers to the management group appointed by the Swedish Assembly of Finland (*Svenska Finlands folkting*). Led by President Martti Ahtisaari, the group drew up an action plan completed in spring 2010. The action plan included concrete proposals for the maintenance of two viable national

languages in Finland. The action plan focused on Swedish, the lesser used national language, which therefore is a *de facto* minority language.

The action plan of President Ahtisaari's working group included 25 proposals for actions. Some of these have already been implemented or advanced in some other way after the completion of the action plan. They are therefore not addressed in this strategy. Among other things, these proposals pertained to integration, the distribution of lesson hours in comprehensive school, the language of patient documents, and to the provisions of information on the recruitment guidelines compiled by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance. The information is given on the Ministry of Finance's website and in training events concerning the recruitment procedure.

In agreement with the premises of the Language Act, the strategy's basic principle is the coexistence of both national languages and the provision of services so that there is no need to resort to separate solutions. In some cases, however, linguistic equality may in practice require certain types of special solutions for specific language groups or areas. For example, the efficient production of high-quality services may require smaller units or alternative concepts. Thus, the cost structure that meets the goal may in some cases differ from the symmetrical provision of care or other services, if such provision is deemed to be impractical.

## 1.4 Responsibility for the Finnish and Swedish languages

Finland has traditionally relied on two languages, Finnish and Swedish, but other languages have also been used alongside these two. By virtue of a decree, it has been possible to use Finnish and Swedish in official contexts since 1902. After Finland gained independence, the Constitution Act of 1919 contained stipulations on the status of Finnish and Swedish as national languages. The status of the national languages was confirmed in the reform of basic rights in 1995, and the linguistic rights were included without change in the Constitution of 2000. The public authorities are required to provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis.<sup>2</sup>

Finland is committed to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, signed under the auspices of the Council of Europe. In

its reports submitted to the bodies monitoring these treaties, Finland also reports on the implementation of linguistic rights among speakers of Swedish, the less spoken national language.

Finland is responsible for ensuring that the Finnish and Swedish languages prosper, remain vigorous and continue to develop. Seen, for example, from the European perspective, both national languages are small languages, and all small languages need special attention when the use of larger languages gains more ground.

This responsibility applies to our two national languages in different ways. Finnish is not used as an official language in any other country. No other state is therefore responsible for the development and maintenance of the Finnish language to the same extent as Finland is. Thus, the responsibility rests solely on Finland.<sup>3</sup> Swedish is spoken as an official language in Sweden, too, but in Finland the language is a *de facto* minority language. Less used languages always require more care and attention than the majority's language. Finland's official bilingualism rests on the will of Parliament's majority. Thus, the majority also bears the responsibility for the less used language. Responsibility for the maintenance of Finland's bilingualism or the less used national language, Swedish, cannot be left to one language group only, in practice to the Swedish-speaking population of Finland.

Above all, responsibility for our languages rests with the State of Finland and is divided among different actors within State administration. Finland's bilingualism requires certain solutions and institutions from the State, such as authorities and courts of law, enabling both Finnish-speakers and Swedish-speakers to realise their linguistic rights regardless of whether they can speak the other national language.

The State bears its responsibility, whenever necessary, by supplementing and adapting the legal provisions that specify the basic linguistic rights. Especially large reform projects, such as the local government reform and the social welfare and health care reform, which are under preparation at the same time as this strategy, require coordination so that both the basic linguistic rights and the goals set for the reforms are attained.

The State also bears its responsibility for our languages by issuing this Strategy for the National Languages of Finland as a government resolution.

A government resolution cannot stipulate new obligations for municipalities; their residents have self-government. The same applies to joint municipal authorities. However, municipalities and joint municipal

authorities shoulder an important responsibility when they implement the basic linguistic rights guaranteed by the Constitution in practice by arranging, for instance, day care, basic education, and social welfare and health care services. In addition, municipalities' internal decisions on questions such as what languages are used for communication in cases where there are no express regulations on the issue, have an impact on the linguistic options available to holders of municipal positions of trust and municipal residents.

In this resolution, the Government recommends that, in particular, bilingual municipalities and joint municipal authorities adopt the practical tools included in the strategy. The tools do not create new obligations; instead, they are aids that facilitate compliance with legislation.

As it is, English has largely replaced Finnish or Swedish as the language of research in some disciplines, such as mathematics and the natural sciences. In view of the international dimension of science, this is a natural development. It means, however, that the vocabulary used to describe new scientific findings does not necessarily evolve in the national languages. The development of special vocabulary therefore requires constant work so that new phenomena can be discussed in Finnish and Swedish as well.<sup>4</sup>

Individuals are also responsible for their own language and its maintenance in practice. The use of Finnish and Swedish in all walks of life helps maintain diverse and nuanced vocabulary and expressions. If languages are not used and maintained, their scope of use shrinks. This must be considered as the use of other languages, especially English, is becoming more common in domestic contexts as well.<sup>5</sup>

Individuals' opportunities to use their own language or the other national language depend partly on the individuals' own active approach and partly on decisions made by society. For instance, the decision when pupils start to study the second national language is primarily made by the local authorities regardless of the wishes of individual children or parents. This means that if no option is offered for early language studies, it cannot be selected. Decisions made by society should therefore always support the opportunities to learn and use both national languages.

Despite the fact that Finland is a bilingual country based on two national languages, everyone has the right to live in one's own country using one's own language, either Finnish or Swedish. Individuals are not always bilingual. Especially young people living in the Åland Islands have had a wide range of contacts

with Sweden since their childhood, for instance, via Swedish – and therefore Swedish-language – youth culture, television, press, and social media. Finland must offer activity and study options in the Swedish language so that these young people, too, would consider Finland a natural choice as the country for their future. Migration is a natural phenomenon, but if it arises because of narrower options in one's own language in the homeland, it is both a demographic and economic loss for Finland.

## 1.5 Benefits and strengths offered by two viable national languages

The starting points of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland are *the basic linguistic rights of individuals* and *the benefits and strengths arising from a bilingual society*. Individual and societal benefits are intertwined because societal benefits, such as stable external relations, international cooperation inspiring confidence, and economic gains derived from exports, also bring benefits to individuals. This is the case also when an individual wants to live his or her life only in Finland and in one language. Similarly, individual benefits will also benefit society, for example, when thanks to their good language skills, Finns are able to act successfully in Nordic or wider international contexts.

### 1.5.1 Societal benefits

Society benefits from Finland's official bilingualism in sectors such as *culture, history, law* and *the economy*.

Geographically, historically, culturally, politically and economically, Finland is a Western North European country. Above all, our country has a long common history with Sweden and for centuries Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden. The Nordic countries share a number of fundamental social features, such as the openness of public activities and the rule of law. Many of Finland's societal structures, such as those used in administration and the judicial system, hark back to the Swedish period. Thus, the evolution of the Finnish language, especially its administrative usage, is grounded in the Swedish administrative and judicial structures and the related vocabulary.

Finland's inclusion in the Nordic cultural community means that Finland has *a diverse domestic culture* that has received influences, values and traditions from both East and West. Nordic values are an inseparable element of Finnish society. All Nordic countries value the welfare state, which includes the freedom of the individual, democracy, the rule of law, a well-functioning public sector, and gender equality.

Trust in fellow citizens and in society's institutions is another common Nordic feature.

Nordic cooperation is conducted at many levels, including education and social policy and the advancement of innovation capacity. The Swedish language serves as an agent for mutual understanding and a common value base in the Nordic countries. A common cultural and language background creates a stronger feeling of affinity and trust and facilitates cooperation. This applies to all cooperation. Knowledge or understanding of Swedish brings practical added value to Nordic contacts and cooperation even if the actual business documents are written in some other language.

*The legal benefits* of Finland's official bilingualism include the language legislation, considered exemplary even in international contexts. It defines this society built on two equal national languages. This legislation is an indication of Finland's tolerance towards both national language groups, and the country's appreciation for the joint history with Sweden and the resulting cultural richness.

As a society, Finland benefits from its bilingualism economically. The Nordic countries have traditionally constituted an important economic area for Finland, and this is still true. The other Nordic countries account for the bulk of Finnish exports and imports. Sweden is Finland's biggest trading partner for exports, accounting for over 11 per cent of Finnish exports in 2010 and 2011, and it is the third biggest country for imports.

Knowledge of the national languages continues to be important on the labour market within Finland, too. Owing to retirement, the demand for new labour force will increase in the coming years. Demand for labour is particularly great in occupations requiring vocational education. According to employers, after Finnish and English, Swedish is the third most important language needed on the labour market.<sup>7</sup>

However, the economic benefits may not be attained if bilingualism is not functional and, in particular, if the Swedish language cannot be used. This is illustrated by the volume of trade between the monolingual, Swedish-speaking Åland Islands and mainland Finland when compared against trade between Åland and Sweden. In 2011, the value of goods exported from the Åland Islands totalled nearly EUR 290 million. Close to 74 per cent of the exports were shipped to mainland Finland. About 48 per cent of the goods imported to the Åland Islands, totalling nearly EUR 536 million in 2011, came from Sweden.<sup>8</sup> One factor explaining the import of goods from Sweden to Åland is the Swedish-language

package information and directions for use, which do not exist for all goods purchased in Finland, despite the legal requirements. This means an economic loss for Finland. Similar losses are services purchased in the Åland Islands from Sweden when they are not offered in the Swedish language in Finland. Such services have included, for instance, certain types of specialised health care.

One of Finland's international success factors has been Finns' good knowledge of languages. Solid skills in the national languages are therefore an advantage for Finland beyond the country's borders, too.

### 1.5.2 Benefits at individual level

Finns benefit in many ways from Finland's bilingualism and from the fact that both languages are used in society.

Finland's bilingualism brings *legal benefits* to individuals if their right to use their own language, Finnish or Swedish, and to be addressed in this language, is realised in the situations where they by law are entitled to do so. Situations important for individuals include dealings with the public authorities in unfamiliar matters that require accurate understanding of the issue at hand. These may include, for example, taxation issues or legal proceedings. Acute situations where the importance of using one's own language is highlighted include calls to the emergency number, discussions with health care personnel, and contacts with the police. Legal benefits are also *societal benefits*, for instance, when the realisation of rights enhances the feeling of legal security, safety and society's functioning.

*The public use, visibility and audibility of one's own language*, for both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers, are messages indicating that both their language and they themselves are accepted in society. These messages make people feel welcome and accepted in their own country and in their own language. This increases confidence in the public domain and in fellow citizens, as well as fostering the feeling of security and togetherness.

Both national languages can be used widely in various contexts and they have many *practical benefits* in everyday life. For example, many university students who responded to the survey conducted for the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland project reported that they used their second national language very extensively both in their studies and in their free time, for instance, on the Internet. Proficiency in both national languages, or even the ability to receive information in the other language, provides more opportunities for studies and leisure.<sup>9</sup>

Knowing languages is useful, for instance, because it provides *more options for studies* both in Finland and abroad. Moreover, extensive language skills and knowledge of the national languages increase *job opportunities* in Finland and possibly also in other countries where Finnish and Swedish play an important role, for instance, in conjunction with trade or tourism. Many Nordic cooperation bodies and organisations offer job opportunities where one practical requirement is the knowledge of Swedish. Many young people feel that they benefit from their Swedish and Finnish skills and believe that those who have good command of both national languages will reap the rewards in their future careers.<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge of both national languages, even when passive, enables one to read domestic books and other publications in the original language, whether Finnish or Swedish. Furthermore, understanding both national languages provides the opportunity to follow theatrical performances, music and other culture in both languages and to *receive information* in various languages and from various sources or to *exchange information*, for instance, on the Internet.

A person knowing both national languages can get to know Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking people in their native languages. Thus, language skills create opportunities *to network, meet new people and, through them, to learn new things*, for example, traditions associated with the other language or language group. Aside from other benefits, meeting speakers of the other language is therefore an opportunity to abate one's own prejudices and broaden one's perspectives, to learn about the background of one's own country and to recognise its bilingual cultural heritage. All these possibilities apply to both professional contexts and leisure.

Command of the Finnish and Swedish languages enables a wide range of activities in Finland and in the other Nordic countries, in both the public and private sectors. The Nordic countries often work together in the European Union and other international contexts. Knowledge of Swedish, a member of the Scandinavian family of languages, facilitates cooperation, creates a feeling of affinity and increases influence within the larger framework.

To gain all these benefits, it is important that education in Finland creates the foundation for solid language skills. It is also important that society actively and consistently supports the use and viability of both national languages. In this way, doors to as many different alternatives as possible will remain open for everyone.

## 2 CURRENT SITUATION

In practice, Finland is today a multilingual country, where 148 languages are spoken as the mother tongue.<sup>11</sup> Finnish is the mother tongue of 4,863,351 inhabitants (90 per cent of the population), while Swedish is the mother tongue of 291,219 inhabitants (5.4 per cent of the population).<sup>12</sup> Other native languages account for 4.5 per cent of the population. The number of Swedish speakers is almost the same as in the 1880s, when population data included the mother tongue for the first time. The number of Swedish speakers was at its highest before tens of thousands moved to Sweden between the 1950s and the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The numbers and percentages of Finnish speakers and speakers of other languages have risen. The figures are based on the Population Information System, where a child's mother tongue is registered on the basis of information given by the parents.

Many languages are used in Finland. Finnish people are supported in their learning of the national languages and other languages. Similarly, people of foreign origin are supported in learning their mother tongue and Finland's national languages.

The languages of the State of Finland are Finnish and Swedish, which by virtue of Section 17 of the Constitution have the status of national languages. Thus, Finland is officially a bilingual country. The Constitution guarantees native Finnish and Swedish speakers equal rights to use their mother tongue, or their "own language".

The Government's position is that the language legislation that entered into force in 2004 is for the most part good and up to date. However, there are shortcomings in compliance with the legislation. The impacts of inadequate application surface differently for Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers. Finnish speakers can generally trust that their linguistic rights are realised and that they can express themselves in their own language. In contrast, Swedish speakers cannot have equally high trust in the realisation of their linguistic rights. They also have the option of using their own language in contacts with the authorities less frequently. Shortcomings have been reported widely, for instance, in the Report of the Government on the Application of Language Legislation in 2006 and 2009 and in Finland's periodic reports to the bodies monitoring the minority treaties of the Council of Europe.

### 2.1 Finnish language and Finnish speakers in Finland

Depending on the definition of language, the Finnish language or its early forms were already spoken in Finland during the first millennium CE.

People speaking Finnish as their mother tongue account for the overwhelming majority, about 90 per cent, of Finland's population. In most of Finland, everyone has the option of using Finnish and to be understood in that language.

Finnish speakers live everywhere in Finland. Most of them live in the Finnish-speaking areas. They have few natural contacts with the Swedish language and with the segment of the population speaking Swedish as their mother tongue. If they so wish, Finnish speakers can of course seek contacts with the Swedish language in these areas, too, via literature or the Internet, for example, or they can make an effort to use the Swedish language when travelling in a bilingual locality. In bilingual areas, Finnish speakers have better opportunities to get to know Swedish speakers and to use the Swedish language. There is variation in the proximity or distance between the language groups in practical situations, and in how much Finnish speakers use Swedish in their contacts with Swedish speakers. Finnish speakers also live in monolingual Swedish areas in Ostrobothnia and Åland, and in these areas they constitute a minority.

The linguistic rights secured by the Constitution for Finnish speakers to use their own language before courts or law and other authorities are generally realised well. This is also the case in bilingual municipalities where the majority language is Swedish. For instance in social welfare and health care, the linguistic rights of Finnish and Swedish speakers are realised in the most egalitarian way in those bilingual municipalities where Swedish is the majority language.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2 Swedish language and Swedish speakers in Finland

Swedish has been spoken as a mother tongue in Finland at least since the 12th century. People speaking Swedish as their mother tongue account for 5.4 per cent of Finland's population.<sup>15</sup>

Swedish-speaking Finns are natives of Finland. They are Finnish citizens and Finland is their homeland. Some Swedish-speaking Finns have relatives in Sweden or other contacts with the neighbouring country, whereas other families do



not originally come from Sweden. Not all Swedish speakers have family or emotional contacts with Sweden. For Swedish-speaking Finns, Sweden is a neighbouring country where their language is used as the country's principal language and where they therefore have the opportunity to use their own language widely.

Many Swedish speakers in Finland perceive that they have a double identity. They feel that they belong to the group of Swedish speakers in Finland which is a *de facto* minority group in this country. At the same time, they feel strongly that they are Finns and belong to Finnish society. Tens of thousands of Swedish speakers cannot speak Finnish fluently or do not speak Finnish at all. Especially those Swedish speakers who have learned the Finnish language well feel that they are in practice bilingual. Thus, belonging to a Swedish-language community does not conflict with a Finnish and bilingual identity.<sup>16</sup>

Swedish speakers live in different types of areas. Most Swedish speakers live in the Helsinki metropolitan area and on the coast; the former is bilingual and the latter mainly bilingual. There are also three monolingual Swedish-language municipalities on the coast of mainland Finland. In fact, Swedish speakers lived all over the country at the end of 2011. According to the population data of Statistics Finland, only 17 out of the 285 monolingual Finnish-language municipalities in mainland Finland had no Swedish speakers. However, the proportion of Swedish speakers in most of Finland's municipalities is so low that, by virtue of Section 5 of the Language Act, the municipalities are officially monolingual.

It is rare that Swedish speakers have no contacts with Finnish speakers. Swedish speakers live both in monolingual Finnish-language and monolingual Swedish-language municipalities; the latter have also Finnish-speaking residents. The majority of Swedish speakers live in bilingual municipalities. For example, about 64,000 Swedish speakers live in the Helsinki metropolitan area, but the predominant language in the region is Finnish and, as a whole, the region functions more often in Finnish than in Swedish. In bilingual municipalities, the Swedish speakers' situation is often different from that of the Finnish speakers, as everyday situations and the concepts of Finland's bilingualism may not be the same. In a bilingual municipality where the majority language is Finnish, Finnish speakers can most often organise their lives completely in their own language, but this is not necessarily the case for Swedish speakers living in the same municipality. This means that Swedish

speakers do not always have as many opportunities to use their mother tongue as Finnish speakers.

In practice, all Swedish speakers have at least some contacts with the Finnish language because, for example, the majority of official communications, radio and television news, and Finnish literature is in the Finnish language.

Swedish speakers' linguistic rights are realised to a varying extent in different parts of the country, and regional differences are considerable. Swedish speakers' rights are realised the best in Swedish-language areas and in bilingual municipalities where Swedish is the majority language. Seen as a whole, there is still room for improvement in the implementation of Swedish speakers' linguistic rights. The authorities usually plan their operations only in the majority language of their official district, mostly in Finnish. In their guidance documents, the ministries and most of the bilingual municipalities do not explicitly mention the duty to arrange operations in two languages. In public administration, the starting point is that Swedish speakers are served in Finnish unless they specifically ask to be served in Swedish. Especially in large municipalities with Finnish as the majority language, it is often difficult to obtain social welfare and health care services in Swedish.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3 Bilingualism at the individual level and coexistence of the national languages in Finland

By virtue of the Constitution, Finland is officially bilingual. In consequence, the public authorities are required to provide for the cultural and societal needs of the country's Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations on an equal basis.<sup>18</sup>

By law, everyone in Finland has one registered mother tongue in the Population Information System. The registered language is, above all, a tool for administrative division and planning for the arrangement of society's services. It does not show how an individual perceives his or her own language, *i.e.* linguistic identity, or how the individual relates to other languages. There is no legal or linguistic definition for bilingualism at the individual level. When talking about bilingualism at individual level, the question is *who considers himself or herself to be bilingual*.

Today, Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers – at least not in all parts of the country – do not form clear-cut language groups that would live separately from each other and that would in all cases have

different customs. A practical example of the natural and close coexistence of both national languages is bilingual families where both parents speak their own mother tongue with their children and possibly also with each other. Both Finnish-language and Swedish-language traditions often blend and live side by side in these families, in the same way as the languages.

Swedish speakers perceive themselves as bilingual more often than Finnish speakers. In turn, Finnish speakers less frequently feel that they are bilingual even if their skills in both national languages were comparable to the language skills of Swedish speakers who perceive themselves as bilingual. An individual's perception of one's own bilingualism does not depend on the level of language skills but is rather a question of which group(s) the individual identifies with. Naturally nothing prevents a Finnish speaker from identifying with both the Finnish-speaking and the bilingual populations.

Since bilingualism at the individual level is increasing, the division into Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking population groups does not always feel natural. The division is artificial also because, irrespective of their own mother tongue, many people have relatives whose mother tongue is the other national language. Increasingly often, families have members who speak different languages or have a different linguistic identity.

Despite the bilingualism displayed by people and despite the coexistence of the national languages, it is important to remember that the right, nor necessarily even the need, to use one's own mother tongue does not subside even if a person perceived himself or herself as bilingual. Bilingualism provides opportunities to use both of our languages, but this does not necessarily mean that people who are in practice bilingual would not expressly have the wish and need to use the language that they have learnt first or regard as their mother tongue. In addition, there are people in Finland who are fluent in only one of the two national languages. This also holds for Swedish speakers. For this reason, it must always be ensured, for instance, when organising services, that the rights and societal and cultural needs of both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers are the starting point even if many people in practice were bilingual at one level or another.

It is important to increase interaction between the language groups and to encourage natural ways of using both Finnish and Swedish in the same contexts. Many possibilities already exist. For instance, *adult education centres* exist all over Finland; they offer various courses in the national languages. Bilingual

areas also have both Finnish-language and Swedish-language adult education centres. Apart from language studies, they enable leisure interests in the other national language, thereby providing the opportunity to use the other language and to meet its speakers. Better utilisation of these types of opportunities would improve language skills and would strengthen viable bilingualism. The authorities can also increase voluntary personnel exchanges, for instance, between hospital districts and create other opportunities for cooperation that would help strengthen the personnel's occupational language skills and would promote the viability of both national languages. *Wider Nordic cooperation* among the authorities within the same sector is also a way to strengthen linguistic resources and to create better opportunities for the coexistence of the languages in daily life.

However, the encounters between the languages and language groups must not take place at the expense of either language, for instance the less used one, and must not supersede this language. Representatives of the smaller language group are often expected to show flexibility in various situations pertaining to language use. Bilingual discussions often turn into monolingual ones so that the language spoken is in practice that of the majority. Viable bilingualism at individual level would benefit from such natural encounters between languages where all parties use their own languages.

The impact of increasing bilingualism at individual level must be taken into account in the future when planning and organising various services provided by society. This is the case, for instance, when evaluating future school arrangements. It may then be justified to seek ways of supporting the equal development of both languages among bilingual children. However, the objective must be that everyone gets equally good basic education regardless of the language. A Swedish-language school cannot act as a language school because its task is to be an institution that passes on and creates Swedish language in Finland.<sup>19</sup> Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers are not in a fully equal situation in this respect. Since Swedish speakers constitute a *de facto* minority, they need more support from society for their language and its development than members of the Finnish-speaking population do.<sup>20</sup> The situation may be the opposite in areas where Swedish is the majority language.



## 2.4 The special status of the Åland Islands

The Åland Islands are an autonomous region of Finland. The autonomy of the region is based on international legal guarantees, *i.e.* the decision made by the League of Nations in 1921 and the first Act on the Autonomy of Åland dating from 1922. According to these guarantees, the official language of Åland is Swedish. The purpose of the autonomy of Åland is to guarantee “the population of the Åland Islands the preservation of the Swedish language, culture and local customs” (Treaty signed between Finland and Sweden on 27 June 1921). Thus, one of the objectives of Åland’s autonomy was to secure the status of the Swedish language in Åland, because Swedish is the less used national language in Finland.

The linguistic guarantees towards the population of Åland require that the State of Finland must manage its contacts – both oral and written – with Åland in Swedish. Åland’s autonomous status is enshrined in the Constitution and in the Act on the Autonomy of Åland.

The importance of the monolingual, Swedish-speaking region of Åland to mainland Finland is not limited to historical agreements alone. Åland’s monolingual Swedish status is also an effective reminder that not all Finns speaking Swedish as their mother tongue are bilingual. The State must also be able to meet the needs of monolingual Swedish speakers both in Åland and elsewhere in Finland in the same way as the State meets the needs of monolingual Finnish speakers who do not know Swedish.

According to the Act on the Autonomy of Åland, the language of instruction in schools financed or supported by public funds is mostly Swedish. In these schools, Åland also provides the teaching of Finnish as a voluntary A2 language that starts in grade 4 or 5 of comprehensive school or as a B1 or B2 language that starts in the upper grades of comprehensive school. 74 per cent of all pupils in grades 4–6 study Finnish as an A2 language. Ålands lyceum, the general upper secondary school in Åland, offers as many Finnish courses as schools in mainland Finland. The curricula of upper secondary schools for seafaring and health care also include studies in Finnish. In addition, Finnish courses are offered within liberal adult education.

The Åland Islands are an excellent language resource for mainland Finland. The region consisting of 16 municipalities constitutes a community

operating genuinely in the Swedish language. When visiting Åland, everyone has the opportunity in all situations to use Swedish and to experience the Swedish-language aspect of Finland. Åland’s readiness to offer, for instance, civil servants and politicians opportunities to use Swedish and to exchange information has also been recorded in the Government Programme of the Åland Government for the years 2011–2015.

In practice, Åland is a multilingual society. In 2010, the Åland Islands had a total of 28,007 inhabitants, of whom 25,173 were Swedish speakers, 1,373 were Finnish speakers, and 1,461 reported some other mother tongue.<sup>21</sup>

The administrative authorities and municipalities of the region use the Swedish language. By virtue of the Act on the Autonomy of Åland, the language of correspondence between the regional authorities and the State authorities is Swedish. However, Finnish citizens are entitled in their own cause to use Finnish before a court of law and other State authorities in the Åland Islands.

## 2.5 Other languages and their speakers in Finland

Many other languages besides the national languages have been spoken by smaller groups in Finland for centuries. Of these languages, the Constitution mentions the language of the indigenous Sami people, which in Finland means three languages: Northern Sami, Skolt Sami and Inari Sami. In addition, the Constitution mentions the language of the Roma and sign language. The traditional sign languages in Finland are Finnish Sign Language and the Swedish Sign Language of Finland. Provisions on the right to use Sami are laid down, above all, in the Sami Language Act. Many Acts contain provisions on the right to use other languages and, for instance, to be assisted by an interpreter and to receive mother tongue instruction in other languages. At present, there are no separate Acts for the Roma language or sign language.<sup>22</sup>

Other languages with a long history in Finland include Tatar, Yiddish, Russian and the Karelian language. The number of people of a foreign background living in Finland has also increased during the past few decades, and this trend can be expected to continue. People who have a mother tongue other than Finnish or Swedish account for 4.5 per cent of the population. After the national languages, the most spoken languages are Russian,

Estonian, Somali, English and Arabic.<sup>23</sup> Aside from Finnish, Swedish and Sami, no other language has its own general legislation. However, many Acts contain provisions on the rights of people using other languages, such as the right to interpreting and the right to instruction in the mother tongue.

Finland is home to increasingly many people who were not born in Finland and whose mother tongue is neither of our national languages. The mother tongue of more than 20,000 pupils in basic education is not Finnish or Swedish. The development of their mother tongue is supported by supplementing their basic education with voluntary instruction in the mother tongue. The instruction is supported by means of a discretionary government grant. In 2011, instruction was given in a total of about 55 languages to approximately 13,200 pupils.

Pupils whose mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish or Sami and whose skills in Finnish or Swedish are not up to the mother tongue level in all sectors of language use, receive instruction *in Finnish or Swedish as a second language*. This instruction is given to pupils with an immigrant background, in the language that is the school's language of instruction. Upon application, the body providing the instruction can receive a discretionary government grant for this instruction.

Most pupils with an immigrant background go to Finnish-language schools; the practical consequence is that there is only little instruction in Swedish as a second language.

Each year, about 3,000 pupils are exempted from learning the second national language as the B language. The decision on exemption is made by the headmaster upon a written request, after having heard the child's guardians. Most exemptions apply to Swedish courses in Finnish-language schools; only a small percentage concerns Finnish courses in Swedish-language schools. Few or no exemptions are granted in bilingual municipalities. The numbers of exemptions vary, but in some municipalities the numbers are great.

Most pupils with an immigrant background go to a Finnish-language school and learn Finnish either in the subject "Mother tongue and literature" or in "Finnish as a second language". However, their opportunities to learn Swedish are weaker, for instance, because of the exemption practice. At present, it is not possible to start studies in the other national language in secondary education.

## 3 CHALLENGES IN ATTAINING VIABLE BILINGUALISM

The creation of viable bilingualism built on two national languages is a challenging task requiring long-term work, for instance, to ensure sufficient and high-standard instruction in the Finnish and Swedish languages. Viable bilingualism also requires work aimed at eliminating any misunderstandings concerning Finland's bilingualism, modifying the negative attitude atmosphere and increasing understanding of the costs associated with basic rights. Finland's bilingualism requires practical measures both in the long run and during this Government's term of office.

### 3.1 Finland's bilingualism and misconceptions about it

Finnish society has traditionally been open, fair and safe. These are among the strengths on which the Government wants to build a caring and successful Finland in the future as well. In recent years, however, our society has displayed hardening attitudes towards smaller groups in society, such as immigrants.

There have also been increasingly negative attitudes towards the Swedish language and Finland's bilingualism.<sup>24</sup> Negative attitudes and reactions increase antagonism and defensiveness in both language groups. For instance, Internet discussions, some of which are conducted anonymously, show that both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers use negative and aggressive expressions about the speakers of the other language.

There are many misconceptions about the national languages and about the contents and meaning of the relevant legislation. At their worst, these misconceptions can result in bitterness towards a certain language, the speakers of that language, or social arrangements. This is problematic in view of social cohesion and tolerance. It is therefore important to elucidate the social structures that support the objective defined in Section 17 of the Constitution, *i.e. real equality* between the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and to launch discussion on the misconceptions concerning languages and their speakers.

### 3.1.1 Finland's bilingualism and social structures

In some cases, real equality between the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, requires special arrangements in order to safeguard the linguistic rights of the smaller language group. Known as positive discrimination or affirmative action, this approach is also applied in other countries in order to safeguard the rights of smaller groups. In Finland, it has been concluded that the realisation of linguistic rights in some cases requires that special solutions be devised to attain real equality.

One example of a social structure supporting our national languages – the goal of which is not commonly known – is the obligation laid down by law for some universities to ensure that they educate a sufficient number of people proficient in Swedish to meet the country's needs.<sup>25</sup> The places reserved by these universities for Swedish-speaking students are open to anyone who has sufficient knowledge of Swedish. In other words, they have not been reserved only for students whose mother tongue is Swedish. A similar arrangement has also been implemented to safeguard the linguistic rights of the Sami people. The University of Lapland and the University of Oulu have designated a quota for Sami-speaking applicants in the various degree programmes.

The places reserved by universities for students proficient in Swedish have received much publicity. An indication of the whole field of university studies is, however, that studies can be conducted in the Finnish language at 14 universities, while the number of fully monolingual Swedish-language universities is two. Bilingual universities, where the languages of instruction and examination are Finnish and Swedish, number four. Bilingual universities offer ample linguistic opportunities irrespective of the mother tongue. For example, in 2012, students whose mother tongue is Finnish accounted for 14 per cent of all students at the Swedish School of Social Science, an autonomous unit of the University of Helsinki, where students earn a Swedish-language degree. In addition, the University of Helsinki has for years offered a few bilingual degrees. As of autumn 2013, the number of bilingual degrees will be expanded to seven. Bilingual degrees can be seen as an opportunity to reinforce individuals' language skills, thereby strengthening the national language reserve. However, to secure everyone's right to his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, it is important to ensure that bilingual degree options will

not supersede the opportunities to study in only one language.

Finnish speakers also have the option to study in Swedish at Finland's two Swedish-language universities. In 2012, over 16 per cent of the students at Åbo Akademi University had Finnish as their mother tongue; at Hanken School of Economics, the percentage was nearly 19.

Another example of structures supporting viable bilingualism is the way in which the operations and funding of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) have been arranged. This is based on Yle's duty, in its programme provision, to treat Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking citizens on equal grounds, to produce services in the Sami language and, whenever applicable, to produce services for other language groups in the country.<sup>26</sup> Yle's production of culture – in all languages – is naturally available to everyone living in Finland. For instance, the programmes produced by the Swedish-language channel Yle Fem are subtitled in Finnish, with the exception of news and children's programmes. The channel's domestic content is the largest after Yle TV1, and Yle Fem also imports more Nordic programmes to Finland than all freely available channels together. Correspondingly, Swedish speakers can watch a wide selection of programmes spoken or subtitled in Finnish. Thus, both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers have access to programmes in the other national language. In consequence, they have the opportunity to learn about culture-specific features associated with languages.

### 3.1.2 Understanding for the other national language and its speakers

Finnish speakers, Swedish speakers, as well as those who speak both national languages, have their home in Finland and have many things in common. Recognition of the shared background and common factors and, on the other hand, appreciation of differences as part of our country's varied culture is a constructive point of departure for a country of two viable national languages and for the appreciation of other cultures.

Neither Swedish speakers and the Swedish language nor Finnish speakers and the Finnish language are safe from misunderstandings and from the resulting attitudes. Attitudes can also be detected within language groups, since the groups represent a wide spectrum of different views and experiences of one's own group and the other group. Preconceptions are often negative, especially when people have no

personal contacts with individuals speaking the other language or their experiences. The most positive attitudes have arisen through personal experiences.

One misconception concerning the Swedish speakers is that they are a *vanishing group* in Finland. Seen as a whole, however, the number of Swedish speakers has remained steady and is today almost the same as in the 1880s. The birth rate of Swedish speakers is also somewhat higher and their life expectancy somewhat longer than those of Finnish speakers, and the children of bilingual families are registered Swedish speakers more often than Finnish speakers. On the basis of these data and provided that no unforeseen great migration takes place, it is likely that the size of the Swedish-speaking population in Finland will remain steady or will increase slightly.<sup>27</sup>

Another misconception concerning the Swedish speakers is that they are a homogeneous group. However, Swedish speakers, like Finnish speakers, live all over Finland and therefore do not constitute a geographically uniform group. There are also Swedish speakers in all professions and socio-economic groups; thus, they do not constitute a group differing from the majority population. Although some Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers live apart from each other, for instance in areas where there are only speakers or either of the two languages, a great many Finnish and Swedish speakers live in the same areas. This is the case, for instance, in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

In addition, it has been suggested in some contexts that Swedish speakers *differ and possibly want to keep apart from* Finnish speakers. Even though Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers live apart from each other in some areas and the groups have traditions linked to the language, the differences between Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers are rather small when seen from a wider perspective. A number of families have also switched from one language to the other within only a few generations. In consequence, many families, regardless of their language, have traditions and practices that have their roots in the other language or its culture.

A misconception among some Swedish speakers is that *Finnish speakers do not know Swedish and do not want to use it at all*. However, most Finnish speakers have a positive or at least a neutral attitude to the Swedish language and its speakers. One example of this is bilingual families, *i.e.* families where both Finnish and Swedish are used. The number of such families is increasing constantly.

The negative attitudes experienced by Swedish speakers towards their own language also stem from the fact that *Finnish speakers do not always use Swedish when the opportunity arises*. At such times the reason is not necessarily a negative attitude to the Swedish language or its speakers, but, for example, the individual's perception that his or her own Swedish skills are inadequate. A positive attitude to one's own – even elementary – language skills and seeking out opportunities to use Swedish could, at least in some cases, lower the threshold to use Swedish, thereby also abating the feeling among Swedish speakers that their language is not valued or accepted.

Misconceptions and uncertainty exist among both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers concerning *the content of language legislation*; in other words, when individuals are entitled by law to use their own language. For instance, the right to use Finnish or Swedish before the authorities of the State, bilingual municipalities and joint municipal authorities, as stipulated in the Language Act and other Acts, is often associated erroneously with issues such as bilingual service in shops. The latter case is, however, based on voluntary service and is not meant to guarantee the linguistic rights provided by law.

Erroneous conceptions or inadequate information on citizens' legal rights and the authorities' corresponding legal obligations lead to situations where citizens are urged in practice to give up their basic linguistic rights. This happens when civil servants who have the obligation to serve clients in their language, in practice ask them to switch to the civil servant's language. Individuals' own inadequate knowledge of their rights may also lead them to relinquish their basic linguistic rights. Potentially occurring negative attitudes towards the other language make situations of this type even more difficult.

Misconceptions can be dissipated and negative attitudes can be influenced by raising the level of knowledge and by increasing the visibility of both national languages in our country. What needs to be done is to make visible the current coexistence of our languages and to build new bridges for enabling the coexistence of languages and language groups, while also valuing differences.

## 3.2 Language teaching and learning

The Finnish and Swedish languages are included in the curriculum of Finnish schools. Thus, all pupils learn

Finnish or Swedish as the mother tongue and as the second national language in basic education and in general or vocational upper secondary education. University degrees also include studies and a test in the mother tongue and the second national language. This is justified because Finnish and Swedish are the languages that can generally be used in dealings with the authorities and in which public services are provided. The intention is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to become familiar with both Finnish-language and Swedish-language culture in Finland. Finnish is the language used by the majority of inhabitants and as such an essential element of Finnish society. For Swedish speakers, it is an advantage to be able to speak the majority language that is used nearly everywhere in Finland.

When Finnish-speaking Finns learn Swedish, the common language base joins them more closely to the Nordic community, which has many ties with Finland. Finns proficient in Swedish also have ample opportunities to work and engage in other activities in bilingual or fully Swedish areas, communicating with both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns.

As languages, Finnish and Swedish belong to different language groups. However, the use of Finnish, for example, in administration and courts of law has been modelled after the Swedish usage. For this reason, the two languages have a kind of semantic kinship associated with similar social structures and phenomena. This means that they resemble each other in many respects. From this it follows that, without realising it, Finnish speakers already know many Swedish words and expressions. They can therefore absorb or at least read Swedish and other Scandinavian languages more easily than what could normally be assumed in the case of languages belonging to different language groups. Thus, at least in some respects, the national languages support each other.

### 3.2.1 The learning and competence level of the mother tongue and the other national language

#### **Finnish and Swedish in the education system**

Viable bilingualism requires good learning of the national languages. However, many factors affect the learning outcomes. One of these is *the amount of language studies*. Today, the amounts of studies in the second national language are different. Most Finnish pupils, about 90 per cent, begin their studies of Swedish in the 7th grade. In contrast, about 90 per cent of Swedish-speaking pupils begin their studies of

Finnish in the lower grades, where Finnish is either the compulsory A1 language or a voluntary A2 language. This means in practice that Finnish speakers study Finnish as their mother tongue and Swedish speakers as the second national language from the lower grades onwards. A considerably smaller number of pupils study Swedish as their mother tongue, and the majority of Finnish-speaking pupils do not study Swedish as the second national language until the upper grades. On 28 June 2012, the Government issued a government decree on the national objectives of education referred to in the Basic Education Act and on the distribution of lesson hours in basic education.<sup>28</sup> An important change in the distribution of lesson hours is that the start of the B language studies is brought forward from the current 7th grade to the 6th grade. In practice, this change concerns the start of Swedish studies.

Learning outcomes also depend on *the availability of language studies*. In many municipalities, Finnish-language schools do not offer studies in Swedish as the A language. From this it follows that, even if they wanted to do so, pupils would not be able to start Swedish language studies as early as most Swedish-language schools initiate Finnish language studies. An additional factor affecting learning outcomes is *the number of lessons* reserved for education. The number of lessons in the second national language was cut by one third in the 1990s.

An effort has been made to step up language studies by increasing optionality. The General Upper Secondary Schools Act was amended in 2004 so that the mother tongue is the only compulsory test in the Matriculation Examination. In other words, everyone takes the Finnish or Swedish mother tongue test. After the amendment, the number of Finnish-speaking students taking the Swedish test in the Matriculation Examination has been falling year by year. Depending on the sources and calculation methods, only 60–70 per cent of Finnish-speaking students select the Swedish language. In Finnish-language general upper secondary schools, only eight per cent of students study Swedish as the A language, while the rest study it as the B language. The consequence is that the majority of students selecting Swedish in the Matriculation Examination take the B language test.<sup>29</sup> In Swedish-language general upper secondary schools, at most five per cent of students do not select the Finnish test in the Matriculation Examination.<sup>30</sup> The follow-up of the reform shows that increased optionality in the Matriculation Examination has not had a positive impact on the reserves of the national languages or other languages.



### **Level of competence in the national languages<sup>31</sup>**

Mainly *at the final stage of comprehensive school*, the Finnish National Board of Education implements national evaluations in many subjects by using statistically representative samples of pupils. Among the subjects evaluated is Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking pupils' level of competence *in the mother tongue and in the second national language (Swedish or Finnish)*. The second national language can be studied as the A1 language (608 hours) or as the A2 language (456 hours) starting in the lower grades, or as the B language (228 hours) starting in the upper grades. Bilingual pupils can also study the more demanding native-level Finnish as their A language.

When evaluating competence in the mother tongue, the skills tested are reading, writing, and the knowledge of the language (vocabulary, basic concepts). In addition, listening comprehension and speech are tested in the evaluation of competence in the second national language (Swedish or Finnish).

The Matriculation Examination tests competence in Finnish and Swedish as the mother tongue only by using a writing test, which was revised in 2007. For the test in the second national language (Swedish and Finnish), candidates can select a test at level A or level B. These demonstrate the candidate's skills in reading, listening, writing and in the knowledge of the language. In contrast, speech is not tested. Vocational education does not include a corresponding evaluation system.

The assessment of the competence level presented here is based mainly on the latest national evaluations. In addition, previous evaluation rounds have been utilised when describing trends. For various reasons, it is not possible to present a definite assessment of competence levels. Instead, it is easier and more reliable to determine trends. The concise description of the evaluations necessarily highlight the average competence. Some pupils have a higher, and some a lower level of competence.

*In comprehensive school*, the average reading skills of Finnish and Swedish as *the mother tongue* can be considered reasonably good, while the average skills in writing and in the knowledge of the language can be considered satisfactory. *In the Matriculation Examination*, writing skills in the mother tongue have been declining since the mid-1990s.

*For the second national language*, the level of competence in Swedish as the B language is poor, or at most adequate, *in comprehensive school*. About half of pupils do not even reach the fairly low target level in basic language skills that would

enable satisfactory coping in daily life. Especially writing and speaking caused difficulties: in writing, 14 per cent of pupils fell below the grading scale; in speech, 18 per cent. Girls had a significantly higher level of competence than boys. *In the Matriculation Examination*, competence in Swedish as the B language has fallen markedly. It has been necessary to lower the cut-off points for the test grades, both at both the top and the bottom of the scale. Today, only a little over 60 per cent of all candidates take the test in Swedish as the B language.

For Finnish as the A language *in comprehensive school*, Swedish-speaking pupils have on average a good level of competence in speech, a reasonably good level in writing, listening and reading and a satisfactory level in the knowledge of the language. The competence level of students who have studied native-level Finnish is on average good. *In the Matriculation Examination*, the average competence level of Finnish as the A language is reasonably good, even good in writing.

*In summary*, it can be concluded that despite the slight decline in mother tongue skills, the level of competence in comprehensive school has remained essentially the same in the 2000s. The average competence level of mother tongues in comprehensive school is reasonably good. In general upper secondary schools, evaluation data on the mother tongue are available only for writing. The level of writing has declined in the Matriculation Examination and is on average mostly satisfactory. The average level of competence in Swedish as the B language in comprehensive school is at most adequate. It does not provide a sufficient base for studies in secondary education after comprehensive school. This is reflected later, for instance, in language studies at universities. The average level of competence in Finnish as the A language is fairly good.

Differences in level of competence between schools can be fairly great. In contrast, regional differences do not exist to the same extent: for instance, schools with better and worse outcomes in the mother tongues and the second national languages are found in both the East and the West. The exception is Finnish as the A language, where the difference between the southern coastal region and Swedish-language Ostrobothnia is considerable.

The same trend has been detected in the evaluations of both comprehensive school and the Matriculation Examination: girls perform better than boys in the mother tongue. This difference is also seen in Swedish studied as the B language in

comprehensive school but not in the Matriculation Examination. Nor is there any major difference when Finnish is the A language.

The level of competence is associated with the amount of studies and depends on whether pupils get enough high-quality education and whether they make use of it actively and in the long term. One reason for the low level of competence in Swedish as the B language is that the total extent of Swedish-language studies in comprehensive school is only 228 hours. Swedish is rarely available as the A language. In the Matriculation Examination, the decline in the mother tongue writing test stems partly from the fact that many candidates have only completed the minimum number of courses. The low level of competence in Swedish as the B language and the level of mother tongue skills in general upper secondary education need to be raised; this also requires more time spent on studying these languages. The major regional difference in the learning outcomes of Finnish as the A language also poses a challenge for the development of education.

### **Other languages**

The need to know other languages is a topic that often arises in discussions about the teaching of the national languages. One question presented then is whether the teaching of two fairly small national languages takes time away from the teaching of other languages. However, it is impossible to foresee which language(s) an individual may need in the future. For this reason, the national objectives of education cannot be built, for instance, merely on the languages that may be needed later in working life.

The need to know other languages is an undeniable fact. Other languages are needed, for instance, in trade and tourism, studies abroad, research, and also in public administration and within the court system. The learning of one's own mother tongue and the national languages creates prerequisites for learning other languages; there are thus no conflicting objectives between the languages.<sup>32</sup> Languages should therefore not be set against each other. The goal of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is to create a society that does not deny anyone the right and the opportunity to learn both of Finland's national languages, thereby enabling everyone to become familiar with the various aspects of both Finnish-language and Swedish-language culture. This guarantees everyone the potential to be active in the whole country.

### **Language immersion**

Language immersion is a teaching method where the goal is to achieve functional bilingualism. Immersion teaching starts in early childhood education and, in the best of cases, continues until the end of basic education. This is called early complete immersion. However, the concept of immersion includes many different types of teaching. The original goal of the immersion method is to target it at children who speak the majority language as their mother tongue. By means of immersion, they will then learn the minority language. Most immersion arranged in Finland is immersion in the Swedish language for Finnish speakers.

Immersion has proved to be a successful teaching method. Finnish-speaking pupils who are in Swedish-language immersion have on average slightly better mother tongue skills than children in Finnish-language schools. As regards Swedish, they are at almost the same linguistic level with Swedish-speaking children. Immersion pupils have positive attitudes to other languages and cultures, get better results than the average, for instance, in mathematics and English, and are more oriented towards general upper secondary education than pupils on average.

Despite the positive outcomes, immersion teaching is still fairly limited in Finland.

According to data reported by municipalities, in 2010 Swedish-language immersion was offered by 23 municipalities in early childhood education, by 15 municipalities in grades 1–6 of basic education, and by 11 municipalities in grades 7–9 of basic education. Altogether 1,930 pupils were in language immersion in grades 1–6 and 674 in grades 7–9. Finnish-language immersion was offered by two municipalities in early childhood education, by one municipality in grades 1–6 of basic education, and one municipality in grades 7–9 of basic education.<sup>33</sup>

The decision to arrange immersion is made by the municipality. In many municipalities, the demand for immersion exceeds the supply. As many as 40 per cent of municipalities that provide immersion in early childhood education believed that the demand for immersion will rise. The same was true for immersion provided during basic education. Municipalities also believed that not all of the increase in demand will be met. Instead, municipalities that do not provide immersion at present did not expect that the demand for immersion will rise.<sup>34</sup>

Immersion is geographically limited to the coastal areas. No Finnish or Swedish language immersion is provided in Central, Eastern or Northern Finland.

Despite the learning outcomes and demand, the scope of immersion has not increased. No comprehensive school has adopted the most extensive type of immersion, early complete immersion, as a new teaching method in the lower grades since the early 1990s.

A shortage of qualified immersion teachers has impeded the expansion of immersion. No new students have been taken for immersion teacher education since 2009. This means that after the last qualified immersion teachers graduate in 2013, no new immersion teacher training has been commenced in Finland for four years and there is no longer any immersion teacher training where the Swedish-language immersion teacher's qualification could be earned during Master's degree studies.<sup>35</sup>

Immersion supports excellent learning and proficiency in the national languages and contributes to the development of the national language skill reserves.

### **Assessment of learning outcomes in language studies**

Currently, there is no comprehensive and systematic national monitoring of Finns' learning outcomes at the various learning stages in the subjects "Mother tongue and literature" and "Second national language". Learning outcomes are monitored mainly by conducting assessments at the final stage of basic education. Especially the monitoring of Swedish as the second national language takes place at irregular intervals. Nor is there currently any comparative information on upper secondary school graduates' skills in the mother tongue and in the second national language, which would enable comparisons in language learning after basic education and general upper secondary education. For this reason, it is difficult to give any overall picture of proficiency in the national languages, or to take corrective action for improving the situation in any way. Regular monitoring would make it possible to tackle any flaws in the system.

#### **3.2.2 Opportunities of speakers of other languages to learn Finland's national languages**

Finland is home to increasingly many people whose mother tongue is not Finnish or Swedish. Within the education system, they are given the opportunity to learn the national languages (see 2.5). At present, however, it is not possible to start studies in the second national language in general or vocational

upper secondary education. This must be seen as a shortcoming that closes the door to studying the second national language at a later stage.

Opportunities to learn the national languages are also important for those people of foreign extraction who do not learn them within the education system. On 7 June 2012, the Government issued a resolution on the Government Integration Programme for 2012–2015. The link between the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland and the Government Integration Programme is that the language is the key for integration into Finnish society and a prerequisite for Finnish citizenship. For this reason, the objective of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland to ensure everyone the opportunity to learn Finnish and Swedish is in harmony with the goals of the Integration Programme.

Currently, the provision of Finnish and Swedish language courses, included in integration training, is inadequate. The provision of courses in Swedish is also limited in bilingual municipalities. When monitoring the Integration Programme, it is essential to specify the grounds on which Finnish or Swedish becomes selected as the language of integration; in other words, whether the selection is made by the individual, by the receiving municipality or by the State. Furthermore, it is important to provide teaching included in the integration training in both Finnish and Swedish so that the personal needs of people being integrated can be taken into account.

### **3.3 Costs and savings arising from Finland's bilingualism**

It is not common to present a detailed itemisation of the costs incurred in basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution. It is natural that the maintenance of common values involves costs. No specific price should be attached to values because this might lead to a situation where basic rights are ranked according to how much their implementation is estimated to cost. Basic rights must not be set against each other; they are all equal and they must all be implemented.

The designation of Finnish speakers' and Swedish speakers' linguistic rights as basic rights costs in the same way as any other basic rights cost. It is natural, for example, that expenses arise from the right to basic education free of charge – irrespective of the language – in the same way as expenses arise from the right to a fair trial and social welfare. It can therefore be concluded at *general level* that Finland's bilingualism has economic impacts.



In practice it is impossible to present a detailed calculation of the costs resulting from Finland's bilingualism or from either of the national languages. One reason for this is that no comprehensive picture of the costs is available. On the other hand, there may also be some savings. For example, it has been noted that patients recuperate more quickly if the care personnel use their language.

In discussions about the costs of Finland's bilingualism, it is not always remembered that bilingualism also brings economic *benefits*, which are equally difficult to calculate. All learning, including the learning of the Finnish or Swedish language, costs but, at the individual level, knowledge of the two national languages gives, for instance, wider opportunities to select a place of study or a job in Finland or in other Nordic countries, as well as the opportunity to read literature in the original language and to converse with both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers. These benefits are also society's benefits, for instance, when individuals' language skills lead to better cooperation opportunities, job options and economic profits. Savings also ensue if interpreting is not needed in bilingual discussions where the parties understand each other.

When the Language Act, encompassing the whole field of administration, was passed, no new financial resources were reserved for the authorities. At its worst, this will also lead to cost cuts in both national languages and the selection of, for example, English as the only language of communication, which means that we would not be able to express ourselves in our native language. Especially the less used language, Swedish, will be subject to cost cuts, for instance, in the provision of services, further education, publications and websites. For example, among the authorities, the use of Swedish has diminished and State administration functions increasingly often only in Finnish. The result is that the realisation of the basic linguistic rights in practice often depends on a few persons having the necessary language skills. This situation is not in agreement with the objectives of two viable national languages and functional bilingualism.

A number of decisions have been made in Finland during the past few decades without assessing what long-term effects these decisions will have on the conditions for Finland's bilingualism. Examples of these decisions include a reduction in the number of lessons in language education and making the test of the second national language optional in the Matriculation Examination. Neither of these decisions

has had positive effects for enhancing the language reserves in the national languages or other languages. Reversing this trend requires conscious decisions and long-range, systematic work. It also requires that the benefits of Finland's bilingualism are seen and put to efficient use.

## 4 ACTIONS TO MEET THE CHALLENGES

The long-term Strategy for the National Languages of Finland calls for concrete measures, which – according to the Government Programme – will be initiated during the term of the current Government. These measures are presented in section 4.2.

Many of the commitments made in this strategy require continuous work. These include at least the formation of a more positive attitude climate towards both national languages and their speakers, for instance, by dispelling misconceptions. These also include measures to keep both national languages visible, increase the coexistence of both languages and to enhance the visibility of learning opportunities, especially, enabling early encounters with the languages and improving language skills. The strategy document is therefore a tool for future work.

However, the long-term strategy for two viable national languages is not limited to one government term. Development and change are continuous. New measures may thus take place at a time not yet determined. As society changes, it is often difficult to assess what considerations and decisions will have long-term effects on the viability of the national languages. It is clear, however, that the viability of languages is linked to their use and to the possibilities of using them. Creating the prerequisites for these is society's task. Section 4.1 presents measures for pursuing the vision of the strategy in the long run.

### 4.1 Proposals for long-term measures

Viable bilingualism is a goal that requires the maintenance and development of both national languages. Thus, reaching the objectives of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland requires a continuous process. Languages do not develop without use. The consequence is that they can no longer be used naturally. In the long term, society must therefore provide real opportunities for using both national languages. This means that both national languages must be present *in all planning for the future*.

*New solutions and structures* may be needed in the future for safeguarding both viable bilingualism and the basic linguistic rights in various situations. This is especially the case when structures are revised or when public tasks are transferred to new parties.

Then it must always be ensured that the impacts of the solutions and structures help safeguard the implementation of linguistic rights and viable bilingualism. For example, in small municipalities or in regions where only few people speak either of the national languages, solutions must be sought to ensure the realisation of the smaller group's rights in the best possible way. Such solutions could be, for instance, an official body or a service point specialising in providing service for the speakers of either language. In accordance with legislation and the underlying principles of this strategy, separate solutions must be used sparingly since they do not necessarily promote the coexistence of the languages and the opportunities for learning both languages. Especially when children are concerned, extra care must be exercised: for instance, pilot projects and other experiments must not endanger children's possibilities of learning their mother tongue and the other national language.

*Finnish culture*, whether produced in Finnish, Swedish or both languages, belongs to all. Fostering the common culture calls for measures so that everyone has the opportunity, at will, to follow the cultural offerings in this country. It is therefore important in the future, too, to ensure the cultural production of the present-day *Finnish Broadcasting Company*, or a corresponding public actor, in the Finnish and Swedish languages on equal grounds, regardless of any restructuring or financing reforms that may be implemented. Similarly, when maintaining *the library institution* and when allocating and monitoring funds, it must be ensured that the activities support acquisitions of literature and other material in both national languages.

*Good language skills* are the key to all language use and to viable bilingualism; for this reason, sufficient learning of languages must be ensured at all education levels. Teaching must be developed so that increasing attention will be paid to *communication skills*. Effort will also be made to expand the provision of *language immersion*. In order to improve *learning outcomes in the Swedish language*, it would be well founded to investigate whether the number of Swedish lessons could be increased at least so that the continuum of education is ensured until the last grade of comprehensive school.

The teaching of the national languages is rather limited in *vocational education*, especially in view of the fact that vocational schools often provide qualifications for practically oriented occupations. The adequacy of the teaching of the national languages in vocational education should therefore be investigated

in relation to the needs of occupations. On the basis of the findings, the teaching could be developed to meet practical needs better.

The maintenance and development of *scientific vocabulary* in the Finnish and Swedish languages is a precondition for the future use of these languages in various fields in the ever more international world. It would therefore be useful in the future to investigate the possibilities of using, for instance, the summaries of doctoral dissertations to disseminate scientific findings in Finnish and Swedish also when these have originally been published in other languages.

*Security and health* are central factors in human life. However, in these sectors, for instance in health care, there are many professionals who lack sufficient Finnish or Swedish skills to explain to their clients what concerns them. In order to secure future bilingualism, it must be ensured that persons working in such sectors, such as the police, customs officials and the border guard, as well as social welfare and health care personnel, possess *sufficient Finnish and Swedish skills*. In addition, more attention should be paid to ensuring that persons who study for these and other corresponding important and human-oriented professions are informed, already *during their basic studies*, of their linguistic obligations, which have the purpose of securing citizens' basic linguistic rights.

According to current legislation, *health care and medical care* in the patient's language and social welfare in the client's language depend on the linguistic status of municipalities or joint municipal authorities. This means in practice that, in situations of vital importance for people, the right to use one's own language, either Finnish or Swedish, and the right to be addressed in this language, as provided by the Constitution, depend on where the person is living or happens to be. It should therefore be determined how the linguistic rights in these vital situations can be safeguarded in the Finnish and Swedish language also in smaller municipalities and joint municipal authorities.

The language skills of public authorities constitute a cornerstone for bilingual administration and for the use of both national languages. In order to harmonise *the government's recruitment process*, the recruitment guidelines of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Justice will be coordinated better so that information on the competence requirements concerning language skills, and on the applicable provisions, will be included in the relevant norm of the Ministry of Finance when it is revised the next time.

The realisation of citizens' linguistic rights is monitored by the highest supervisors of legality, *i.e.* the Chancellor of Justice of the Government and the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The supervision of legality concerning the basic rights, as conducted by the highest supervisors of legality, has traditionally been *ex post review*. At least supervision by the Parliamentary Ombudsman has evolved in recent years so that it strives increasingly often to prevent any constitutional and human rights problems by underscoring the obligation to promote these rights already in advance, for instance in legislative drafting.<sup>36</sup> Apart from the highest supervisors of legality, it would, however, be necessary in the future to explore the possibilities of creating a public function for promoting the use of languages and linguistic rights. For example, this function could spread good practices in the promotion of language use and could advise people of their rights. This body could be, for instance, *a language ombudsman* or some other independent actor. The post of *a discrimination ombudsman*, who may be appointed in the future, could also include tasks for supervising the realisation of linguistic rights.

Monitoring of linguistic rights and viable bilingualism is important even though language use situations and their quality are hard to measure. The same applies to how individuals, for instance, perceive the level of their own or another person's language skills and to their attitudes towards languages and their users. Precise and objective information on these aspects is unlikely to be available. However, in order to measure trends, effort must be made to create *indicators* for the realisation of these objectives.

## 4.2 The Government's measures for the government term 2011–2015

### 4.2.1 Increasing the visibility of the national languages and systematic application of language legislation in administrative processes

- The visibility of both national languages is increased in the public sector by applying, among others, the practical tools included in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland. (All State authorities)
- The practical tools included in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland are put into use for the proper consideration of both

- national languages in administration exercised by all State authorities. (All State authorities)
- Information is disseminated of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland and of the practical tools included in its Appendix. (Ministry of Justice)
  - Based on the description of duties in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland, one or more contact persons for the national languages are appointed to support the management's work. (All ministries)
  - A network of contact persons for the national languages is created for the ministries and is instructed in its tasks. (Ministry of Justice)
  - For future planning, an assessment of linguistic impacts is conducted as part of administrative reforms and legislative drafting projects. The outcome of the impact assessment is given due attention when reforms are implemented. The guidelines issued by the Ministry of Justice for the assessment of linguistic impacts will be used as help. (All State authorities)
  - During spring 2013, before municipal mergers, a tool will be prepared for municipalities to help them take account of linguistic rights in municipal mergers. (Ministry of Finance, in cooperation with the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and possibly the Ministry of Justice)
  - The Swedish and, whenever necessary, Finnish language skills of civil servants are improved by stressing the importance of the actual knowledge of the national languages in recruitment and by facilitating the maintenance of language skills by targeting resources at language training, because proficiency in languages is an element of the professional competence included in work duties. (All State authorities)
  - Means are developed for ensuring the real language skills of civil servants in recruitment. (Ministry of Finance)

#### **4.2.2 Strengthening of Finnish and Swedish skills and appreciation of languages and culture**

- Better conditions are created for ensuring adequate and high-standard immersion teaching. To enable this goal
  - Within the appropriations reserved in the State Budget for the personnel training of teaching staff, enough immersion teachers are trained both within basic training and further training to meet this country's need for them. (Ministry of Education and Culture)

- As part of the preparations for the training, the need for immersion teachers is determined on the basis of the demand for immersion. Together with universities, the Ministry will create a specialisation path for immersion teachers within the training programmes for kindergarten teachers, class teachers and subject teachers. (Ministry of Education and Culture)
  - A curriculum for national immersion teaching is drawn up as part of the revision of curricula in basic education. The core curriculum takes into account the continuum and special features of immersion teaching. (National Board of Education)
  - Municipalities and parents are informed of immersion activities and possibilities. (National Board of Education)
- Investigations are carried out to determine which models, when incorporated into the school system, could improve the preconditions for learning both national languages. Investigations are carried out to determine means for increasing pupils' interest in learning both national languages at various education levels. The starting point is that both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking pupils continue to receive high-standard education in their own languages.
  - It is investigated whether courses in native-level Swedish could be offered, whenever applicable, in the same way as courses in native-level Finnish. (Ministry of Education and Culture)
  - When the core curriculum for general upper secondary education is revised, it is determined how the Swedish period, Finland's bilingualism, the special status of the Åland Islands and Nordic cooperation are treated in history lessons. (Ministry of Education and Culture, National Board of Education)
  - Reading and writing skills and interest in reading among Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking children and young people are promoted by means of the Lukuinto (Encouraging Reading) programme in 2012–2015. The programme creates an action model that develops diverse reading and writing skills among children and young people and sustains a positive reading culture. This model will gain an established role in the daily work of schools and public libraries. (Ministry of Education and Culture)
  - A national term bank is created for use by everyone in order to foster, develop and maintain Finnish and

Swedish vocabulary and to promote the use of the national languages. (Prime Minister's Office)

- The mutual understanding of Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers, and the knowledge of each other's literature and the common cultural heritage are strengthened by supporting translation of literature from one national language to another. (Ministry of Education and Culture)
- Information is provided of the opportunities to encounter and learn languages. (Ministry of Justice)
- Cooperation between Swedish-language and Finnish-language schools, and the exchange of teachers and students among education institutes and universities, are strengthened by utilising the programmes of the EU (Comenius) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (Nordplus Junior) and the opportunities offered by the National Board of Education and the Norden Association in Finland. (Ministry of Education and Culture)
- Language encounters among children, young people and adults are supported systematically, for instance, by strengthening and intensifying information efforts associated with the Nordplus programmes of the Nordic Council of Ministers in cooperation with other Nordic school and university actors. (Centre for international mobility CIMO)
- The opportunity offered for students of a foreign background to start a syllabus in the other national language in upper secondary education will be investigated when the national objectives, distribution of lesson hours and core curriculum of general upper secondary education are revised. (Ministry of Education and Culture)
- Foreigners settling in Finland are systematically given information on Finland's bilingualism, its importance on the labour market, and the availability of courses in the Finnish and Swedish languages. (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Ministry of Education and Culture)
- Student counselling is developed so that foreigners settling in Finland and planning further studies get a correct picture of the requirements set for Finnish and Swedish skills at various education levels and in various professions. (National Board of Education and providers of education)
- In the provision of services in keeping with the Act on the Promotion of Integration (1386/2010), foreigners settling in Finland are systematically given information on Finland's bilingualism, its importance on the labour market, and the availability of courses in the Finnish and Swedish languages. (Ministry of Employment and the Economy)

- In accordance with the central government spending limits 2013–2016, integration training of immigrants, including studies in Finnish or Swedish, will be increased. (Ministry of Employment and the Economy)

#### 4.2.3 The Government's recommendations

The Government recommends that bilingual municipalities and joint municipal authorities adopt the practical tools included in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland for the proper consideration of both national languages in their activities.

The Government recommends that bilingual municipalities and joint municipal authorities appoint one or more contact persons for the national languages to support the management's work. Whenever applicable, this should be based on the description of duties included in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.

The Government recommends that, especially in bilingual locations, education be arranged across universities and together by Finnish-language and Swedish-language universities for Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking students so that the voluntary use of Swedish during university studies is increased.

The Government recommends that, with the help of separate financing from the Ministry of Education and Culture, universities develop methods that ensure the attainment of the Finnish and Swedish skills required in the government decree issued on university degrees (794/2004).

The Government recommends that universities offer instruction in the Finnish and Swedish languages to students with an immigrant or foreign background to facilitate their employment on the Finnish labour market.

The Government recommends that, especially in bilingual localities, the bodies procuring integration training for adult immigrants consider the needs for instruction in the Finnish and Swedish languages when procuring the training to enable working life-oriented learning of Finnish and Swedish.

## 5 MONITORING

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland does not propose the establishment of new authorities for monitoring how well the strategy or linguistic rights are realised. Responsibility for supervising the legality of the authorities' activities rests with each authority (Language Act, Section 36, Subsection 1) and the highest supervisors of legality (Constitution, Sections 108–109).

### 5.1 Monitoring of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland

A key element for the strategy's success is its continuous monitoring to make sure that the Government's will is realised. The monitoring focuses on the implementation of the measures listed in section 4.2 and the use of the tools included in the Appendix to the strategy.

#### 5.1.1 Ministry of Justice

The general responsibility for monitoring rests with the Ministry of Justice, which is already responsible for monitoring the enforcement of the language legislation (Language Act, Section 36, Subsection 2). The monitoring of the strategy is a natural element of the same responsibility.

The monitoring includes at least the following:

- The coordination and guidance of the ministries' network of contact persons for the national languages, included in the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland, as well as the monitoring of the network's activities.
- Ensuring that the measures included in this Strategy for the National Languages of Finland are launched in accordance with the Government Programme during the current Government's term (2011–2015).
- Regular monitoring of the use of the practical tools included in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.
- Monitoring of the assessment of linguistic impacts, carried out during legislative drafting, as an element of the monitoring of better regulation.

#### 5.1.2 Ministry of Employment and the Economy

The task of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy is to monitor the implementation of this strategy insofar as the services provided in accordance with the Act on the Promotion of Integration

(1386/2010) systematically give information on Finland's bilingualism, its importance on the labour market, and the availability of Finnish and Swedish language courses.

#### 5.1.3 Ministry of Finance

The Ministry of Finance monitors that linguistic rights are realised in the reform in local government structures.

#### 5.1.4 Administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Board of Education, as of 1 January 2014 the Finnish Centre for Evaluation of Education, monitor the competence level of the national languages so that information on learning outcomes in the subjects "Mother tongue and literature" and "Second national language" is obtained regularly for the development of education.

In the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture, an evaluation is conducted of the teaching practice in the Swedish language, included in Swedish subject teacher training and class teacher training.

In conjunction with performance negotiations, the Ministry of Education and Culture will monitor how universities comply with the recommendations included in the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.

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- 2 Constitution, Section 17, Subsection 2
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- 4 Suomen kielen tulevaisuus
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- 6 Backman & Englund 2012
- 7 Confederation of Finnish Industries, Final report 2006
- 8 Statistics and Research Åland 2012, 15, 18, 19
- 9 Survey for the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland
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- 11 Statistics Finland 2011a
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- 24 STTK questionnaire survey on municipalities 2012
- 25 Universities Act (558/2009), Section 12
- 26 Act on the Finnish Broadcasting Company (1380/1993), Section 7
- 27 Finnäs 2009
- 28 Government decree on the national objectives of education referred to in the Basic Education Act and on the distribution of lesson hours in basic education (422/2012)
- 29 Finnish National Board of Education; Publications 2011, 29
- 30 Finnish National Board of Education; Publications 2011, 29
- 31 This section is based on the report "Miten suomea ja ruotsia osataan äidinkielenä ja toisena kansalliskielenä peruskoulun ja lukion päättövaiheessa?" by Professor Emeritus Sauli Takala
- 32 Suomen kielen tulevaisuus; Täнк om...
- 33 Kangasvieri et al. 2011
- 34 Kangasvieri et al. 2011
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Constitution of Finland (731/1999)

Government decree on the national objectives of education referred to in the Basic Education Act and on the distribution of lesson hours in basic education (422/2012)

Language Act (423/2003)

Universities Act (558/2009)

## APPENDIX

### STRATEGY FOR THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES OF FINLAND: PRACTICAL TOOLS

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland includes tools\* designed to help the authorities and civil servants with the application of the language legislation so that the constitutional rights of both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers are realised. The tools illustrate the Language Act in practice in various administrative duties.

#### **Tools**

1. How do you show that you use the national languages and how do you promote their use?  
A checklist for civil servants and the authorities, for compliance with the Language Act
2. Consideration of the language legislation in working groups and projects
3. Communication by the authorities. How to consider the Language Act in communication?
4. Consideration of the Language Act in publication processes and online publications
5. Consideration of the Language Act in the procurement procedure
6. Consideration of language skills in recruitment
7. A model for the job description of the contact person for the national languages, designated by ministries

\* The given links under each tool provide access to material mainly in Finnish and Swedish only.

# 1 HOW DO YOU SHOW THAT YOU USE THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND HOW DO YOU PROMOTE THEIR USE?

## A checklist for civil servants and the authorities, for compliance with the Language Act

### 1.1 Requirements of the Act and the nature of the tool

According to the Language Act

“An authority shall ensure in its activity and on its own initiative that the linguistic rights of private individuals are secured in practice. A bilingual authority shall serve the public in Finnish and Swedish. An authority shall *demonstrate to the public* both in its services and in its other activity that it uses both languages.” (Language Act, Section 23, Subsections 1 and 2)

“In their activity, authorities shall protect the linguistic cultural tradition of the nation and promote *the use of both national languages.*” (Language Act, Section 35, Subsection 3)

The visibility of both national languages, Finnish and Swedish, is an issue of legal protection: private individuals must know that they can exercise their linguistic rights. The visibility of both languages also has symbolic value since it means that both languages are accepted as part of the public sphere and society. Promotion of the use of the national languages has a positive impact on the maintenance and development of two viable national languages.

This tool is designed to help the authorities and civil servants with the application of the Language Act. The tool describes good practices for applying the provisions of the Language Act and the principles of good governance. The tool is based on the provisions of the Language Act and the preparatory works to the Act, on the practice followed by the highest supervisors of legality in their decisions, and on the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Justice when monitoring the Language Act. These sources are mentioned specifically, while the other items are by nature new recommendations that give the legislation concrete form.

The provision of information by the authorities is governed by Section 32 of the Language Act (see the tool “Communication by the authorities”).

The Language Act is also applied to purchased services (see the tool “Consideration of the language legislation in the procurement procedure”).

### 1.2 Practical tips for how you show that you use the national languages and promote their use

#### Publications and other printed material

- Prepare publications and other printed material simultaneously in Finnish and Swedish or in two languages (e.g. Finnish and Swedish texts side by side or on the different sides of the same publication).
- Use ready-made bilingual models regardless of which language you use for writing (e.g. templates for letters and forms).
- Bilingual publications and other printed material (e.g. forms) are cost-effective and help to show that you use both Finnish and Swedish and promote their use.
- Display monolingual publications and other printed material so that they can be selected with equal ease in both Finnish and Swedish (Government Proposal 92/2002, p. 87).
- Develop new terminology simultaneously in Finnish and Swedish. In this way, you create opportunities for the use of both languages.
- Use both Finnish and Swedish on the Internet and in the social media, especially if this medium serves as the official body’s principal information channel (Government Proposal 92/2002, p. 93, “the information required by Section 32 is given in both Finnish and Swedish regardless of the form or manner in which it is given”).
- When committee reports include legal proposals and are circulated for comments, at least the legal proposals and the summary must be published in both national languages (Language Act, Section 31, Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice OM 3/58/2011).
- Acts, decrees, legal rules issued by the authorities and generally applicable collective agreements for civil servants are issued in Finnish and Swedish (Constitution, Section 79, Subsection 4; Language Act, Section 30; Act on Confirmation of the General Applicability of Collective Agreements, Section 1, Subsection 2).
- Use the name of a bilingual authority in Finnish and Swedish in all contexts
- It is preferable to use the same font size for both languages (Government Proposal 92/2002, p. 87).

- Give both the Finnish and Swedish name for a bilingual authority. Do not merge different languages or their letter combinations in the same name (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decisions no. 2745/4/10, 3581/4/10, 3706/4/10).
- Use the national languages in the names of authorities. An English name alone is not enough (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decision no. 4032/4/08).

### **E-mail correspondence**

- Use at least Finnish and Swedish in the automatic messages of absence sent by e-mail systems (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decisions no. 2575/4/06, 63/4/07, 2809/2/08).
- Use at least Finnish and Swedish in your e-mail contact details (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decision no. 3010/4/11).

### **Use and development of information systems, including online communications**

- Make sure that one and the same language can be used at every stage of the information system operation. This is important especially when different programs are combined and updated (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decisions no. 212/4/08, 2523/4/08).
- Think about online communications from monolingual persons' perspective: Can they get all the necessary information in their own national language, and can they proceed on the site without changing language?
- Remember both Finnish and Swedish languages when information systems are acquired (see the tool "Consideration of the Language Act in the procurement procedure").
- Remember both Finnish and Swedish languages in all automatically produced texts.
- For the authority, create an Internet address that consists of whole Finnish and Swedish words based on the authority's name. This will contribute to the equal realisation of linguistic rights, as referred to in Section 35 of the Language Act (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decision no. 3802/4/07).
- Prepare online forms in both languages.

### **Contacts with private individuals**

- Include both languages in the planning of service processes.
- Have bilingual models ready for use (e.g. letter templates and other materials).
- Find out in advance to whom you refer a client if the civil servant familiar with the substance lacks adequate Finnish and Swedish language skills to

answer questions or to help the client in his or her case.

- Make sure that everyone knows where to get service in Finnish or Swedish if the service is not provided in both languages at the same place (e.g. service points and service numbers in different languages, clear signs and other symbols) (Government Proposal 92/2002, p. 87).
- Use signs, flags or other symbols that clearly indicate what languages you use. Help clients to choose the language they prefer.
- In uncertain situations, ask which national language the client wants to use (Language Act, Section 23, Subsection 1: "An authority shall ensure in its activity and on its own initiative that the linguistic rights of private individuals are secured in practice", Government Proposal 92/2002, p. 86).
- Create lists of terms and phrases in your own field, such as greetings, for future use. This facilitates, for example, telephone service and other work in the less used language.
- Also instruct external staff to use both Finnish and Swedish (e.g. in greetings).
- Use Finnish and Swedish in automatic answerphone messages (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decisions no. 1891/4/10, 633/4/07).
- Contact private individuals in their language, the one they have used before, or in both Finnish and Swedish. This applies to bilingual authorities (Language Act, Section 19, Subsection 3; Section 23, Subsection 3).

### **Public appearances and meetings**

- Use both Finnish and Swedish in public appearances, such as speeches and greetings. This is communicatively effective, makes all feel welcome and increases the languages' coexistence in public.
- Ensure that the members of a multi-member body know their right to use Finnish and Swedish at meetings (Language Act, Section 28: "A member of the Government and of a State committee, commission, working group and corresponding body as well as a member of an organ of a bilingual municipality has the right to use Finnish or Swedish in a meeting and in a written statement or opinion to be appended to the records or report").
- Send the meeting materials, whenever possible, in Finnish and Swedish, or partly in both languages.
- Use one language in oral presentations and another language in the slide show supporting the presentation. This also develops the participants' professional terminology in both languages.

### **Using Finnish and Swedish and improving language skills in the authorities' internal activities**

- Use and encourage the use of both Finnish and Swedish at meetings (as enabled by the Language Act, Section 26: "A State authority uses the language of the majority of its official district as its working language, unless the use of the other language, of both languages or for a special reason of a foreign language is more appropriate").
- Send the meeting materials, whenever possible, in Finnish and Swedish, or partly in both languages.
- Use one language in oral presentations and another language in the slide show supporting the presentation. This develops the participants' professional terminology in both languages.
- Use Finnish and Swedish at the same time in informal discussions. This contributes to the maintenance of the personnel's language skills and the natural use of both languages.
- Keep both Finnish-language and Swedish-language newspapers and other reading material visible.

### **Examples of bilingual products**

- Templates for letters and forms
- Electronic models for presentations
- An authority's logo (Parliamentary Ombudsman, decision no. 3010/4/11)
- Business cards, cover letters
- Brochures, publications and annual reports
- Notices and signs (e.g. "Pull", "I'll be back soon")
- Etc.

### **Examples of how to protect the linguistic cultural tradition and to promote the use of both national languages**

- Use both Finnish and Swedish in public appearances, such as speeches and greetings.
- Use Finnish and Swedish in international contexts (e.g. Suomi/Finland).
- Ensure that literature, culture and science are available in Finnish and Swedish.
- Use Finnish and Swedish when giving information about cultural sights.
- Use Finnish and Swedish in historical names.
- Etc.

## 2 CONSIDERATION OF THE LANGUAGE LEGISLATION IN WORKING GROUPS AND PROJECTS

### How to consider aspects pertaining to the national languages in working groups and projects?

#### Introduction

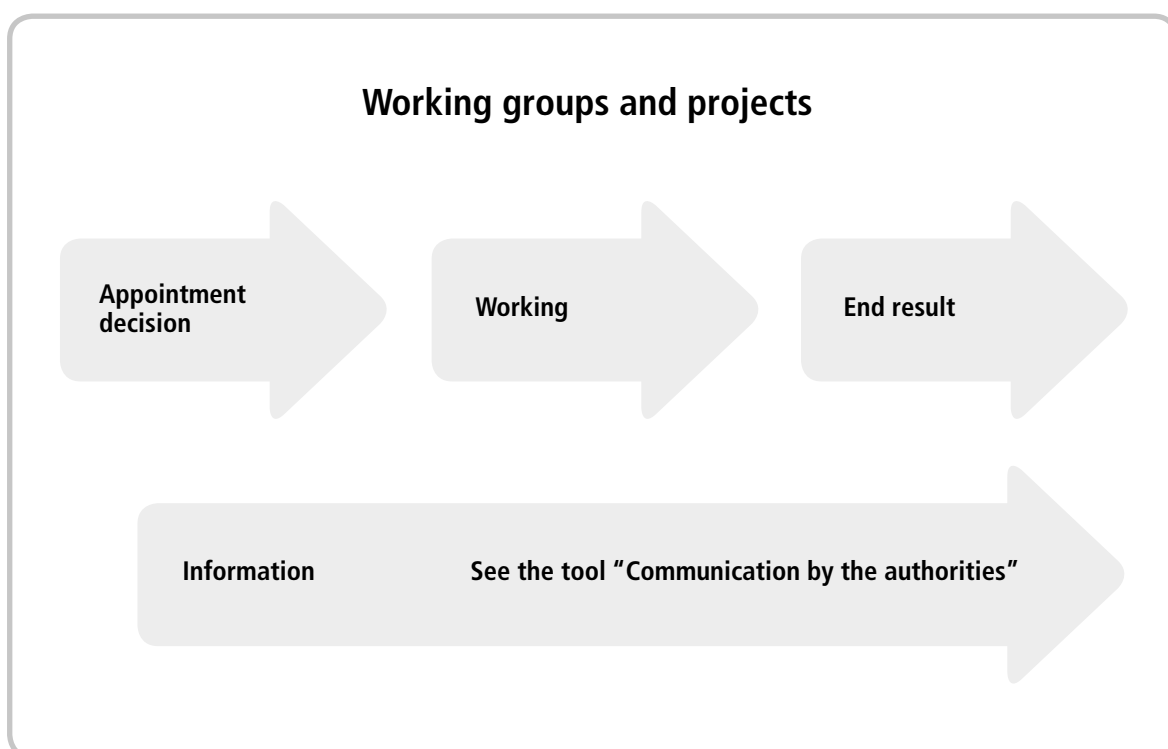
This tool is designed to help the authorities and civil servants with the application of the Language Act (423/2003) in working groups and projects so that the results of their efforts realise the constitutional rights of both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers. The best outcome that secures the realisation of linguistic rights is achieved if the language legislation is remembered especially at the outset of the work and thereafter during every phase of the project.

The provision of information by the authorities is governed by Section 32 of the Language Act (see the tool "Communication by the authorities").

The Language Act is also applied to purchased services (see the tool "Consideration of the language legislation in the procurement procedure").

#### Checklist: To be recorded in the appointment decision

- Definition of tasks
  - Indication that the task includes the assessment of the project's linguistic impacts
  - Indication that the assessment of linguistic impacts is taken into account in the end result
- Consultation during the work
  - Indication that cooperation bodies of key importance to the working group or project (for example, experts in the production of Swedish-language services) are consulted
- Work plan
  - Indication of the phase of the work where linguistic impacts are assessed
  - Indication that the work schedule includes enough time for translations
  - If the project concerns legislative drafting, see the Better Regulation website of the Ministry of Justice, <http://www.om.fi/en/Etusivu/Parempisaantely>
  - For disseminating information about the project, see the tool "Communication by the authorities"



### Checklist: Working

- Assessment of linguistic impacts to ensure a result in agreement with legislation
  - see the Ministry of Justice checklist for assessing linguistic impacts, which is also suitable for projects other than law drafting, <http://www.om.fi/Etusivu/Perussaannoksia/Kielilaki/Kielisaannoksetsaadosvalmistelussa/Kieellistenvaikutustenarviointi>
- Consultation of experts, whenever necessary, in order to ensure an effective outcome in Finnish and Swedish
  - See information about the consultation process <http://www/http://www.om.fi/en/Etusivu/Parempisaantely/Consultation>
- The actions to be taken are specified
  - Example: language training to ensure adequate language skills
- Indicators are defined for monitoring actions and effects
- If the working group's work leads to procurement, see the tool "Consideration of the Language Act in the procurement procedure"

### Checklist: End result

The content of the final product must allow the realisation of linguistic rights

- A working group report or the final report of a project
  - At least a summary and any legislative proposals must always be in Finnish and Swedish (Language Act, Sections 31-32)
  - Provision of information: see the tool "Communication by the authorities"
  - Determining the responsibility for monitoring so that the realisation of linguistic rights is monitored
  - How and within which period is monitoring carried out?
  - Who is responsible for monitoring?
  - What kind of indicators are used to monitor the linguistic impacts of the outcome?

## 3 COMMUNICATION BY THE AUTHORITIES

### How to consider the Language Act in communication?

#### Introduction

This tool is designed to help the authorities and civil servants with the application of the Language Act (423/2003) in their communication so that the basic linguistic rights of both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers are realised in their access to information.

See also the tool "Consideration of the Language Act in publication processes and online publications".

#### Legal provisions

- The information given by State or municipal authorities to the public in a bilingual municipality must be in Finnish and Swedish (see Language Act, Section 32, Subsection 1).
- Information relevant with regard to the life, health and safety of individuals and with regard to property and the environment is issued in both national languages throughout the country (see Language Act, Section 32, Subsection 1).
- Note the Act on emergency bulletins (466/2012, enters into force on 1 June 2013). An emergency bulletin must be given in Finnish and Swedish. Guidelines for emergency bulletins will be published on the website of the Ministry of the Interior in spring 2013.
- The publication of reports, decisions or other corresponding texts drawn up by the authorities does not require that these be translated as such. Nonetheless, the authorities must provide for the information needs of both the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking population (see Language Act, Section 32, Subsection 3).

#### Specific provisions concerning legislative proposals and reports

- When committee reports include legal proposals and are circulated for comments, at least the legal proposals and the summary must be published in both national languages (see Language Act, Section 31, Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice OM 3/58/2011).
- If the Ministry in question deems the report to be of considerable significance to the Swedish-speaking population in the country, the report is published in

full in Swedish (see Language Act, Section 31, Subsection 2).

- A legislative proposal or report that deals only with the Åland Islands or that is of particularly great significance to that region must be published in its entirety in Swedish (see Language Act, Section 31, Subsection 2).
- If a legislative proposal or report is of significance primarily to the Swedish-speaking population or to the Åland Islands, it may be published in Swedish so that the publication includes a Finnish summary and a Finnish text of the legislative proposal. (see Language Act, Section 31, Subsection 3; Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice OM 3/58/2011; The status of Åland in legislative drafting and in EU affairs, Reports and guidelines of the Ministry of Justice 8/2012).

### Checklist

- Do you provide communication in Finnish and Swedish throughout the project?
  - For example, press releases and websites and keeping them up-to-date.
- Do you time the publication of press releases, websites and other material so that they are available simultaneously in both languages?
- Have you considered issuing a short press release, which means that there is also less to translate?
- Did you notice that the Language Act applies to all media, including the Internet?
- When a press release is published on the Internet, it is aimed at the general public and must be in Finnish and Swedish.
- Do you enable interviews in both national languages, for example, when the final report is published?
- Do you take care to use both Finnish and Swedish in the social media, especially if this medium serves as the official body's principal information channel?
- If the Finnish and Swedish reports of an issue differ in scope (Language Act, Section 32, Subsection 3)
  - What information is essential for the recipient and must be in Finnish and Swedish?
  - Does the issue have a name or a heading in both languages; in other words, does the reader learn what the issue is about?
  - Is it clear in both languages what the current phase of the matter is (for example, a report, an interim report, a decision)?

- Who gives additional information in the other language if the principal presenter does not speak that language?
- If all background material is not published in its entirety in Finnish and Swedish, is there an informative summary in the less used language?
- Can links be created to other texts published on the same topic or on the same theme?



## 4 CONSIDERATION OF THE LANGUAGE ACT IN PUBLICATION PROCESSES AND ONLINE PUBLICATIONS

This tool is designed to help the authorities and civil servants with the application of the Language Act (423/2003) in publication processes and online publications. The best outcome that secures the realisation of linguistic rights is achieved if the language legislation is remembered especially at the outset of the work and thereafter in every phase of the project.

### What is required by the Language Act

- The information given by State or municipal authorities to the public in a bilingual municipality must be in Finnish and Swedish (Language Act, Section 32, Subsection 1).
- The publication of reports, decisions or other corresponding texts drawn up by the authorities does not require that these be translated as such. Nonetheless, the authorities must provide for the information needs of both the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking population (Language Act, Section 32, Subsection 3).
- When committee reports include legal proposals and are circulated for comments, at least the legal proposals and the summary must be published in both national languages (Language Act, Section 31, Subsection 1).
- If the report is of considerable significance to the country's Swedish-speaking population, it must be published in its entirety in Swedish. Similarly, a report that deals only with the Åland Islands or that is of particularly great significance to that region must be published in its entirety in Swedish (Language Act, Section 31, Subsection 2).

### Checklist for the general planning of publications, including online publications

- Does everyone involved in writing or commissioning the publication know what the Language Act requires?
- Have decisions been made about in-house policies and prioritisation concerning the national languages in publications?
- Have both languages been taken into account in the authority's graphic image?

- Are there ready-made models serving as examples of how languages should be used?

### Checklist especially for online publications

- Is the language selection easy to find?
- Can the language be switched on any page while still remaining on the same page?
- If the text has a link to a page in a different language, is this mentioned by the link?
- Do external links work in both languages?
- Does the search function work in both languages?

### Checklist for the graphic image of publications

- Use the name of a bilingual authority in Finnish and Swedish in all contexts.
- It is preferable to use the same font size for both languages.
- Use both national languages in the name of a bilingual authority. An English name alone is not enough.

## Process description and a checklist for publications

### Planning of the publication

- Prepare publications and other printed material simultaneously in Finnish and Swedish or make them bilingual (e.g. Finnish and Swedish texts side by side or on the different sides of the same publication).
- Reserve enough time for translation already at this stage.
- See the tool "How do you show that you use the national languages and how do you promote their use?" for additional practical tips.
- Does the publication include legislative proposals? See Language Act, Section 31.



### Potential procurement

- If any subcontractors are used, do they know that the final product must meet the provisions of the Language Act?
- See the tool "Consideration of the Language Act in the procurement procedure".



### Translation

- Who translates?
- Is the translation done by the authority or is it purchased from an external supplier?
- What is translated?
- Has enough time been reserved for the translation process, including the proofing?
- Plan the schedule so that the Finnish and Swedish versions can be published at the same time.



### Distribution

- If the publication has different language versions, make sure that recipients get the publication in their own language.
- Bilingual authority: remember a bilingual cover letter.

## 5 CONSIDERATION OF THE LANGUAGE ACT IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCEDURE

### How to ensure the realisation of linguistic rights in procurement?

#### Introduction

In general, the Act on Public Contracts (348/2007) applies to government procurement procedures. However, the outcome of the procurement, such as a service or a product, must be such that it ensures the basic linguistic rights of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking citizens, as provided in the Language Act (423/2003).

State authorities, as well as bilingual municipalities and joint municipal authorities, must provide services in Finnish and Swedish. If a task vested in a public authority is assigned to a private body, the authority must ensure that the level of linguistic services provided in the performance of the task remains unchanged (Language Act, Section 25).

The purpose of this tool is to illustrate the relationship between the Act on Public Contracts and the Language Act and to help the authorities and civil servants to pay due attention to the Language Act in the procurement procedure.

#### Checklist: Assessment of linguistic impacts in the procurement procedure

Assessment of linguistic impacts in the procurement procedure means assessing in which language(s) the acquired product or service must be functional. The assessment must be carried out when the object of the contract is defined. Then the language properties of the product or service acquired can be taken into account when the invitation to tender is drafted and when tenders are submitted; this will also be seen in the outcome of the procurement. This means at least the following:

- Lawfulness
  - Responsibility for the outcome of the procurement rests with the authority. Bilingual authorities, as well as bilingual municipalities and joint municipal authorities, must ensure that the outcome of purchased services safeguards the linguistic rights of both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking citizens (see Language Act, Section 25).

- Economic impact
  - If the fact that the object of the contract must be functional in different languages is not taken into account until the stage when the contracting authorities are bound by the invitation to tender and the tenders, the costs can rise significantly (compare, for example, the acquisition of a standard product and the construction of a tailored feature in an information system project).
- Impact on schedule
  - The assessment of linguistic impacts performed after the definition phase may delay the entire procurement process and may also affect other processes
  - For example: organisational development, other acquisitions.

#### Checklist: Language of the procurement procedure

In the procurement procedure, the language of the invitation to tender and tenders is determined according to the Act on Public Contracts (348/2007).

Check at least the following:

- Is the procurement procedure to be managed in one or two languages?
  - The language of the procurement procedure only applies to the procedure, not the outcome of the procurement. The language of the invitation to tender and tenders must not have an adverse effect on the language(s) of the product or service acquired and thereby on the realisation of citizens' linguistic rights.
  - The language selected for the procurement procedure must not exclude potential tenderers from the further phases of the process.
    - For example: in bilingual municipalities, monolingual service providers must also have the opportunity to submit a tender in their own language.
  - In some cases, such as EU contracts, the procurement procedure may be carried out in one of the Union's official languages (see Act on Public Contracts, Section 41).

### Checklist: The product or service acquired

Must the product's output be generated in more than one language?

- For example: can the information system print out documents in the recipient's language, Finnish or Swedish (customer perspective, legality)

In which language(s) must the product or service be functional?

- For example: can the information system be used in Swedish in a Swedish-language or bilingual municipality (civil servant perspective)

Is bilingualism a standard or an additional feature in the product?

- For example: an additional feature usually costs more than a standard feature in an information system; this must be taken into account in the definition of the contract and in the budget (cost perspective).

## Procurement procedure

### Definitions

- planning
- survey of markets
- definition of the contents and properties of the contract, including languages
- **CONSIDERATION OF THE LANGUAGE ACT: THE LINGUISTIC IMPACTS OF THE ACQUIRED PRODUCT OR SERVICE MUST BE ASSESSED AT THIS STAGE**



### Invitation to tender

- contract notice
- invitation to tender
- additional references



### Tender

- reception and opening
- eligibility of tenders and tenderers
- comparison of tenders



### Procurement

- award decision
- rejection decision
- information



### Contract

- initialling
- monitoring

## 6 CONSIDERATION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS IN RECRUITMENT

### Introduction

This tool is designed to help the authorities and civil servants with the application of the Act on the Knowledge of Languages Required of Personnel in Public Bodies (424/2003) in their recruitment so that the personnel's knowledge of the languages needed in the job is ensured.

### Legal provisions

- In an announcement concerning an official position or other service position that is subject to application or is vacant, the State authorities must include a reference to any qualification criteria set for the knowledge of languages, as well as a reference to language skills required for the work assignments or considered an advantage in recruitment (Section 4).
- When a person is being recruited for an official position or otherwise for service, it must be verified that his or her knowledge of languages meets the language requirements for the work assignments (Section 3).

Establishing qualification criteria for the knowledge of languages (Section 5)

- Qualification criteria for the knowledge of languages may be set for the personnel of the State authorities only by virtue of an Act or by virtue of a decree issued by the Government or the relevant Ministry under said Act.
- Qualification criteria concerning Finnish and Swedish skills must always be laid down if the personnel's assignments include exercise of public power that is significant in view of the rights and obligations of individuals.
- Knowledge of languages may be required of municipal personnel in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act (365/1995) unless otherwise provided in an Act or by virtue of an Act.
- Independent institutions under public law may set requirements for their personnel's language skills, if these are not laid down in an Act or by virtue of an Act.

### Checklist

Drawing up a job description

- What languages are needed in the job and at what level should the language skills be?
  - For example, are writing skills needed or are comprehension and oral skills enough?
  - The levels are satisfactory, good and excellent (previously: perfect).
  - The need for language proficiency may apply to Finnish, Swedish, and possibly other languages.

Announcement for an official post

- Have any qualification criteria for language skills been laid down for the post?
- What language skills, and at what level, do the work assignments require in practice or what language skills are considered an advantage for the applicant even if they have not been set as formal qualification criteria?
  - The announcement for an official post must be clear so that the reader understands the difference between the qualification criteria and the skills considered an advantage.

Job interview

- Do you ensure both the formal language proficiency (based on language tests or certificates) and the actual language skills?
  - Ensuring the language proficiency may also concern, e.g., the actual ability to write Finnish.

Evaluation of merits, the memorandum of presentation, and appointment

- Do the language qualifications required and the language skills considered to be an advantage have any real importance for the appointment?
- Are the language skills and their importance weighed in the same way as other merits in the memorandum of presentation?

Checking the qualification criteria concerning language proficiency

- Are the qualification criteria concerning language proficiency at an appropriate level in the agencies too or should they be revised?
  - Would it be possible to stipulate, for instance, that the holders of some posts must have excellent Swedish skills and satisfactory or good Finnish skills?
  - Would it be possible to have symmetrical provisions concerning excellent Finnish or

Swedish skills and satisfactory skills in the other language (see Act on Civil Servants in Parliament, 1197/2003)?

See also

- Guidelines of the Ministry of Finance on principles followed when filling official positions (VM 1/01/2009, VM/2165/00. 00.00/2011)
- Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice concerning the consideration of language skills in recruitment by the State authorities and courts of law (OM 3/58/2005)

- Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice: Language skills in recruitment by the ministries – provisions and a checklist pertaining to recruitment (OM 1/58/2011)
- Qualification criteria concerning language proficiency and their importance for securing an official position, [http://www.oph.fi/download/47005\\_vhkielitutkinnot.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/47005_vhkielitutkinnot.pdf) (p. 16-25)
- Employment of immigrants and ethnic minorities in public administration, [http://www.tem.fi/files/34482/Maahanmuuttajien\\_ja\\_etnisten\\_vahemmistojen\\_tyllistaminen\\_julkishallinnossa.pdf](http://www.tem.fi/files/34482/Maahanmuuttajien_ja_etnisten_vahemmistojen_tyllistaminen_julkishallinnossa.pdf)

## Consideration of language skills in recruitment

### Drawing up a job description

- What language skills and at what level are needed in the job?
- Should there be legal provisions on this?



### Announcement for an official post

- Qualification criteria for language proficiency and language skills considered an advantage must be mentioned



### Interview

- Ensuring formal and practical language skills



### Memorandum of presentation

- All qualification criteria and merits must be specified

## 7 A MODEL FOR THE JOB DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTACT PERSON FOR THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES, DESIGNATED BY MINISTRIES

The contact person for the national languages has the following tasks:

- To help and support the ministry's management so that the legislation on the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, is given due attention in the activities of the authorities and in monitoring these activities.
- To promote the opportunities to use both languages in the ministry in order to achieve viable bilingualism.
- To advise other civil servants in observing the language legislation or to guide them in finding an expert for detailed questions and to guide them in using the tools included in the Appendix to the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.
- To monitor compliance with the language legislation and to collect information thereof within the organisation.
- To monitor and collect information about compliance with the language legislation in the administrative sector of the relevant authority.
- Present initiatives for the elimination of shortcomings detected and for the arrangement of language training and training on good language usage in official contexts.
- To participate in projects arranged by other authorities and bodies, in which the activities of one's own sector and linguistic rights must be reconciled.
- To draw up, at least once a year, a summary of both positive and negative observations of how the language legislation is adhered to and monitored and how the use of the national languages is promoted in the ministry.
- To present observations to the ministry's management and, whenever necessary, to propose improvements.
- To participate in the activities of the network of contact persons for the national languages, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice.

The contact person for the national languages should meet the following requirements:

- Readiness to learn the main features of the legislation on the national languages and the Strategy for the

National Languages of Finland issued by the Government.

- Readiness to become familiar with the activities of the relevant ministry and its administrative sector and to identify the functions and points where linguistic rights may be ignored.
- Finnish and Swedish skills, at least at a satisfactory level, for receiving oral and written inquiries.
- A clear reporting relationship with the management of the ministry responsible for compliance with the language legislation and the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.
- Allocation of sufficient time in the person's remit for managing the duties of the contact person for the national languages, and support from the supervisor for the appropriate prioritisation of tasks.

If justified by the ministry's structure or other reasons of expediency, the tasks of the contact person for the national languages may be divided among two or more people. The remit of the contact person for the national languages may also include monitoring concerning other languages, provided that enough time is reserved for this.

Central agencies, other public authorities, municipalities and joint municipal authorities, and other organisations may use this model, whenever appropriate, for the job description of the contact person for the national languages.



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