

Reports and guidelines

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Abstract			
<p>The first Government Strategy for the National Languages of Finland was adopted in December 2012. It is a strategy for two viable national languages, reaching out to span many decades. Its purpose is to help the authorities to implement basic linguistic rights and to better observe the language legislation. It includes both short-term and long-term measures.</p> <p>At its plenary session on 30 December 2015 (VNK/480/49/2015), the Government decided on strategies and programmes adopted at the Government level by the previous Governments which are still valid in respect of their policy lines during the present government term 2015–2019. The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland was one of these strategies.</p> <p>This Action Plan will present concrete measures for implementing the long-term measures of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland. It consists of eight components and includes measures covering several administrative branches.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increasing the visibility and awareness of national languages2. Both languages present in planning for the future3. Information systems4. Culture: audiovisual services5. Good language skills6. Security and health7. Health care and nursing8. Government's recruitment process			

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Action Plan for the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland

1. Strategy for the National Languages of Finland and its background

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is the Government's primary tool for promoting linguistic rights and its most important language policy document. The first Government Strategy for the National Languages of Finland was adopted in December 2012. It is a strategy for two viable national languages, reaching out to span many decades. Its purpose is to help the authorities to implement basic linguistic rights and to better observe the language legislation.

The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland is divided into two parts: a long-term strategy document and the Government's measures for the government term 2011–2015. The implementation of the objectives of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland involves, however, much more than the implementation of individual measures. The key factors of success are a genuine will of the authorities to use and promote both national languages and a social climate favourable for them.

In May 2015, the Ministry of Justice published an interim report on the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland (34/2015). It gives an account of the implementation of the strategy. The Government measures for its term of office 2011–2015 have either been implemented or their implementation has started. Viewed from this perspective, the strategy has been implemented successfully. This Action Plan will present concrete measures for implementing the long-term measures of the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.

At its plenary session on 30 December 2015 (VNK/480/49/2015), the Government decided on strategies and programmes adopted at the Government level by the previous Governments which are still valid in respect of their policy lines during the present government term 2015–2019. The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland was one of these strategies.

2. Linguistic rights in Finland

National legislation

Section 17 of the Constitution of Finland stipulates that the national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language, shall be guaranteed by an Act. The public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis.

The purpose of the Language Act (243/2003) is to ensure the constitutional right of every person to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts and other authorities. Its goal is to ensure the right of everyone to a fair trial and good administration irrespective of language and to secure the linguistic rights of an individual person without him or her needing specifically to refer to these rights.

European Union legislation

One of the policy areas of the European Union is multilingualism. The objective of the EU's multilingualism policy is to support linguistic diversity and promote language learning across Europe.

The fourth subparagraph of Article 3(3) of the Treaty on the European Union provides that the Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced. Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (2010/C 83/02) provides that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

The EU has 24 official languages and more than 60 indigenous regional and minority languages. Each EU member state decides independently on the legal status of and support for regional and minority languages.

Conventions of the Council of Europe

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2/1998) is binding on Finland. The Convention entered into force in respect of Finland in 1998. Finland submitted its fourth report on the implementation of the Framework Convention in December 2014, and the Council of Europe advisory committee visited Finland in October 2015. In its follow-up report (ACFC/OP/IV(2016)002), the advisory committee monitoring the implementation of the Convention brings up the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland. One of the Committee's recommendations expressly relates to the adoption and implementation of an Action Plan for the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland. In its recommendation the Committee emphasises that the implementation of the Action Plan shall guarantee that the knowledge, visibility and presence of the Swedish language are maintained in education, in the administration, in the labour force and in the public at large.

Finland is also committed to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Charter entered into force in respect of Finland in 1998. Finland submitted its fourth report on the implementation of the Charter in 2010, and the Committee of Ministers issued its recommendations to Finland in March 2012.

3. Objectives and measures for 2015 to 2019

According to the Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government, Finland is open and international, rich in languages and cultures. It also states that we have rich linguistic and cultural heritage and we foster a bilingual Finland in accordance with our Constitution and values. At the level of practice, the Government Programme aims at increasing and diversifying the provision of language studies and enhancing the use of language teaching as a means of integration.

The Government is committed to safeguard the linguistic rights in all its projects pursuant to the Constitution. Especially in large administrative reform projects attention will be paid to the fact that they do not weaken the linguistic rights or the opportunities to receive service in one's own language.

4. Our language - our resource

The Finnish language - the largest language in Finland

Language is part of a person's identity and an expression of culture. Language is a lot more than only a tool for understanding things or expressing oneself.

The Finnish language has a strong status in Finland and the right of Finnish speakers to use Finnish before the authorities is realised nearly without exception. Neither is this right questioned. From time to time Finnish speakers may also encounter a situation where, for example, Finnish translations of EU or other international documents are not available. The major challenge is, however, the development of the language of science. Science as well as its language are becoming increasingly international. It is important that Finnish is also used in scientific work and that the scientific terminology evolves in Finnish.

The principal language of administration in Finland is increasingly Finnish. It is not insignificant what kind of administrative language the authorities use. The use of a clear, comprehensible and appropriate language saves time and effort, improves the efficiency of the authorities' work and reinforces the citizens' legal protection. In Finland, work has been actively carried out for a better administrative language. It is important to continue this work. The need for plain language as well as for information and material produced in plain language has also increased, which should be taken into account by the authorities in their activities.

Learning the language of their new home country is very important for immigrants in respect of integration. In Finland, the language of integration may be either Finnish or Swedish. A person primarily integrates into his or her local community, which means that it is essential to learn the local language.

Swedish-speaking Finns – an indispensable part of Finland

Swedish is the other, less commonly spoken national language of Finland. The Finland-Swedish culture and identity constitute a significant part of the Finnish culture and identity. Even though the Swedish languages used in Finland and Sweden have the same structure and grammar, the spoken language and dialects of Swedish-speaking Finns differ from the standard Swedish spoken in Sweden. Finland has a particular responsibility for the preservation of Finland-Swedish culture.

There are shortcomings in the realisation of the right of persons speaking Swedish as their mother tongue to use it before the authorities or in the context of public services. The existing language legislation on Finnish and Swedish is for the most part up to date. In fact, shortcomings exist in its practical application. The authorities have the obligation to foster the linguistic heritage of Finland in their activities and to promote the use of both national languages. If the circumstances so require, the public authority must take special measures to safeguard the cultural or social needs related to the national languages. These obligations of the authorities and public authority require more attention.

In addition to other languages, the knowledge of Swedish is still necessary in working life in Finland. There is a shortage of Swedish-speaking personnel especially in the public sector, but also increasingly in the private sector. In the private sector the knowledge of Swedish is beneficial since Finland's trade is strongly oriented towards the other Nordic countries. The Swedish language assists in participating in Nordic cooperation and allows for full exploitation of the educational opportunities offered by the other Nordic countries as well as of their labour markets and cultures.

Learning Swedish should be made easier. Complete language immersion has proved to be a good method since the child learns another language in connection with other activities. Unfortunately, the supply of language immersion is inadequate to meet the demand. In addition to language immersion, people in Finland, especially in bilingual areas, have good possibilities of learning Swedish simply by using it without hesitation in daily life with Swedish-speaking Finns.

4.1 Increasing the visibility and awareness of national languages

Training on linguistic rights for Government officials and state civil servants

- a) **Contents:** Training will be offered to Government officials and state civil servants and information disseminated on the linguistic rights and the authorities' obligations to serve customers in their own mother tongue in Finnish and in Swedish and, if necessary, in the Sámi language, sign language and other languages. Targeted training on the consideration of national languages in communications is organised for the personnel of communications departments.
- b) **Responsible ministries:** Ministry of Justice and Prime Minister's Office
- c) **Timetable** and follow-up: will be launched during spring 2017

- a) **Contents:** Establishing Government language and translation policy lines for 2017 to 2020. The objective of the policy lines is to support the ministries in the implementation of linguistic rights, in identifying and foreseeing translation needs and in promoting clear administrative language.
- b) **Responsible ministry:** Prime Minister's Office
- c) **Timetable** and follow-up: establishment of the policy lines in 2017, implementation of the measures between 2017 and 2020

4.2 Both languages present in planning for the future

Assessment tool for linguistic impacts

- a) **Contents:** The assessment tool for linguistic impacts will be improved, and a revised tool will be published. The revised assessment tool will be incorporated into the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Justice for the assessment of linguistic impacts.
- b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Justice
- c) **Timetable** and follow-up: autumn 2016 – spring 2017, completion of the assessment tool and its introduction into use

Follow-up indicators for linguistic rights

- a) **Contents:** Language indicators will be designed for monitoring language conditions and the realisation of linguistic rights in accordance with the model used for equality indicators.
- b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Justice

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: the indicators will be created and introduced into use during 2017.

4.3 Information systems

Guidance on the consideration of languages in the development of ICT solutions for authorities

a) **Contents:** It is necessary to ensure in the development of information systems for the public administration that the systems support the application of the Language Act. The needs of users and customers with different mother tongues must be considered already in the designing stage. In connection with the update of the relevant public administration recommendations, guidance on the consideration of different languages will be added to the recommendations. Examples of these are public administration recommendations nos 173 and 174. Particular attention will be paid to the requirements of the Language Act in the development of a common ICT platform for provinces.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Finance

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: updating of the relevant recommendations so that they support the application of the Language Act, 2017–2019.

4.4 Culture: audiovisual services

Monitoring the prerequisites of the Finnish Broadcasting Company for providing multilingual content

a) **Contents:** The production of the Finnish Broadcasting Company is of particular significance for the Swedish speakers and other language minorities in Finland because it is not always feasible to produce programmes for these groups on a commercial basis. The administrative bodies of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, which operate under the responsibility and supervision of Parliament, are responsible for the company's operation and management in accordance with the Act on the Finnish Broadcasting Company. In its broadcasting, the Finnish Broadcasting Company must treat Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking citizens on equal grounds.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Transport and Communication

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: Act on Yleisradio Oy (Finnish Broadcasting Company; 1380/1993), 2017–2019

4.5 Good language skills

Study on the current situation of language immersion

a) **Contents:** It will be examined how measures for promoting language immersion (e.g. separate funding) have influenced the supply of language immersion teaching since the previous study conducted in 2011. Obstacles to increasing the availability of language immersion will also be mapped.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Education and Culture

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: a study on the current situation of language immersion teaching will be completed during 2017/2018.

Increasing and diversifying the availability of language immersion teaching

a) **Contents:** The Government's key project concerning knowledge and education includes a separate project aiming at an earlier beginning and diversification of language learning. The objective of the project is that more children start learning a foreign language already in the first grade of basic education. Other learning methods suitable for early language teaching will also be supported. The objectives set in the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland for promoting language immersion teaching will be considered in the preparation of the key project.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Education and Culture

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: the availability of language immersion has been increased.

Improving motivation for studying Swedish in vocational education and training

a) **Contents:** The motivation of students for studying Swedish will be enhanced in vocational education and training. It will be increased through effectively highlighting the benefits of Swedish language skills in the domestic and Nordic labour markets. The implementation of the campaign requires participation from the partners.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Justice and partners

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: the campaign will be launched during 2017.

Promoting integrated learning of national languages in vocational education and training

a) **Contents:** The knowledge of both national languages is beneficial and even necessary in many professions. 1.7 million Finns live in bilingual municipalities. It is important to know especially the vocabulary of one's own profession in both domestic languages. In vocational institutions, the learning of the vocabulary and fluent use of a language other than the mother tongue in connection with practical activities has proved to be a successful and necessary form of language learning, and it is increasingly used in vocational institutions. The introduction of 'integrated language learning' in vocational institutions will be promoted by bringing up good practices in various ways (e.g. seminars, development days, publications, Internet pages).

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish National Board of Education

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: in connection with the reform of vocational education and training during 2017

Bank of Finnish Terminology in Arts and Sciences

a) **Contents:** The Bank of Finnish Terminology in Arts and Sciences is an open term bank which is common to all branches of science practised in Finland and updated continuously. It is intended for the use of the scientific community and citizens. The project, which was coordinated by the University of Helsinki, received research infrastructure funding from the Academy of Finland between 2011 and 2015. The project will be implemented on a voluntary basis and at the moment, the term bank is being expanded. The project and especially the Swedish-language term bank will be developed.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Education and Culture

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: both the Finnish and Swedish content of the term bank are expanded

Supporting the realisation of immigrants' language choices through information and education

a) **Contents:** The extent to which integration training is arranged as training for employment in Swedish will be monitored (in particular in the provinces of Uusimaa, Varsinais-Suomi and Pohjanmaa).

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Employment and the Economy

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: during 2017

a) **Contents:** Integration is an individual process which is partly based on the immigrant's personal needs and wishes. Language choices are also affected, for example, by the actual availability of integration services, and they are not always made in a planned manner. Neither do the authorities always have adequate information on the opportunities of Swedish-language integration and employment or on Swedish-language networks supporting integration. The opportunities of immigrants to choose either Finnish or Swedish as their language of integration will be supported by providing information and training on language choices for actors in the employment administration (in particular in the provinces of Uusimaa, Varsinais-Suomi and Pohjanmaa).

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Employment and the Economy

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: during 2018

Improving the language skills of Government officials

a) **Contents:** Priorities related to the development of language skills among Government officials will be outlined as part of the Government Skills Strategy. The Government's working culture will be strengthened in respect of the consideration of different language and culture groups so that the use of a foreign language will be a natural part of professional skills and interaction.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Prime Minister's Office

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: starting from 2017

4.6 Security and health

Measures concerning the Emergency Response Centre Administration: Use of the Erica system for guaranteeing service in Swedish

a) **Contents:** The new emergency response centre information system (Erica) used jointly by the authorities enables a networked mode of operation where the resources of all Swedish-speaking emergency response centre operators on duty can be utilised better. According to the plans, the system should be in nationwide use in 2017. The system assists in utilising the resources of persons who know Swedish but it does not replace the attrition of Swedish-speaking or bilingual personnel or eliminate the difficulties in recruiting emergency response centre operators speaking both national languages. The intention is that all functions and risk assessment guidelines are available in the emergency response centre information system in both national languages. Each branch will be responsible for translating the risk assessment guidelines it issues.

The emergency response centre information system used jointly by the authorities does not itself increase language skills. It slightly assists in utilising the resources of persons with a knowledge of the Swedish language but does not constitute a significant improvement to the situation. It will not replace the attrition of Swedish-speaking or bilingual operators.

b) **Responsible entity:** Ministry of the Interior

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: the timetable is the same as the timetable for implementing the new emergency response centre system (Erica)

Recruitment of personnel with language skills to operator training

a) **Contents:** Recruitment of bilingual applicants to degree-oriented training for emergency response centre operators will be enhanced by increasing targeted advertising of the training in cooperation with the Emergency Response Centre Administration.

Swedish language skills are needed on all courses for emergency response centre operators. Emphasis is placed on already acquired language skills of the participants. The Emergency Services College will promote participation by more bilingual (Finnish and Swedish) applicants in entrance exams. The expertise of local emergency response centres can also be utilised in this work. At the same time, the applicants' practical language skills will be assessed in the entrance exam.

b) **Responsible entity:** Ministry of the Interior

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: The work is continuous. A decision on a possible increase in the number of study places available will be made in connection with the framework for 2018 to 2021. If the number of study places is increased, the need for recruiting bilingual students will be taken into account.

Measures concerning the police: The police helpline service will be developed so that customers can use the service directly in their own language, either in Finnish or in Swedish

a) **Contents:** A helpline service is to be established for non-urgent police matters in connection with the project (called YLVÄS) for improving the accessibility of the police. Non-urgent customer service matters include advice and guidance, driving licence issues and other licensing issues. When the service is developed, Swedish speakers will be provided with the possibility of using the service directly in Swedish.

b) **Responsible entity:** Ministry of the Interior and National Police Board

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: the helpline service is established so that both Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers can use the service directly in their own language

Ensuring that the language of the person being questioned is considered in a criminal investigation and increasing the awareness of other linguistic rights among the police

a) **Contents:** A revised Criminal Investigation Act entered into force on 1 January 2014. The reform specified the means the criminal investigation authorities can use to ensure that the linguistic rights of the person being questioned are realised. In order to enhance the implementation of the legislative reform, a reference to the provisions on languages in the Criminal Investigation Act will be added to the performance agreements of the National Police Board. A reference may also be added for ensuring the realisation of other linguistic rights.

b) **Responsible entity:** Ministry of the Interior

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: the linguistic rights are realised in criminal investigations in accordance with the Criminal Investigation Act

Examining the possibilities of using Swedish-language back-up services within the police

a) **Contents:** The language skills of local police officers will be primarily utilised in police field activities. However, if a patrol does not have adequate language skills for serving a Swedish-speaking customer, the police can seek support over the telephone or through other communications means from a centralised Swedish-language support service known as the back-up service.

b) **Responsible entity:** Ministry of the Interior and National Police Board

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: examining the possibilities of using Swedish-language back-up services within the police

4.7 Health care and nursing

Assessing linguistic impacts of the reform of social and health services

a) **Contents:** An assessment of linguistic impacts will be performed on the reform of social welfare and health care services and on the proposed provincial act. Parliament's Constitutional Law Committee has outlined in connection with the reform of regional administration that the linguistic basic rights need to be

considered already when divisions into regions and their alterations are being prepared (PeVL 21/2009). Apart from the formally equal treatment of languages, Section 17 of the Constitution also requires safeguarding the *de facto* equality of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations in the provision of social services, for example. The impact assessment should examine, for example, the impacts of the reform on the equal opportunities of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations to receive services in their own language.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Finance

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: launched during 2016. The assessment of linguistic impacts will be carried out in connection with the social welfare and health care reforms. Linguistic impacts will also be considered in the further preparation of the reform.

Promoting linguistic rights in social welfare and health care

a) **Contents:** Increasing the awareness of linguistic rights and their significance in social welfare and health care. The target group consists of both the personnel and the patients of social welfare and health care services. For this purpose, material on the linguistic rights will be produced for the target groups and suitable channels used for reaching them.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Justice

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: will be launched during 2017. The information material has been drafted and is available to the target groups.

4.8 Government's recruitment process

Developing means for ensuring the actual language skills of officials in recruitment

a) **Contents:** In connection with the revision of the Government recruitment guidelines, the guidelines will be updated and their consistency with the legislation on national languages and other languages will be checked. The Ministry of Finance guidelines on the principles to be followed in the filling of a post will be revised in respect of the application of the Language Act (423/2003) and the Act on the Knowledge of Languages Required of Personnel in Public Bodies, taking into account the practical tools included in the Strategy for the National Languages of Finland.

b) **Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Finance and Prime Minister's Office

c) **Timetable** and follow-up: during 2017 and 2018