

Statement by the National Federation of Sweden Finns (RSKL) on Swedish Minority Policy and the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Summary

The National Federation of the Sweden Finns (RSKL) represents Sweden Finns across Sweden and works to strengthen the Finnish language, Sweden Finnish culture and identity, and the equal participation of Sweden Finns in Swedish society.

RSKL recognises the significant progress made since Sweden ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2000. Sweden has recognised Sweden Finns as a national minority and Finnish as a national minority language, established a legislative framework for minority rights, strengthened the Minorities Act, expanded the administrative area for Finnish and introduced measures intended to support language revitalisation.

These achievements are important.

However, more than twenty-five years after ratification, **RSKL considers the principal challenge facing Swedish minority policy to be the persistent gap between rights recognised in legislation and their implementation in practice.**

This conclusion is supported by the Council of Europe's previous monitoring, the Swedish National Audit Office (Riksrevisionen), the Equality Ombudsman (DO), the National Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), and the experience of Sweden Finnish organisations and rights-holders.

RSKL considers that the next phase of Swedish minority policy must therefore focus on **implementation, continuity and accountability**. Minority rights must become predictable and accessible in people's everyday lives, regardless of municipality or region.

In particular, RSKL calls on Sweden to:

- Establish long-term national strategies, measurable objectives and clear responsibilities for implementing minority rights and revitalising the national minority languages;
- Guarantee a continuous educational pathway through which Finnish can be learned, reclaimed, used and developed from early childhood into adulthood.
- Establish long-term measures to address the shortage of Finnish-speaking teachers and other professionals.

- Ensure that rights to Finnish-language public services, including elder care, can be exercised in practice and are not dependent on temporary local capacity.
- Create permanent conditions for Sweden Finnish culture, media, civil society and language environments to develop.
- Strengthen the effective participation and institutional capacity of Sweden Finns and their organisations.
- Introduce systematic monitoring, accountability and corrective mechanisms where rights and political objectives are not being fulfilled.

For RSKL, the fundamental question is no longer simply whether Sweden recognises minority rights. It is **whether Sweden Finns can exercise those rights in practice and whether Finnish has the conditions necessary to survive and develop as a living language for future generations.**

A persistent gap between rights and reality

RSKL welcomes the development of Swedish minority policy since 2000. The recognition of the national minorities and minority languages represented an important change in the relationship between the Swedish state and its historical minorities. Sweden has subsequently developed legislation, administrative structures and policies intended to protect minority rights and promote the national minority languages.

However, legislation alone does not safeguard minority rights. Rights must be implemented consistently, throughout the country and across generations.

RSKL shares the conclusion reached by several independent Swedish and international bodies that the principal challenge facing Swedish minority policy is no longer primarily the absence of legislation, but the inadequate implementation of existing rights.

This assessment is shared more broadly within the Sweden Finnish minority. In February 2026, RSKL, the [Sweden Finnish Delegation](#) (Ruotsinsuomalaisten Valtuuskunta) and the [Sweden Finnish Archive](#) (Ruotsinsuomalaisten Arkisto) issued a joint statement¹ concerning Sweden's reporting to the Council of Europe. The organisations concluded that the gap between Sweden's international commitments and the practical implementation of minority policy had become too wide. The organisations called, among other things, for clear and measurable political objectives, effective monitoring, consequences where obligations are not fulfilled and meaningful possibilities for rights-holders to seek remedies.

The Council of Europe's Committee of Experts has repeatedly identified shortcomings in Sweden's implementation of the European Charter. These concerns are increasingly reinforced by Sweden's own independent and monitoring authorities.

¹ [Ruotsin raportoinnista Euroopan neuvostolle 2026 - RSKL](#)

The Swedish National Audit Office concluded in 2025 that the state's measures are insufficient to achieve the objective of keeping the national minority languages alive and identified shortcomings concerning long-term governance, education, teacher supply and coordination.

The same overall picture emerges from MUCF and Sametinget's 2026 follow-up of minority policy. Their assessment is that state initiatives remain fragmented and that the large number of separate government assignments since 2010 has contributed to fragmented governance, without an overarching picture of how the national minority-policy objective is to be achieved. The report calls for more strategic and long-term governance and stronger mechanisms to ensure compliance with minority legislation.

The Equality Ombudsman has reached similarly serious conclusions concerning the gap between formal rights and their effective implementation.

Taken together, the assessments of the Council of Europe, the Swedish National Audit Office, MUCF and Sametinget, and the Equality Ombudsman point towards the same structural problem: Sweden has developed an important legal and policy framework, but lacks sufficiently coherent, long-term and accountable structures for translating that framework into effective rights. Closing this implementation gap should now be the central objective of Swedish minority policy.

Minority rights must be enforceable rights

RSKL considers minority rights to be an integral part of human rights.

The ability to use one's language, transmit it to future generations, participate in cultural life, receive education, access public services and participate effectively in decisions affecting one's community cannot be regarded as optional cultural benefits.

Sweden has voluntarily undertaken obligations through its ratification of the European Charter and the Framework Convention. Their implementation should therefore not depend primarily on municipal priorities, temporary government initiatives or short-term funding programmes. Rights must be predictable, and accessible.

This requires more than legislation. Public authorities must have clear responsibilities, adequate resources and the institutional capacity necessary to implement those rights. Rights-holders must also have access to information about their rights and meaningful possibilities to raise complaints and seek remedies when those rights are not respected.

The Equality Ombudsman has highlighted precisely this structural weakness. DO has concluded that effective legislation requires clear and enforceable provisions and effective follow-up and has recommended establishing or designating one or more authorities with supervisory responsibility for legislation concerning national minority rights.

For RSKL, a right that can only be exercised when circumstances happen to permit it is not an effectively implemented right.

Long-term governance, measurable goals and accountability

A recurring weakness in Swedish minority policy is the reliance on temporary projects, short-term funding and time-limited government assignments. This concern is also reflected in the Government's own system for monitoring minority policy. In their assessment of developments during 2025, MUCF and Sametinget conclude that state initiatives within minority policy are fragmented. They note that the large number of government assignments issued since 2010 has contributed to fragmented governance and that there is no sufficiently coherent overall picture of how the national minority-policy objective is to be achieved. The monitoring authorities therefore call for governance that is more strategic and long-term.

For RSKL, this is a central issue. Minority policy cannot be built as a succession of individual assignments, projects and initiatives. The Government needs to define the long-term results it expects minority policy to achieve, assign responsibility for achieving them and systematically assess whether the situation of the minority languages and their speakers is actually improving.

The Swedish National Audit Office has reached a similar conclusion. Its review found that short-term governance makes it difficult for responsible authorities to recruit qualified staff, retain competence, develop activities and establish lasting relationships with language speakers.

Long-term funding alone, however, is insufficient. Reversing language shift that has taken place over generations requires decades of consistent policy, stable institutions and sustained investment. Swedish minority policy thus needs clear objectives and mechanisms for determining whether those objectives are actually being achieved.

Too much reporting focuses on activities: consultations held, projects financed, information produced or government assignments completed. The more important question is whether these activities have resulted in greater access to rights and improved conditions for the languages. Monitoring should therefore focus increasingly on outcomes.

For Finnish, Sweden should be able to determine whether:

- More children have access to Finnish in preschool and school.
- Continuity between different levels of education is improving.
- More children and adults have opportunities to learn or reclaim Finnish.
- The number of qualified Finnish-speaking teachers and other professionals is increasing.
- Finnish-language elder care and other public services are actually available.
- Opportunities to use Finnish in cultural and social environments are increasing.
- Sweden Finns have meaningful influence over decisions affecting them.

Clear objectives are also necessary for accountability. Responsibilities can easily be transferred between the state, government agencies, regions and municipalities when objectives and mandates are unclear.

National objectives should therefore be translated into measurable targets, assigned to responsible actors and followed up regularly. When targets are not achieved, the causes should be identified and corrective measures taken.

The perspectives of Sweden Finns must form an integral part of this evaluation. Statistics alone cannot establish whether rights function in everyday life. Minority organisations and rights-holders must therefore participate both in developing minority policy and in evaluating its implementation.

The recommendations arising from Council of Europe monitoring should similarly be incorporated systematically into Swedish governance. Responsibilities, measures and timetables should be established following each monitoring cycle and progress reported transparently.

Every objective should have a responsible actor, a timeframe, adequate resources and a mechanism for follow-up. When objectives are not achieved, this should lead to corrective action.

Without this chain of responsibility, minority policy risks remaining a statement of ambition rather than a system for securing rights.

Language revitalisation and education

A continuous pathway for Finnish

The greatest long-term challenge facing the Sweden Finnish minority is the transmission of Finnish between generations. The decline and interrupted intergenerational transmission of Finnish must be understood in the context of historical assimilation, social pressure and inadequate opportunities to learn and use the language in education and public life.

Revitalisation therefore requires sustained public investment, political commitment and permanent structures.

RSKL considers linguistic equality, Finnish-language education, bilingualism, cultural participation and intergenerational transmission as central objectives. It calls for children and young people with Sweden Finnish roots to have access to Finnish-language education, for bilingual Finnish-Swedish educational alternatives to be supported where needed and for Finnish language and culture to be promoted both in school and during leisure time.

Education is the cornerstone of successful language revitalisation. Children and young people need a continuous educational pathway that allows them to learn, use and progressively develop Finnish—from early childhood and preschool through compulsory and upper-secondary education and onwards into higher education and adult learning.

Limited mother-tongue instruction cannot alone carry responsibility for revitalising a language. Learners also need environments in which Finnish can be used naturally and regularly, including bilingual and Finnish-language educational settings and cultural and leisure activities.

RSKL's call for a continuous educational pathway is also supported by MUCF and Sametinget's 2026 assessment. The monitoring authorities conclude that access to education in the national minority languages remains insufficient and that structural barriers must be addressed if individuals are to have genuine opportunities to learn and develop their language **from preschool to university**.

This is an important shift in perspective. The objective cannot be limited to providing individual educational measures at different stages of life. **The education system as a whole must support language development and progression over time.** For Finnish, this means creating continuity between preschool, compulsory school, upper-secondary education, higher education and adult learning.

The right to reclaim Finnish

Language revitalisation cannot be limited to maintaining Finnish among people who already speak it. Historical language shift means that many Sweden Finnish children grow up in families where parents or grandparents have lost all or part of their Finnish. If revitalisation policy requires children already to possess the language in order to access meaningful opportunities to learn it, the consequences of historical assimilation risk being reproduced.

People belonging to the national minority must therefore have genuine opportunities to **learn or reclaim Finnish**, including pathways from beginner level towards advanced proficiency. A national minority language must be possible to learn and develop, not merely maintain.

Teacher supply and professional education

The shortage of qualified teachers remains one of the most significant structural barriers. The Swedish National Audit Office concluded that existing educational provision does not correspond to the need for teachers in all national minority languages. It specifically highlighted the significant need for preschool teachers who speak minority languages and identified shortcomings in the pathways towards becoming a minority-language teacher.

A long-term national strategy for Finnish-language teacher supply is therefore necessary. It should address preschool teachers, mother-tongue teachers, subject teachers and teachers capable of providing bilingual education, while creating flexible routes for Finnish-speaking professionals to qualify as teachers.

The educational chain must also continue beyond school. Higher education, vocational education and adult education in and through Finnish are necessary both for individual language development and for society's ability to provide Finnish-language education and public services. RSKL's political programme therefore stresses the importance of education in Finnish in different professional fields so that Sweden has a workforce capable of providing education and services in Finnish.

RSKL's priorities concerning Article 8 of the Charter

RSKL considers education one of the areas in which stronger implementation of Sweden's undertakings under the European Charter is particularly urgent.

Sweden should:

- Guarantee a continuous educational pathway for Finnish from preschool through compulsory and upper-secondary education to higher and adult education.
- Develop a long-term national strategy for Finnish-language teacher supply.
- Strengthen bilingual and Finnish-language educational alternatives.
- Create structures enabling children and adults to learn or reclaim Finnish even where the language has not been transmitted at home.
- Strengthen national coordination of mother-tongue and distance education.
- Ensure permanent production and development of modern Finnish-language teaching materials and digital resources.
- Develop vocational and professional education in Finnish.
- Establish measurable national targets for children's actual access to Finnish-language education.

The objective must be **progression in language proficiency**, not merely theoretical access to a limited number of hours of instruction.

Culture, identity and media

Language cannot be separated from culture and identity. For Finnish to remain a living language in Sweden, people must have opportunities not only to learn it but also to **live, experience and create through it**. A strong Sweden Finnish cultural life provides environments in which language becomes meaningful and a sense of belonging can develop across generations.

RSKL's Minority Political Programme emphasises strengthening Sweden Finnish cultural heritage through literature, theatre, music, film, associations and other forms of cultural expression. It also calls for greater visibility for Sweden Finnish history and identity and support for local Finnish-language associations and cultural activities.

Culture must not be understood solely as the preservation of traditions. A living minority culture must be able to develop, change and create new forms of expression. Children and young people in particular need opportunities to shape what Sweden Finnish identity means to them today. Literature, theatre, music, film, digital media and other contemporary cultural expressions can create new spaces for Finnish and make the language relevant to new generations.

This is also an important part of language revitalisation. Formal education develops language skills, but speakers need environments where Finnish can be used socially and creatively. Associations, libraries, cultural institutions, festivals, media, children's activities and other meeting places provide such environments.

For a minority affected by historical assimilation, the possibility of developing a positive cultural identity is particularly important. Sweden Finns who have grown up without Finnish or with limited knowledge of their family's history should have opportunities to reconnect with their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Greater visibility is also necessary in majority society. Sweden Finnish history, language and contemporary culture form part of Sweden's common cultural heritage and should be reflected in education, cultural institutions, libraries, archives, museums, public broadcasting and public life.

Finnish-language media have a particularly important role. Public-service broadcasting and other Finnish-language media create linguistic and cultural spaces that reach people who may otherwise have limited everyday contact with Finnish. They also enable Sweden Finns to participate in public debate and maintain a shared cultural and linguistic community.

RSKL's priorities concerning Articles 11 and 12 of the Charter

Sweden should create permanent infrastructure for Sweden Finnish cultural and linguistic life rather than relying predominantly on temporary projects.

This should include:

- Sustainable conditions for cultural environments in which Finnish can be used.
- Long-term investment in Sweden Finnish children's and youth culture.
- Support for contemporary Sweden Finnish cultural production.
- Stronger institutional capacity for Sweden Finnish cultural organisations and civil society.
- Sustainable Finnish-language media, including strong public-service provision.
- Greater representation of Sweden Finnish history and contemporary culture within Sweden's cultural institutions.
- Long-term core funding that allows key minority organisations and institutions to retain competence and plan strategically.

RSKL considers language, culture and identity to be mutually reinforcing parts of the same revitalisation process.

Finnish in public services and social life

Access to Finnish-language public services remains uneven. The right to communicate with authorities in Finnish and to receive elder care in Finnish is not implemented consistently.

Municipalities frequently struggle to recruit Finnish-speaking personnel, reflecting both a shortage of Finnish-speaking professionals and limited opportunities for vocational and professional education in Finnish. Implementation therefore continues to depend too heavily on local capacity.

Older Sweden Finns should never lose access to their language precisely when they become most vulnerable. The ability to communicate in one's own language becomes especially important when a person depends upon others for care and support.

For some older people, illness, dementia or other age-related conditions can also make an acquired second language increasingly difficult to use, further increasing the importance of Finnish-speaking personnel. The same principle extends to healthcare, social services and public administration.

The state must take greater responsibility for ensuring sufficient Finnish-language competence. This requires long-term workforce planning, vocational and professional education and systematic measures to identify, recruit and develop Finnish-speaking personnel.

Language services are rights

Minority-language services must be treated as rights, not discretionary benefits.

Where legislation or Sweden's international commitments establish a right to use Finnish or receive services in Finnish, access should not depend on whether an individual municipality happens to have sufficient personnel, whether the service is considered a local political priority or whether Finnish-speaking staff happen to be available at a particular moment. Personnel shortages may explain difficulties in implementation, but recurring shortages cannot constitute a permanent justification for non-implementation.

Public authorities have a responsibility to plan, organise and resource their activities so that established rights can actually be exercised. The state must address structural causes where authorities repeatedly lack the capacity to fulfil their obligations.

RSKL therefore calls for stronger national coordination, clearer accountability and systematic monitoring of access to Finnish-language public services. Individuals must also receive accessible information about their rights and have meaningful opportunities to raise complaints and seek remedies when those rights are not respected.

RSKL's priorities concerning Articles 10 and 13 of the Charter

Sweden should:

- Systematically monitor whether Finnish-language services are actually available, rather than only whether authorities have formal procedures for providing them.
- Establish long-term workforce planning for Finnish-speaking personnel.
- Expand vocational and professional education that develops Finnish-language competence.

- Ensure that rights-holders receive clear information about their language rights.
- Clarify responsibility for correcting recurring failures in implementation.
- Strengthen mechanisms through which individuals can raise complaints and obtain effective remedies.

The measure of successful implementation is not whether a right exists on paper, but whether a Sweden Finn can exercise it in everyday life.

Effective participation and strong minority institutions

Meaningful participation is a fundamental element of minority rights. RSKL welcomes the consultation mechanisms established within Swedish minority policy. However, our experience is that consultation does not always provide national minorities with genuine opportunities to influence decisions.

Consultation may occur too late in decision-making processes, after important priorities have already been determined, or without sufficient information and resources for minority representatives to participate on equal terms.

The Equality Ombudsman has similarly concluded that significant shortcomings remain concerning national minorities' influence and participation and has questioned whether the existing consultation model is sufficient to fulfil Sweden's obligations under the minority conventions.

MUCF and Sametinget's 2026 follow-up reinforces this concern. While public authorities increasingly offer national minorities opportunities for participation, the monitoring authorities report that minorities still often experience a lack of real influence over the issues that matter most to them. They also identify declining public funding as a factor limiting the ability of national minorities to strengthen their own agency and contribute to the development of minority policy.

For RSKL, participation and institutional capacity are therefore inseparable. A minority organisation cannot exercise meaningful influence simply because it is invited to a consultation. It must have the organisational capacity to gather the experiences of rights-holders, analyse proposals, develop policy positions, participate throughout decision-making processes and follow up the implementation of decisions.

The organisations of the national minorities should therefore be regarded not merely as recipients of public funding or consultees, but as **essential partners in the implementation and evaluation of minority policy**.

RSKL considers that Sweden should:

- Involve national minority organisations at an early stage in decisions affecting their languages, culture and rights.
- Strengthen the quality and impact of consultation and ensure feedback on how minority perspectives have influenced decisions.

- Provide long-term and adequate organisational funding that enables minority organisations to build institutional capacity.
- Involve minority organisations systematically in monitoring the implementation of minority rights.
- Strengthen opportunities for children and young people belonging to national minorities to participate in decisions affecting language revitalisation and cultural development.

Strong minority institutions are not separate from the implementation of minority rights. They are part of the infrastructure necessary to make those rights effective.

RSKL's principal recommendations to Sweden

RSKL believes Sweden has established an important legal foundation for minority protection. The priority must now be to ensure effective implementation.

RSKL therefore calls on the Swedish Government to take the following six structural measures:

Establish long-term national strategies with measurable objectives

Sweden should adopt long-term strategies for the national minority languages, including a specific approach to Finnish based on the situation and needs of the language and its speakers. The strategies should contain measurable objectives, responsible actors, timetables, adequate financing and regular public reporting.

Guarantee a continuous educational pathway for Finnish

Children and adults must have genuine opportunities to learn, reclaim, use and progressively develop Finnish. This requires an educational continuum from preschool through compulsory and upper-secondary education to higher education, vocational education and adult learning, combined with a long-term strategy for teacher supply.

Build the Finnish-speaking workforce required to implement language rights

The shortage of Finnish-speaking teachers, care workers and other professionals must be addressed as a structural policy issue. Language revitalisation, education policy and workforce planning should be connected so that Sweden develops the human resources required to provide education and public services in Finnish.

Create permanent infrastructure for language, culture, media and civil society

The Government's responsibility should not be limited to financing individual activities. Sweden needs sustainable institutions and environments in which Finnish can be learned, used and developed and Sweden Finnish culture can be created and transmitted between generations.

This requires predictable funding for cultural activities, media, minority organisations and other institutions central to revitalisation.

Make minority rights effectively enforceable

Access to rights must not depend on where a person lives or the temporary capacity of an individual municipality.

Responsibilities must be clear, implementation monitored and rights-holders provided with meaningful possibilities to raise complaints and obtain remedies when established rights are not respected.

Introduce systematic accountability for results, and establish effective supervision of compliance with minority legislation. The success of minority policy should be measured through outcomes rather than activities. Council of Europe recommendations should be incorporated into national governance through action plans specifying responsibility, deadlines and follow-up.

RSKL supports the conclusion of MUCF and Sametinget that stronger supervision is necessary to ensure that duty-bearers fulfil their obligations. Where municipalities, regions or government authorities repeatedly fail to implement established minority rights, there must be mechanisms for identifying these failures, requiring corrective action and following up whether deficiencies have been remedied.

Conclusion

RSKL remains committed to constructive cooperation with the Swedish Government, municipalities, regions, public authorities and the Council of Europe.

Sweden has taken important steps during the twenty-five years since ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The task now is to ensure that the rights Sweden has recognised become an everyday reality.

For RSKL, the future of Finnish in Sweden ultimately depends on whether a child can learn the language even when previous generations lost it; whether young people can develop Finnish beyond basic proficiency and use it socially and culturally; whether adults can study and work through Finnish; whether older people can receive care in their own language; whether Sweden Finnish culture can continue to evolve; and whether Sweden Finns have genuine influence over decisions affecting their rights and their future.

The long-term objective must be not simply to protect Finnish from further decline, but to create the conditions in which Finnish can be revitalised, developed and transmitted as a living language in Sweden.

This is why RSKL considers the distinction between formal rights and effective rights fundamental.

Sweden's implementation of the European Charter should ultimately be measured not only by legislation, policies, government assignments or projects, but by whether the situation of Finnish and its speakers is demonstrably improving from one monitoring cycle to the next.

Only when Sweden Finns can exercise their rights consistently in everyday life, and when future generations have genuine opportunities to learn, use and transmit Finnish, can the objectives of the European Charter and the Framework Convention be considered fully realised.

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