



To the Council of Europe 2019

Comments on implementation of Minority Rights for  
the Sweden Finns in Sweden

Compiled by the Sweden Finnish Delegation

# The Lost Momentum Continues in 2019

## A brief background and status quo

As already stated in the 2016 report *Lost Momentum* we again: “Need to inform the Council of Europe of signs of deterioration in the current implementation and list areas of concern that have been observed. The great hopes and expectations that the 2010 minority rights reform raised have not been met yet. In fact, Swedish minority rights policy is currently losing momentum and the lack of appropriate government measures is detrimental.” This is still very much the case in 2019, even though national minority policy has experienced a strengthening during 2019, this is yet to fully be implemented on a local level. The report from 2016 *Lost Momentum* already encompassed, described and outlined needed changes within national minority politics where the Swedish Finnish minority was concerned.

Even though two larger inquiries concerning the Sweden Finns have since been made, not enough of their analysis has been taken to heart, or has simply not been acknowledged nor brought through the necessary steps for implementation. They have not been granted funds in the new budget in 2019 so that pivotal steps needed to bring national minority rights to life even could take place. The first inquiry *Nästa Steg? Förslag för en stärkt minoritetspolitik* (Next Step? Proposals to enhance national minority policy) by Lennart Rohdin. The second inquiry, *Förbättrade möjligheter för elever att utveckla sitt nationella minoritetsspråk* (Increased opportunities for pupils’ development of their national minority language) by Jarmo Lainio published in 2017. The implementation of suggestions brought forth in these inquiries are scarce to none. Two years after the fact the national minority still awaits the necessary actions described in the inquiry that would enhance education in Finnish and might directly contribute to younger generations. The inquiry on national minority education is still on hold.

Notably, neither has new legislation from 2019 yet given an effect in the everyday lives of the Sweden Finns. More descriptions of the lack of all important supportive structures needed for the national minority rights to actually have an impact and reach will follow. Note that the updates listed in this article are to be viewed as additional additions to the previous very thorough *Lost Momentum* report written in 2016. We conclude that not much has changed since then.

# National Minority Languages in Public Service Media

## The Importance of Media for National Minorities and Minority Languages

The public inquiry that preceded the minority rights reform in 2010 stated that the most important things to achieve if the national minority languages are to have a future in Sweden are: systematic revitalisation and increasing the visibility and raising the status of national minority languages in society. Minority language public service media is important from all these aspects, as presented in the Lost Momentum - an alternative report 2016, to the Council of Europe.

Strong and independent minority language media is essential for the national minorities and for the improved implementation of minority rights in Sweden. There are very few minority language newspapers and magazines – and no daily newspapers at all. Minority language public service media is still the only media that follows and investigates the implementation of the Council of Europe minority conventions and how the Government, the municipalities and authorities are pursuing this work, as the alternative report 2016 concludes.

Digital broadcasting continues to be a problem, since listeners and readers cannot access such broadcasts and do not find the channels which should be found in "other languages", not in Finnish, or in Meänkieli, or in Sami as they ought to be.

## Trends in Public Service Minority Media

Sweden undertook specific obligations regarding media when ratifying the European Language Charter. Sweden has promised to make adequate provisions so that broadcasters offer programmes in Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli and to encourage and/or facilitate the creation of at least one television channel in Finnish.

## Developments in Finnish Language Public Service Media

Swedish public radio has broadcasted in Finnish since 1969. In the late 1990s there were as many as 50-60 personnel, mostly reporters engaged in this work. Today the number of reporters has decreased drastically and some positions are not even refilled when personnel retires.

In the fall of 2015 a number of major changes took place in the Finnish language SR Sisuradio. The executives at the broadcasting company explained the changes as improvements and ways to reach a larger Sweden Finnish audience.

According to SR Sisuradio the purpose is to provide so called bilingual programs, in order to attract a younger Sweden Finnish audience that is presumed to have lost most of their Finnish language. Swedish and Finnish ought to be mixed in the programs, but Swedish dominates. Sometimes there are only some phrases in Finnish, and the rest is in Swedish.

There are similar trends in Finnish language television broadcasts, as described above, where Swedish is being used more often than before in the broadcasted programs.

### The Impact of the Changes in Public Service Media

The Government's purpose with the current broadcasting licences was to increase national minority language broadcasts. If majority language is being used in bilingual radio broadcasts, the majority language tends to dominate.

In SR Sisuradio there is not any full-service channel that covers the whole country. In the Public Service Reports 2018 there is some progress since 2013, but it is impossible to know if SR will substitute Finnish language programs with bilingual programs in their statistics in their annual Public Service Reports. This could be compared to the municipalities way of interpreting "partly in Finnish" in a very minimalistic way.

For securing the high quality in broadcasting in Finnish in Sweden there ought to be a journalist education in Finnish language and Sweden-Finnish culture.

There is still no television channel in Finnish in Sweden, in accordance with Article 11 c) i) of the European Language Charter. Some parts of the country can watch TV Finland (a selection of programs from the Finnish YLE broadcasts sent in Finland). TV Finland can only be a complement, not a substitute for Finnish language television in Sweden.

The rights of national minority/Indigenous children must be secured in accordance with Article 30 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child and the Council of Europe minority conventions. National minority children have the right to learn and develop their minority language and a cultural identity. This should be clearly stated in the next broadcasting licences in 2020.

## Education - The Lost Momentum Continues

The Lost Momentum report from 2016 listed challenges and concerns within the area of language rights not being met. This was especially the case when it came to children's rights to use, revitalise and further develop their national minority language. Sweden Finns have also since experienced reports of language bans on Finnish in schools. Continuous bans where national minority children and teachers have been told not to use their national minority language. This speaks volumes about how a school environment can actively promote assimilation and a mindset of a prevalent one language norm.

Arguably language status might play a role in this. In these cases Sweden shows an educational system lacking in knowledge to respect and/ or be able to further the language rights of a child belonging to a national minority. Hindrance of language might and in most cases hinders pupil's possibilities even further: self identification, culture and self expression rests widely on language. Pupils and parents are often left to fend for themselves when language or national minority law are not lived up to on a local level. This is often due to lack of knowledge or disregard of national minority rights. Some municipalities are keen on doing only the bare minimum. Sweden must take its responsibility where its' national minority languages are concerned.

Many of the structural and legal implementation problems remain in the field of education for the Sweden Finn national minority since 2016, when SOU 2017:19 was initiated by the Swedish Government. The inquiry was tasked to establish what action is required to safeguard and revitalise the national minority languages and published its main proposals in November 2017. The proposals are as follows:

A new subject – National minority language is listed in the education act. The subject national minority language is to be included in subject-time allocations and is to be 960 hours, distributed equally between the stages in compulsory school.

The inquiry also states that the current situation for bilingual education is inadequate in Finnish with sporadic municipal classes in Finnish and a few independent bilingual Swedish Finnish schools.

The situation for bilingual Swedish Finnish schools has become worse since 2016. There are now just five schools left and only three of them provide school years 7-9.

There is still no plan on how the educational situation should be improved and no definite answers are provided by the Ministry of Education two years after the inquiry was published. There is no additional information available on the inquiry from the Ministry of Education.

The Sweden Finnish Delegation believes that the upper secondary school education in Sweden regarding Finnish language is in need to be surveyed.

The inquiry National minority languages at school (SOU 2017:19) also emphasizes that a national strategic action plan should be set up concerning the training of teachers in national minority languages. For example, despite the current teacher training program for mother tongue teachers in Finnish the lack of teachers is still acute. Since the start in 2014 the teacher training programme at Stockholm University has provided for only a few teachers for grades 7-9, but there is a great need even for teachers in lower grades. In order to get teachers with the national certificate for teachers for the lower grades the national minority languages need to be included in the teacher training program for the comprehensive school. A change in Higher Education Ordinance in order to allow this has been suggested by the Universities of Umeå, Södertörn and Stockholm to the Ministry of Education in 2016-06-30, but the universities are still waiting for an answer to their suggestion.

One of the reasons for the low amount of students in teacher training is the relatively poor working conditions of the mother tongue teachers – including the subject national minority language in subject-time allocations by 960 would also improve the conditions.

When meetings led by the the County Administrative Board of Stockholm (responsible for reporting on the follow up on Sweden's national minority work nationally) invited national minority organisations to meet with administrative authorities in september of 2019, they opted to leave out Sweden Finn national organisations from meetings concerning the field of education. When the mistake was first noticeable and mentioned, the response of the administrative board was that they would keep this in mind and make changes for next time. This response was not satisfactory to the two organisations affected, so after extra effort on their part, meetings were in the end held with all organisations present. This is just one example of how easily national minority organisations might be kept aside and out of important meetings so we are not able to voice the minorities opinions and make national minority issues visible. This proves a point in how adequate structures supporting the national minorities are not in place and thus leaves much of the responsibility to the national minority.

## New suggestions for curriculum guidelines 2019

The Sweden Finnish Delegation notes that the suggestions so far for new curriculum guidelines weaken the possibilities to increase knowledge about the national minorities considerably and aims to further the invisibility of national minorities in important guidelines. It particularly sees cause to concern, as it is suggested that education about national minorities would be limited only to grades 4-6 of compulsory school. The Delegation argues that more so than a plain out of sight is out of mind trail of thought, is the fact that also surveys already prove that the general public mostly does not have a good knowledge, or indeed has a very limited knowledge of Sweden's national minorities. Not only should national minority children be given the opportunity and possibility to self identification throughout compulsory school, also pupils not belonging to any of the national minorities should be given the chance to learn about this part of Swedish history. As the rights of a child will become incorporated into Swedish law in 2020, it strikes the Sweden Finnish delegation also as odd to remove or make more invisible the national minorities from the curriculum guidelines on a word level.

## Language Not Grounds for Discrimination

There are seven grounds of discrimination in Sweden. Language is not one of them. Something affecting the lives of minority language speakers are the language bans experienced in schools. When parents have reported incidents of experienced bans on Finnish in schools, the way these complaints are dealt with by DO (the discrimination ombudsman in Sweden) parents have subsequently lost their right and voice to plead their child's case. Thus leaving the national minority without a voice in the case of language bans in schools. Skolverket (The Swedish National Agency for Education) who firstly has received these complaints, has automatically transferred them to the DO. The DO has not in these recent cases investigated these circumstances themselves they have however given an utterance on the basis on what documentation has been provided to them. According to DO the evidence has not proven that discrimination has taken place in the light of this documentation. In Sweden language is not considered as a grounds for discrimination. Parents or pupils cannot

appeal when the DO has brought forth its' utterance. This weakens the language rights of a child belonging to a national minority, as there are no protective structures in place to protect these language rights if they are violated. The Sweden Finnish Delegation would recommend that language should be included as grounds of discrimination.

## Increasing Need for Minority Language Care of the Elderly

The need for care of the elderly is increasing among elderly Sweden Finns. Statistical data shows that the number of elderly is increasing drastically and the numbers will continue to increase, according to Lost Momentum, the alternative report 2016. There are already almost 100 000 persons over the age of 60 years, and 47 000 are 70 years or older and around 15 000 have reached 80 years of age or older. It is thus essential to prepare for the large numbers of elderly Sweden Finns that will need care the in the coming years.

The number of care units providing care of the elderly in Finnish are very few in Sweden, even though they have increased when more municipalities have joined the administrative area for Finnish. Not even all the municipalities in the administrative area for Finnish have units providing service in Finnish. Some municipalities claim that they cannot find Finnish speaking personnel.

There are numerous reports on individual cases where elderly Sweden Finns do not receive care in Finnish, even when they need it acutely. These elderly persons that are placed in regular Swedish language care units experience isolation, anger, sorrow and frustration. Many elderly Sweden Finns are suffering from unworthy care conditions where they cannot communicate with the care providers, as stated in the Lost Momentum report. The Finnish-Swedish elderly organisation RSE argues that most of the municipalities are not fulfilling their obligations in 2019 under the Minority Act. There are many Finnish speaking elderly people, who cannot communicate in Swedish, but the only service they get in Finnish is a dictionary and a serviceperson, who only has a command of Swedish. This increases the risk of incorrect or unworthy treatment.

### Structural Problems

Sweden has had a national minority policy for 20 years now and it could thus be expected that the level of awareness about these rights and the needs of the national minorities would indeed be higher than it actually is.



Even the National Board of Health and Welfare points out in their report (Socialstyrelsen: Behovet av kunskap om den stärkta minoritetslagen, artikelnummer 2019-5-9 maj 2019) that the issues of national minorities are not a high priority in many municipalities and knowledge and awareness about the national minorities and their challenges is still very low.

The National Board of Health states that an authority of minority issues could have a responsibility of all national minority issues. We would like a separate, new authority of national minority issues be a part of the general minimal structures, even on the local level. The structures needed for implementing minority rights on the local or national levels are not in place, and very few efforts are being made to develop such structures.

The overall situation of the care of the elderly in Finnish in Sweden has thus not improved since the previous on the spot visit conducted by the Council of Europe. An alarming few municipalities provide adequate care in Finnish.

Source: Lost Momentum Minority Voices on the Implementation of Minority Rights in Sweden 2016. Alternative Report to the Council of Europe The Sweden Finnish Delegation and National Association of Swedish Tornedalians  
<https://sverigesradio.se/diverse/appdata/isidor/files/185/3768fe9e-1b0b-49d8-b713-14ddb211259.pdf>

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