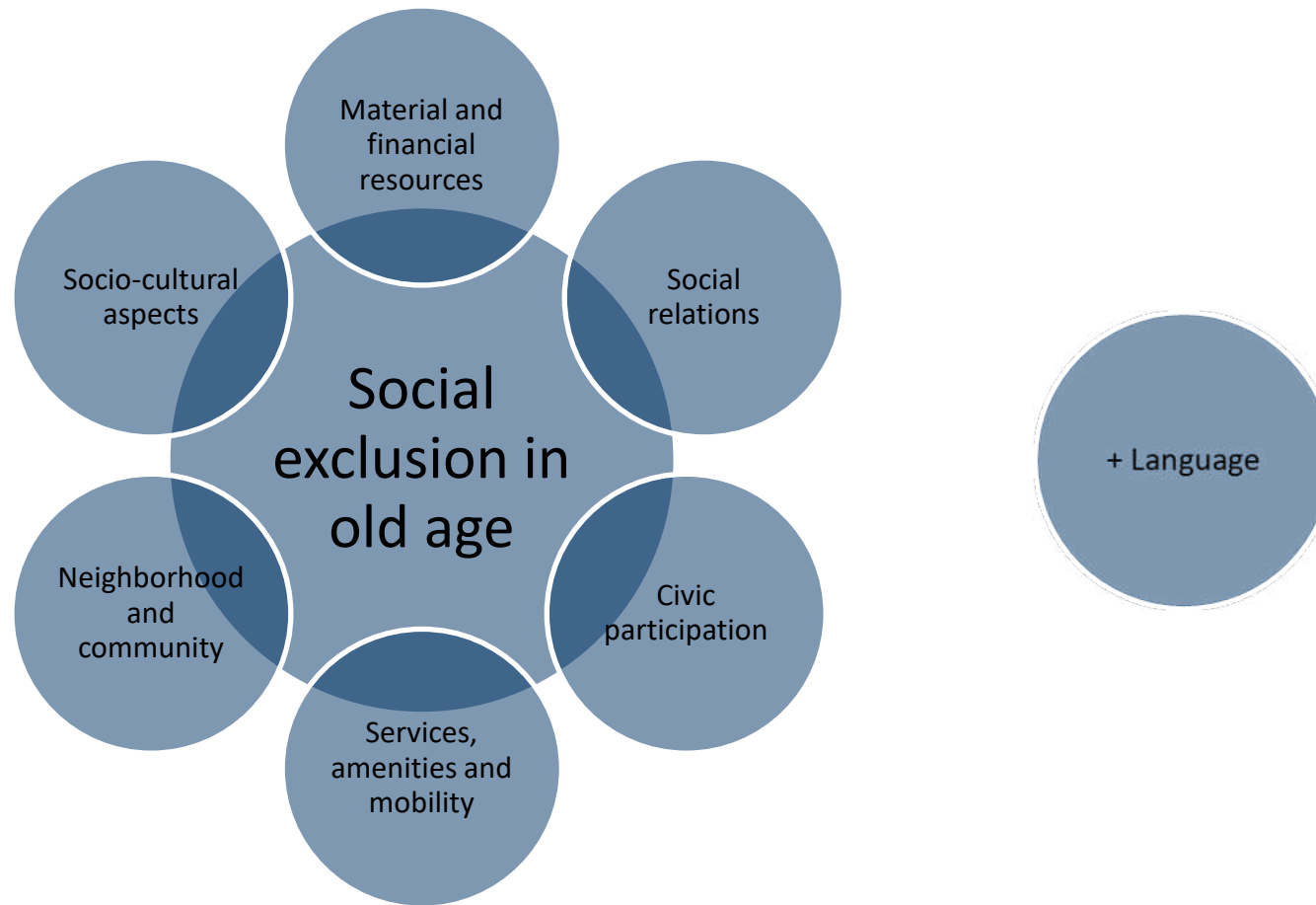


# THE SWEDISH LANGUAGE COMMUNITY IN FINLAND: Older adults

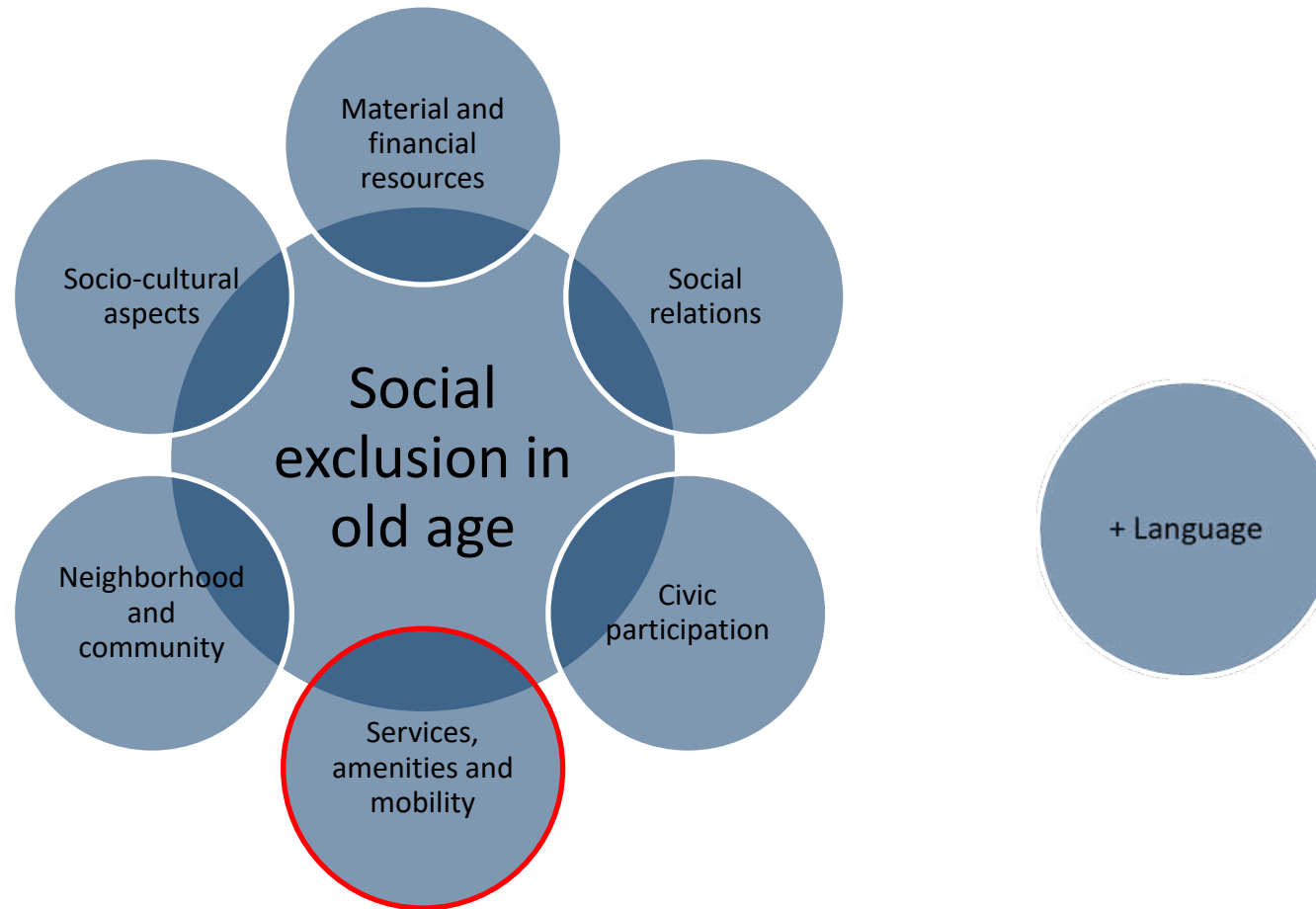
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Docent

# AgeMin: Social inclusion among older adults - focus on linguistic minorities in a national and international context





Ref: Walsh, K., Scharf, T., & Keating, N. (2017). Social exclusion of older persons: a scoping review and conceptual framework. *European Journal of Ageing*, 14(1), 81-98.



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# 1. Review: Canada, Finland, Wales

Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10823-021-09433-z>

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



**Social Exclusion Among Official Language Minority Older Adults: A Rapid Review of the Literature in Canada, Finland and Wales**

Fredrica Nyqvist<sup>1</sup>  · Emilia Häkkinen<sup>1</sup> · Alexandre Renaud<sup>2</sup> · Louise Bouchard<sup>2</sup> · Cynog Prys<sup>3</sup>

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# Societal conditions

- The largest number of studies
- Similar results across all three linguistic contexts
- Obstacles to service access in one's native language, linguistic barriers in high- and low involvement services
- Service encounters in own language dependent on the **concentration and vitality** of the linguistic minority

## 2.

### Minorités linguistiques et société Linguistic Minorities and Society

#### **Public Policy and Citizen-Based Practices That Support Social and Health Services for Official and Co-Official Language Minority Communities. An International Perspective: What Has Really Been Achieved and Where Are the Gaps?**

*Politiques publiques et pratiques citoyennes soutenant les services sociaux et de santé pour les communautés minoritaires de langues officielles et coofficielles. Une perspective internationale : ce qui a été accompli et ce qui reste à faire*

Louise Bouchard, Fredrica Nyqvist, Isidor Marí Mayans, Solange van Kemenade and Alexander R. Maisonneuve

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# Insights

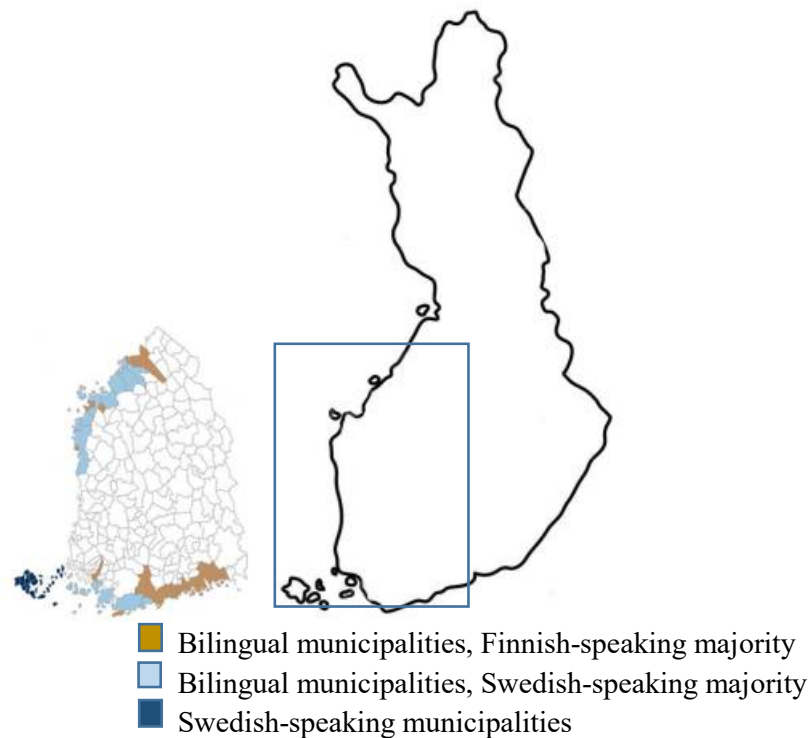
- **Increasing globalisation and international migration**, refugee displacement – complexify the official and co-official language debate
- Growing acknowledgement and awareness of **safety and human rights issues** in relation to language barriers – quality aspect
- **Increased legislation** and **public policy attention**
- **New approaches**: active offer, person or patient-centred care, professional training – research are documenting promising practices
- The importance of **civic organisations**

# Gaps/shortcomings

- **Good practices** – holistic approach integrating good practices is needed
- Effective **implementation** of policies and law enforcement is still lacking
- **Shortage of bilingual** social and health care workers



# 3. Language Barometer Survey 2016



Nyqvist, F., Lindell, M., Björklund, S., & Nygård, M. (2021). Being small and outnumbered: Service and sociocultural exclusion among older linguistic minorities in Finland. *Minorités linguistiques et société/Linguistic Minorities and Society*, 15–16, 39–64. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078476ar>

"Living in a regional language minority situation poses more challenges for the Swedish minority, including the bilingual Swedish-speaking minority, than it does for the Finnish-speaking minority"

# Social exclusion in service settings: language incongruency or identity discrimination, or both?

- **14 Swedish-speaking older adults**, living in a bilingual area (about 50 percent Swedish speakers)
- 65 years or older, Swedish as mother tongue
- 8 participants fluent in Finnish
- Data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic
  
- How is social exclusion shaped in linguistically lacking high-involvement services?

# High-involvement services (e.g. social- and health care)

- The need to switch over to Finnish
  - Longer waiting times, receiving services in Swedish required more patience and effort
  - Concern for elderly care service and mental health services
  - Lack of access to information in Swedish during the COVID-19 pandemic
- *[...] I have been to therapy to [mental health facility] and the therapist I got there was completely Finnish-speaking. She could maybe say “good day” and “thank you” in Swedish, but that was surely it. [...] So, there I missed being able to speak Swedish and... It later led to me having to quit there. [...] All nuances and how one wants to express oneself and understand each other, yes, it is really important. (Sofia, 74)*
  - *[...] I can imagine that those who only speak Swedish... can have problems. Because there are those within health care and within the service sector who do not master Swedish. This I have come across many times [...] let's say out of ten contacts, maybe three have been such. Where it is only Finnish. (Maj, 81)*

# Linguistic identity and exclusion within a service context



- Identity exclusion highlighted in situations where the importance of language was downplayed and where one's linguistic rights were not fulfilled
- Attitudes of service providers
- Language use entails so much more than just sufficient communication

*[...] You feel like you have the right to it, it is our language, and we are meant to be equal. (Fanny, 80)*

*I had an old aunt who spent the last year of her life in a bed ward in [city], and I thought it was so terrible when it was Christmas, and they all always had some Christmas carols on the radio and such, you know, and she did not know a single one of those Christmas carols because they were in Finnish. So, it is those kinds of things, that people do not think about the fact that all that stuff is also part of it. (Gunvor, 86)*

# Take-home-message

- Robust language legislation – constitutionally defined bilingualism of two national languages
- Linguistic rights are jeopardized by the inability to function in Swedish in service encounters
- Identity intersections with service exclusions

An aerial photograph of a vast archipelago, likely in the Åland Islands. The scene is dominated by numerous islands of varying sizes, all densely covered in green coniferous forests. The islands are separated by deep blue water, creating a complex network of channels and bays. In the far distance, a small town or city is visible on the horizon under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

**Thank you**

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