

Bilingual Social and Health Services

**NPLD-COPPIETERS CAMPUS 2023
MANAGING LANGUAGES IN
THE FIELD OF HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE
IN MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES**

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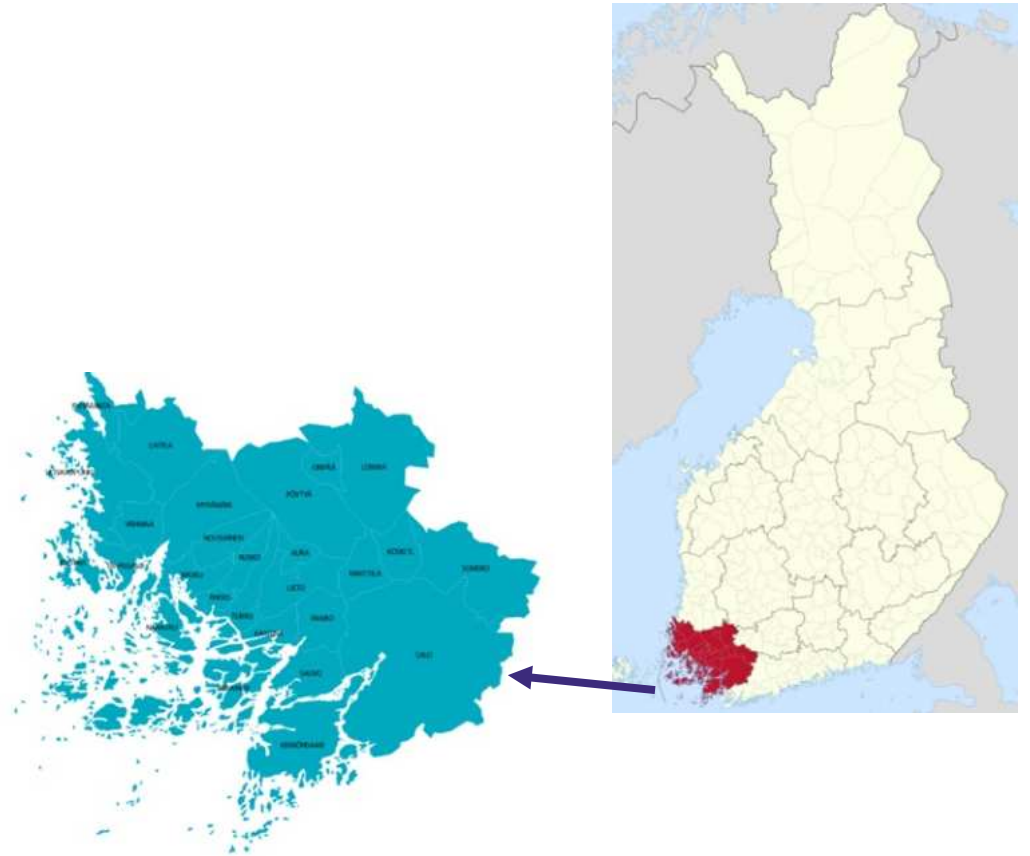
Director of Bilingual Services



The Southwest Finland region - a short introduction

The Southwest Finland Region

- In a European context, Southwest Finland is a **very typical medium-sized region**, in which a metropolitan urban area is surrounded by an area of influence that is relatively densely populated but rural in character.
- Southwest Finland's **central city** is the city of Turku with 200,000 inhabitants.
- The distance between Turku and Helsinki is approx. 160 km.
- The region overlooks **the world's largest archipelago** in terms of the number of islands.



The Southwest Finland Region

- **5.7 per cent** of the region's inhabitants are Swedish speaking, i.e. approx. 27,500 inhabitants.
- **Approx. 8.9 percent** of the region's inhabitants speak a native language other than Finnish or Swedish.
- Out of 27 municipalities in the region, **three are officially bilingual:**
 - The city of Turku
 - The city of Pargas
 - The municipality of Kimitoön



Digital services
Services on wheels



10

Connecting boat routes



13

Ferry services



Source: City of Pargas

**The Wellbeing Services
County of Southwest Finland (Varha)
- a short introduction**

A bilingual wellbeing services county

- Varha is one of seven (or nine) bilingual wellbeing services counties in Finland.
- The Wellbeing Services county of Southwest Finland (Varha) is **the second largest wellbeing services county** in Finland.
- Varha is the **largest employer in Southwest Finland** and one of Finland's largest employers. Varha employs 23,000 personnel.
- Varha operates in **hundreds of locations** around the region.



A wellbeing services county with a university hospital and a special assignment

- Varha is one of the five wellbeing services counties in Finland operating a **university hospital**.
- In addition, Varha provides for clients in need of **demanding specialized medical care** throughout our collaborative catchment area of nearly one million inhabitants.
- Our wellbeing services county is responsible for **coordinating a cooperation agreement** regarding services provided in Swedish by all bilingual wellbeing services counties.

- Varha's services are provided by **six divisions**
 - healthcare services,
 - services for seniors,
 - specialised medical care services (Turku University Hospital),
 - rescue services,
 - group services and
 - organisational services.

The organisational structure and strategy supporting the bilingual operations

- **Vibrant bilingualism requires**
 - legislative support,
 - clear internal governing documents,
 - a strategy that incorporates bilingualism and
 - full support from both the political leadership and the top management of the organisation.
- The **Organisational Services** of Varha include a department where Varha's Swedish-language services are being analysed and where actions are being taken to improve the quality of Varha's services in Swedish.

Varha's Mission

We secure, improve, rescue – wellbeing together, every day

Values on an equal basis – responsibly and effectively – in a friendly manner with professional skill

How to organise and produce bilingual Social and Health Services - case Varha

Bilingual Services team - a part of the Organisational Services division

- **Varha's Bilingual Services department** develops and promotes bilingualism and coordinates and advises on bilingualism matters within the organisation – and, if needed, externally as well.
- We are the eyes and ears of Varha's **National Language Board**.
- We also **support the executive team**. We are there to assist the **managers and the supervisors too**, reminding them always to take language issues into consideration, in every process where it is necessary, as early in the process as possible.
- We are there for the **customers and the patients**.
 - We support them in making use of services in the language they choose, i.e. in Finnish or Swedish.
 - We want the customers and patients to be aware of their rights and to demand what they are entitled to.
- Likewise, we **support and assist the staff** when it comes to language issues.
 - What are the rights of the patients? What are my rights as an employee? What can I do to improve my Swedish speaking skills?



Bilingual operations are supported

- To highlight the **positive aspects** of bilingualism and the **opportunities** created by bilingualism is our mission.
 - Our goal is to offer solutions to the other divisions and teams, not to introduce problems.
- We work to ensure that Swedish and Finnish are being used **parallel and simultaneously** in all communication, both internal and external.
- Our team has introduced a **service desk** called "Ask Annika," where customers and employees may ask anything about Varha, in Swedish, and they can be sure that they will get an answer in Swedish.
- **Our team of six persons** actively work for and actively also monitor **access to services** provided in Swedish.
- Currently our team is managing the development of a **Language Strategy** for Varha - created in collaboration with every division of Varha.
- The Language Strategy will include an action programme which sets yearly goals "top down" in the organisation, including pointing out the individuals responsible for each action planned.

Varha's bilingual operations

- In practice, those Varha units that provide services in both Finnish and Swedish operate across a **geographically fragmented area**, mainly in the areas of the city of Pargas and in the area of the municipality of Kimitoön.
 - One of the special features of these municipalities is that both incorporate a considerable area of archipelago.
 - These two municipalities are officially bilingual, with Swedish as the majority language.
- The bilingual whole should also include "Swedish Turku" and the Swedish-speaking population in the monolingual Finnish municipalities around the city.
- In the city of Turku, however, the **Swedish-language services are fragmented**, which makes it challenging for the new organisation to integrate the services with the bilingual operations.

Varha's bilingual operations

- In the city of Turku there is one (1) health care clinic with a bilingual doctor-care team. Otherwise, the services in Swedish are **fully or partially integrated** with the Finnish-language services.
- This means that it is **not possible to ensure** that a Swedish-speaking customer meets with the personnel who can provide care or service in Swedish.
- There is a **need to develop bilingual services** within the city of Turku and now plans are made for a bilingual health care centre in central Turku.
- In this health care centre, local services would be offered **both to the Swedish-speaking and a part of the Finnish-speaking** population of Turku.
- The health care centre could also provide **certain centralized services** for the entire region's Swedish-speaking population.
- *The specialised medical care services (Turku University Hospital) have a long history of bilingualism and is a good example of how consistent efforts over time lead to steady improvement.*

How to ensure Social and Health Services in the minority language - case Varha

Appreciate language skills when recruiting

- **Before recruiting**, take the necessary language skills into consideration from the very beginning of the recruitment process.
- **When recruiting**, always consider skills in the minority language as important as the other competences required.
 - This requires an understanding of the meaning of the customers rights and that a person's emotional language has an impact on the outcomes of the service or care given.



Consider language aspects in the organisational structure

- Recruit staff **who know the minority language** and who want to improve their language skills.
 - Also recruit people with good language skills who are **qualified for the manager and director positions**, where good language skills in both national languages are required.
- Identify the needs of the language minority when **building the structure of the organisation**.
- Introduce “Language Ambassadors, a network of employees promoting the minority language.
- Identify if there is a need to maintain an organisational structure that takes into account that the **population in certain geographical areas** represents the minority language group and may lack any knowledge of the majority language.
 - In such areas, an organisational structure based on substantive entities does not necessarily work.

Encourage the employees

- Offer the employees **language courses** during working hours.
 - Using interpreters is not an alternative (Finnish-Swedish-Finnish) within a bilingual wellbeing services county.
 - The organisations need to themselves employ enough personnel who can manage in both Finnish and/or Swedish.
- Offer the employees **language allowances** as a part of the salary.
 - In Varha, the language allowance is 25 euros per person per month, when some previously defined criteria are met.



Build bilingual customer processes



As part of the personnel plan laid out for the new bilingual health care centre in Turku, a large survey of Varha employees is conducted inquiring about their language skills and about their interest in working bilingually in this new bilingual work environment.

- Make sure that staff with the appropriate language skills **meet the right patients/customers.**
 - When planning customer processes, this is something that always should be taken into consideration.
- The customer process or the service process can – and often should – **look different** when the customer is entitled to receive services in a minority language.
 - In Varha, we do not yet have full knowledge of the language skills of our employees, but we are working on it!

Create bilingual work environments



- **Create surroundings** where staff representing the minority can work as a team or at least in close cooperation, building networks.
- This does not necessarily have to mean in the same physical buildings, but if it does, the language questions must be **taken into consideration already when planning out the operational premises.**
- The **bilingual work environment** can be either a physical or an emotional environment, or both.
 - This might improve the psychological security of the employees, which might increase job satisfaction.
 - This might be advantageous when recruiting.

**The cooperation agreement between
bilingual wellbeing services counties
- a new frontier**

Background and motivations of the agreement

- In Finland, there have been **longstanding deficiencies** in access to social and health care in Swedish.
- **Through a law on a cooperation agreement** between bilingual wellbeing services counties, the legislature wanted to promote
 - 1) both access to several services in Swedish and
 - 2) also regional equality in terms of services in Swedish.

- The cooperation agreement can be viewed as a new frontier in the ongoing struggle to improve access to social and health care in Swedish in Finland.
- Varha has the special assignment of preparing the cooperation agreement between the bilingual wellbeing services counties

Subject of the agreement

- The contractual obligation applies to **division of labour** and **cooperation** in the implementation of such social and health care services in Swedish **where it is necessary to ensure that the linguistic rights are satisfied**, based on
 - how demanding the task is or
 - how uncommon the task is or
 - how large the costs are.

- The contractual obligation applies also to the **division of labour** and the **cooperation** regarding such social and health care services in Swedish that are **expedient to implement only in a part of the wellbeing services counties** as a result of
 - how demanding the task is or
 - how uncommon the task is or
 - how large the costs are.

Services covered by the agreement

- Expert consultation and development tasks in connection with specialised health care:
 - both services provided to customers and professional support and development activities provided for experts
- Activities at counselling providers for people with developmental disabilities, residential, day and work centres, and other services within the disability services
- Particularly demanding services in addiction treatment
- Services providing 24-hour care in child psychiatry
- Certain child welfare services (e.g. emergency placements)
- Speech therapy
- Sex crime investigations
- Some housing services for the elderly



Implementing the agreement

- The agreement is a **framework agreement**. Regarding specific services, the organisations must enter into **service agreements**, with reference to the framework agreement.
- **The annex to the agreement** enumerates which Swedish-language services the various wellbeing services counties have already agreed to cooperate on or which services they wish to initiate cooperation on.
- The cooperation agreement will **develop over time**.
- The agreement negotiations have been completed in June 2023. The term of the agreement shall begin within this year.
- The bilingual wellbeing services counties will have an official network that meets regularly (at least four times a year).



“The ball is in our court”

**Bilingualism is an
opportunity**

Thank you!