

#07

NPLD

Focus Reports

Spring 2026

NPLD 2026 Annual Conference



25 Years of the European Charter in Sweden:

Achievements, Gaps and Future Directions in Sweden and Beyond

Author: Lasse Vuorsola (University of Stockholm)

The 2026 NPLD Annual Conference, held at Stockholm University on 8 May 2026, brought together seventy language policymakers, researchers, public officials, minority language organisations and representatives of regional governments from across Europe to reflect on the 25th anniversary of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) in Sweden and beyond.

The conference was opened by representatives of the Faculty of Humanities of Stockholm University, the European Commission and the NPLD. Welcoming participants on behalf of Stockholm University, Vice-Dean **Laura Álvarez López** underlined the importance of academic cooperation and research in advancing linguistic diversity and minority language protection across Europe.

Speaking on behalf of the European Commission, **Anna Solé** (DG EAC) reaffirmed the European Union's longstanding commitment to linguistic diversity as a core European value and highlighted the importance of multilingualism, inclusion and cultural diversity within the European project.

Opening the conference, NPLD Chair **Anna Jungner-Nordgren** underlined that linguistic diversity today is not only a matter of cultural heritage or education policy, but increasingly also one of democratic participation, digital visibility and institutional equality in a rapidly changing technological environment. Referring to recent European discussions on cultural diversity and digital platforms, she stressed that regional and minority languages must remain fully present in the spaces where citizens increasingly live, learn and consume culture.



Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD). 1, Rue de la Pépinière | Boomkwekerijstraat - 1000 Brussels (Belgium).

Registered with the Crossroads Bank for Enterprises no: BE-0658.850.328 | npld@npld.eu | www.npld.eu |

Moderated by **Lasse Vuorsola** (Stockholm University), the conference explored both the achievements and the limitations of the Charter after twenty-five years of implementation, with particular attention to monitoring mechanisms, revitalisation policies, education rights and the growing impact of digitalisation and artificial intelligence on Europe's linguistic diversity.

The aim of the conference was to discuss the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, its monitoring and implementation, and how its interpretation has evolved over the 25 years since its establishment. The programme for the half-day conference consisted of a keynote speech, two thematic sessions and a panel discussion including both in-person and online contributions. The topics that were presented and discussed at the conference are summarised below.

Keynote speech: The Charter and its 25 years

Jarmo Lainio | Member of the Committee of Experts (COMEX) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Professor emeritus Jarmo Lainio delivered a presentation marking 25 years of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), focusing on its development, implementation and continuing relevance in Europe. In the presentation, Lainio situated the Charter within the broader framework of the Council of Europe (CoE), discussed the Charter's relation to CoE's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) as well as mentioned the differences between ratifying and only signing the ECRML.

As a longtime member and former chair of the Committee of Experts (COMEX) Lainio explained the Charter's structure and monitoring system. He outlined how states commit to obligations under different parts of the Charter and detailed how monitoring is conducted through periodic state reports, consultations with minority language speakers, and on-site visits by the Committee of Experts.

The Swedish implementation of the Charter was discussed, especially regarding education rights for Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami. Lainio mentioned also the problem related to the fact that Sweden has ratified Sami as one language despite there being five Sami languages spoken in Sweden. The presentation highlighted Sweden's obligations concerning pre-school and primary education in minority languages and stressed that implementation must be assessed in relation to the Charter commitments themselves, not national legislation.

Beyond discussing the Swedish implementation of the Charter, Lainio also addressed broader European developments concerning minority languages. Examples from several countries illustrated the linguistic diversity protected under the Charter noting that approximately 79 languages and more than 200 linguistic groups were covered under the Charter in 2019.



Another major theme was the adaptation of the Charter to contemporary societal and technological developments. The presentation referred to work on media, online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing role of artificial intelligence in supporting minority languages. COMEX has encouraged states to include minority languages in AI research, digitalisation policies and online educational resources to strengthen language use in both public and private life. Technological developments affect how the Charter is interpreted and thus Lainio characterized the Charter both as a static and a dynamic instrument.

Finally, the presentation reflected on the overall consequences of the Charter and related conventions after 25 years. While progress has been made through legislative reforms, institutional support and the professionalisation of minority organisations, implementation remains uneven across Europe. Education, media access and judicial services continue to be among the main areas of concern. In Sweden, recent fluctuations in financial support for minority-language initiatives were highlighted, alongside ongoing discussions concerning language diversification and recognition, including continued advocacy for Elfdalian.

Minority communities' perspectives: what has really changed in 25 years?

Sari Pesonen | The Institute for Language and Folklore (Isof)

Sari Pesonen presented a community-oriented perspective on the development of minority language policy in Sweden during the 25 years since the ratification of the ECRML and FCNM. The presentation examined what has changed in practice for minority communities and where significant challenges remain.

Pesonen outlined how ratification marked a shift from invisibility to formal recognition and established minority policy as a separate policy area in Sweden. Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Romani chib and Sámi were given further legal protection through the Minority Act and the Language Act. Over time, greater emphasis has been placed on implementation, revitalisation and consultation with minority communities. More recent developments have included truth and reconciliation processes and increased attention to historical injustices and assimilation policies. Public authorities and universities have also been given new responsibilities concerning minority languages, while national language centres and revitalisation initiatives have been established.

However, significant implementation gaps remain. Although a structured system of legislation, monitoring and institutional responsibilities has been built, implementation varies greatly between municipalities and regions. Access to services and language rights remains uneven, particularly outside administrative areas, and some minority groups continue to receive weaker support than others. The expansion of administrative areas has also slowed in recent years.

Pesonen pointed out that revitalisation ultimately depends on communities themselves. Families,



local organisations and everyday language use remain central to maintaining minority languages and cultures. While public institutions have become more active and knowledgeable, these efforts have not always translated into meaningful changes in the daily lives of minority-language speakers.

Although awareness, visibility and willingness to revitalise minority languages have grown significantly over the past 25 years, language transmission across generations remains fragile and the long-term sustainability of revitalisation efforts is still uncertain. Pesonen concluded that public policy and revitalisation strategies must continue to evolve in response to changing societal realities and community needs.

Monitoring and data: how do we know whether the Charter is working?

Jürgen Pirker | Vice-Chair of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The theme of the presentation centred on how the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages can be evaluated and monitored, focusing on the question of how to determine whether the Charter is “working” in practice.

A central theme of the presentation was the importance of data and knowledge in assessing the Charter’s impact. The speaker outlined the monitoring system carried out by COMEX, which relies on periodic state reports submitted every five years, together with information from alternative sources such as NGOs and minority-language organisations.

COMEX’s on-site visits with government representatives, parliamentarians, minority-language speakers, NGOs, ombudspersons, academics, journalists and other experts were discussed as well as the resulting evaluation reports that Comex produces.

Pirker discussed further that the Charter functions not only as a legal monitoring mechanism, but also as a broader framework for international standard-setting concerning minority rights and language protection. At the same time, concerns were raised about possible “monitoring fatigue” and the challenges of sustaining long-term engagement from states and institutions.

Pirker concluded by emphasising that the effectiveness of the Charter ultimately depends on continued promotion, awareness-raising, institutional cooperation, dialogue and the empowerment of minority-language speakers themselves.



Panel discussion: Beyond Sweden: Lessons from Across Europe

The concluding panel discussion brought together perspectives from Finland, Spain, the Netherlands and Wales, highlighting both the diversity of constitutional approaches to minority language protection in Europe and the common structural challenges faced across different contexts. Despite important differences in legal frameworks and governance models, a shared conclusion emerged throughout the discussion: legal recognition alone is insufficient. Effective minority language protection requires sustained political commitment, stable institutional

frameworks, adequate funding, educational continuity and active community engagement. Across all interventions, the Charter was presented not only as a legal instrument, but also as a mechanism for democratic accountability and multilingual governance.

Presenting the Finnish case, **Tom Moring (University of Helsinki)** highlighted Finland's constitutional bilingualism and the specific protections granted to Sámi languages. While Swedish benefits from strong institutional support, important regional disparities remain, and Sámi languages continue to face challenges linked to language shift, limited services and demographic pressures, making revitalisation efforts increasingly urgent.

Focusing on Spain, **Eva Pons (University of Barcelona)** discussed the implementation of the Charter in relation to Catalan, Basque, Galician and other minority languages. While the Charter has provided an important framework supporting language promotion policies, implementation remains uneven due to ongoing tensions between regional autonomy and centralised state structures. Persistent gaps remain notably in areas such as justice, state administration and the effective guarantee of linguistic rights.

The Frisian perspective, presented by **Jelske Dijkstra (Mercator-Fryske Akademy)**, illustrated how long-term cooperation between the Dutch State and the Province of Fryslân has enabled relatively stable language planning policies for Frisian, particularly in the fields of education, institutional coordination and Charter monitoring. At the same time, challenges remain concerning digital language use, generational transmission and differing interpretations of Charter obligations.

From a Welsh perspective, **Emyr Lewis (Aberystwyth University)** reflected on both the opportunities and limitations created by devolution in the United Kingdom. While robust institutions, including the Welsh Language Commissioner, have significantly strengthened Welsh language policy over recent decades, important concerns remain regarding education rights, demographic pressures and the socio-economic fragility of Welsh-speaking communities.

Vesna Crnić-Grotić (University of Rijeka) addressed the broader applicability and interpretation of the Charter itself, arguing that ratification does not automatically guarantee stronger



protection for all minority languages. She warned that governments may sometimes “game” the system through restrictive implementation practices, including excessive language proficiency requirements or narrow interpretations of obligations. She also referred to the existence of “glass ceilings” in implementation, where states become reluctant to expand protection measures beyond a certain point. More broadly, she stressed that political shifts across Europe increasingly affect how the Charter is interpreted and applied in practice.

Overall, the panel discussion highlighted both the diversity of minority language governance models across Europe and the persistence of common structural challenges. While Finland, Spain, the Netherlands and Wales each represent distinct constitutional and policy traditions, all demonstrated that the vitality of minority languages depends on long-term institutional commitment extending well beyond formal legal recognition alone.

Concluding reflections

The conference reaffirmed the continuing relevance of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages as one of the central pillars of Europe’s linguistic diversity framework. Twenty-five years after its entry into force in Sweden, the discussions demonstrated both the significant progress achieved in many European contexts and the persistent implementation gaps that continue to affect minority language communities across the continent.

Beyond legal recognition, participants repeatedly stressed that effective language revitalisation requires long-term political commitment, stable institutional structures, adequate public funding, educational continuity and meaningful participation of minority language communities themselves.

At the same time, the conference highlighted the growing importance of new technological and societal challenges. Digitalisation, online communication platforms and artificial intelligence are increasingly shaping how languages are used, transmitted and made visible in public life. In this evolving environment, the protection and promotion of regional and minority languages can no longer be understood solely through traditional educational or cultural frameworks, but must also be approached as a question of digital inclusion, democratic participation and technological fairness.

The discussions held in Stockholm confirmed the importance of continuing to strengthen European cooperation, monitoring mechanisms and policy innovation in order to ensure that Europe’s linguistic diversity remains a living and dynamic component of democratic life in the twenty-first century.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING FROM THE CONFERENCE

- Continue strengthening the implementation and monitoring mechanisms of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages across Europe.
- Ensure that minority language protection extends beyond formal legal recognition and includes effective implementation in education, media, public administration and digital environments.
- Reinforce long-term institutional and financial support for minority language revitalisation policies.
- Increase cooperation between governments, universities, minority language organisations and international institutions in the field of language policy and planning.
- Ensure that regional and minority languages are fully integrated into digitalisation strategies, AI development and online educational resources.
- Promote the active participation of minority language communities themselves in the design and evaluation of language policies.
- Continue adapting the interpretation and implementation of the Charter to evolving societal, demographic and technological realities.





ABOUT NPLD FOCUS REPORTS

NPLD Focus Reports is a series of publications that aims to raise awareness on Constitutional Regional and Small-State languages in Europe. The series includes two kinds of articles: articles to describe best practices in the field of language promotion and articles to address current affairs topics on linguistic diversity in Europe.

The information and views set out in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the NPLD. Neither the NPLD members nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

COORDINATION

Vicent Fenollar i Sastre | NPLD



The Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) is a European-wide network working in the field of language policy and planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages across Europe. The NPLD includes both national and regional governments, universities and associations as its members. www.npld.eu.

