

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Helsinki, showing a dense urban landscape with various buildings, including residential blocks and commercial structures. A large white rectangular box is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the title and subtitle. The background image is in grayscale.

Moving to a bilingual country

The foreign-language community's perception, knowledge, skills and attitude towards the Swedish language in Finland

Survey, spring 2020

About the survey

- A web-based open survey, conducted among the readers of Helsinki Times
- Target group: individuals residing in Finland and born outside Finland whose mother tongue is other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi
- Previous study in 2009 by Helsinki Times and Magma
<http://magma.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/46.pdf>

Respondents 2020 and 2009

2020

- N=542
- 83 different countries of origin, 60 languages as mother tongue
- 59 % lives in Helsinki Metropolitan Area
- 45 % have lived in Finland less than 5 years
- 90 % speak at least one language fluently in addition to their own mother tongue

2009

- N=510
- 79 nationalities, 71 languages as mother tongue
- 69 % lives in Helsinki Metropolitan Area
- 71 % had stayed in Finland less than 5 years
- 90 % speak at least one language fluently in addition to their own mother tongue

Respondents 2020 and 2009

2020

- 76 % men – 24 % women
- 43 % of respondents 20–39 yrs, and 33 % above 50 yrs
- 66 % cohabiting or married
- 74 % have a university degree
- 49 % working full time, 10 % students, 6 % unemployed, 15 % retired

2009

- 61 % men – 39 % women
- 80 % of respondents 20–39 yrs, and 7 % above 50 yrs
- 62 % cohabiting or married
- 64 % have a university degree
- 45 % working full time, 27 % students, 10 % unemployed

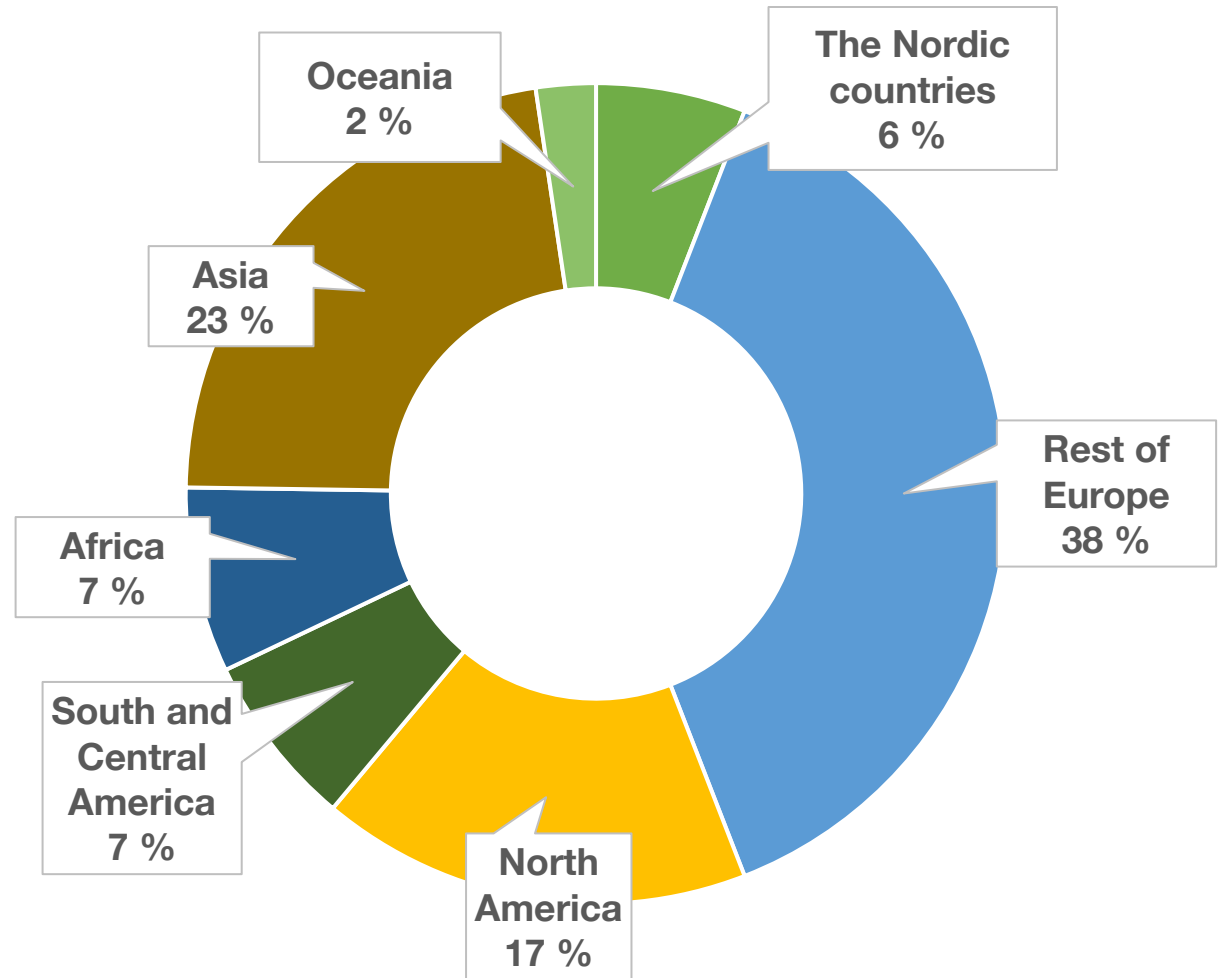
Country of Origin

- 83 countries
- Biggest groups:
 - USA 13 %
 - United Kingdom 12 %
 - India 5 %
 - Germany, Russia, Finland 4 %
 - Canada, China, Netherlands 3 %



Country of Origin

- 83 countries
 - 44 % originating in Europe
 - 23 % in Asia
 - 17 % in North America



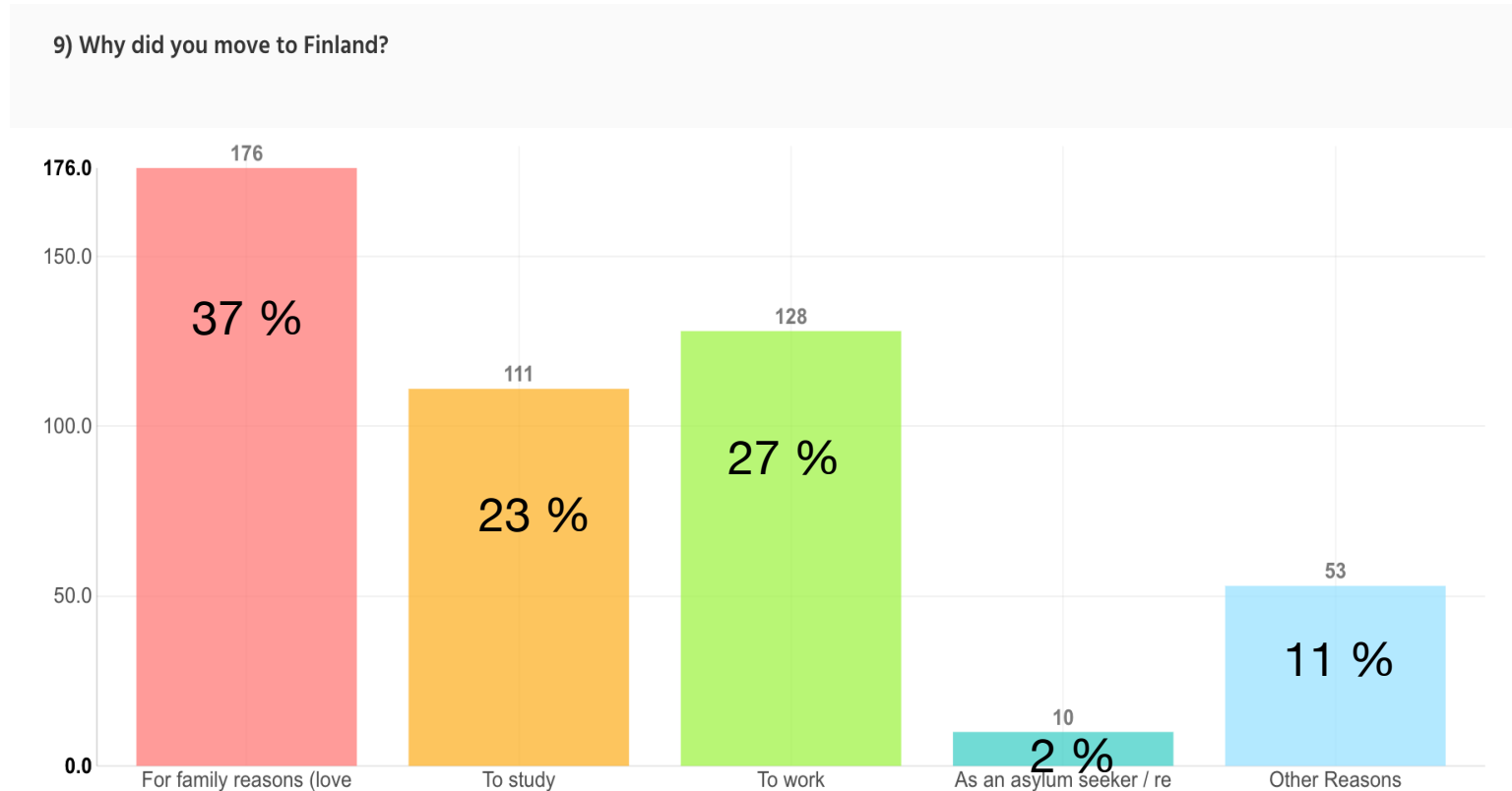
Mother tongue/native language

- 60 languages
- Largest mother-tongue language groups:
 - English 34 %
 - Spanish 9 %
 - German 6 %
 - Russian 5 %
 - Arabic 4 %
 - French, Dutch, Chinese 3 %



Why did you move to Finland?

- 37 % moved for family reasons (love, relatives etc)
- 27 % to work
- 23 % to study
- 2 % as asylum seeker/refugee
- 11 % for other reasons
- Reasons very similar to those in 2009



Why did you move to Finland?

“Other reason”, for example:

Nordic progressiveness

Needing to live in a quiet place in the midst of nature

Love to the country

husbands job posting

I am not living permanently in Finland

To establish business, transfer my family and allow my kids good opportunity of highest level of good education in Finland

Desire to live in a Nordic country

need for change

I came for holidays and I decided to stay a little longer and a little longer.

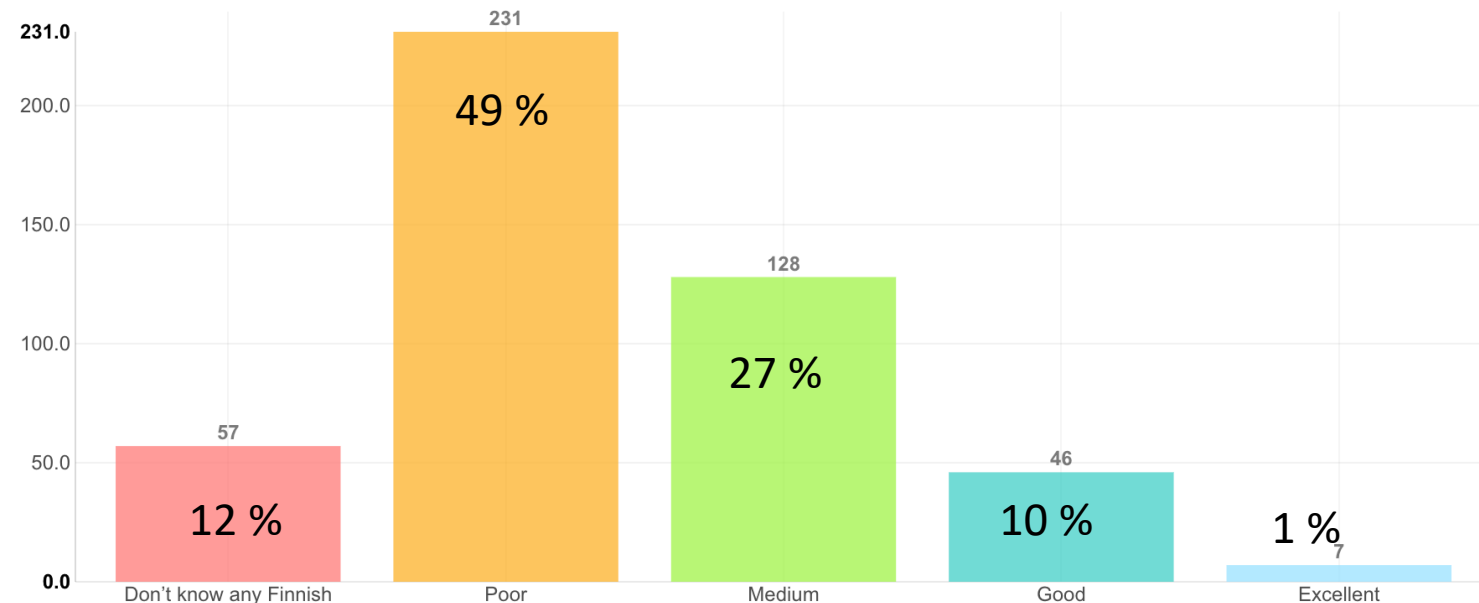
diplomat

Language skills: Finnish

Puhutko
suomea?

- 61 % say that their level of Finnish is poor or that they don't know any Finnish
(57 % in 2009)
- 27 % medium
- 11 % estimate it to be good or excellent
(16 % in 2009)

13) Level of Finnish language?



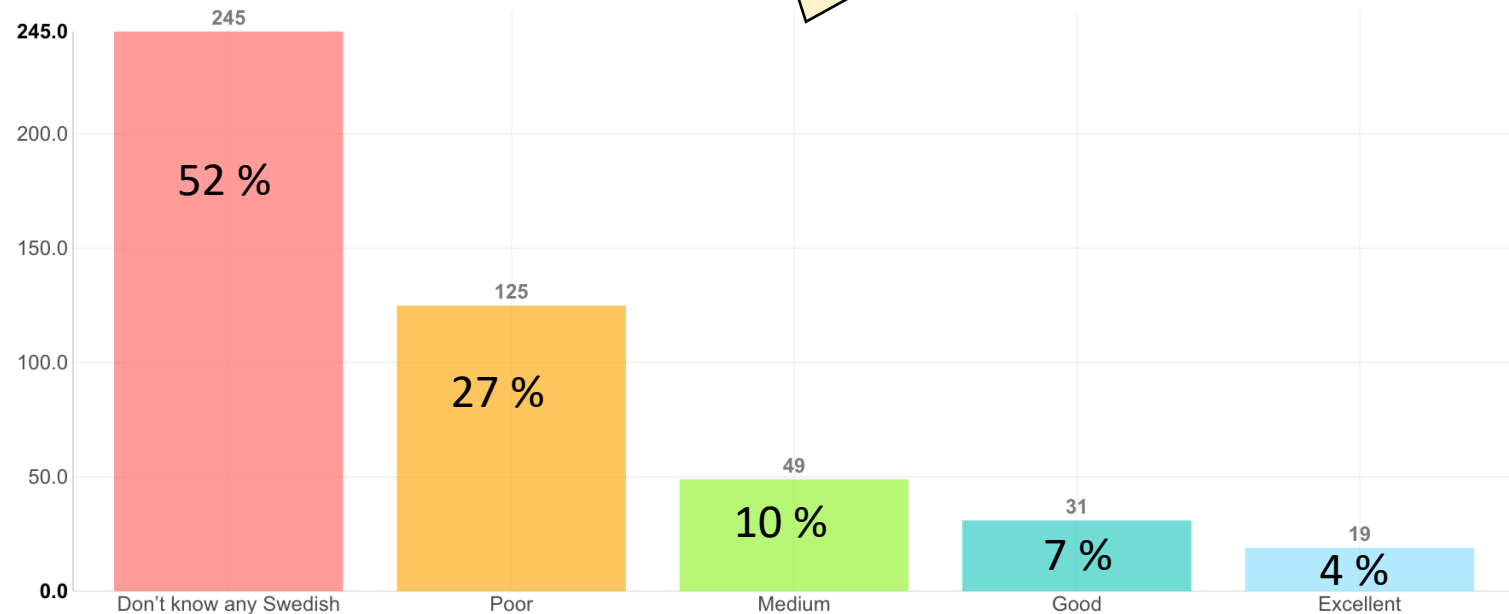
Answered: 469 | Skipped: 115

Language skills: Swedish

- 79 % say that their level of Swedish is poor or that they don't know any Swedish (52 % no Swedish) (89 % and 65 % in 2009)
- 11 % estimate it to be good or excellent (6 % in 2009)
- 31 % have learned/ partly learned Swedish while in Finland (16 % in 2009 "learned some Swedish")

Talar du svenska?

14) Level of Swedish language?



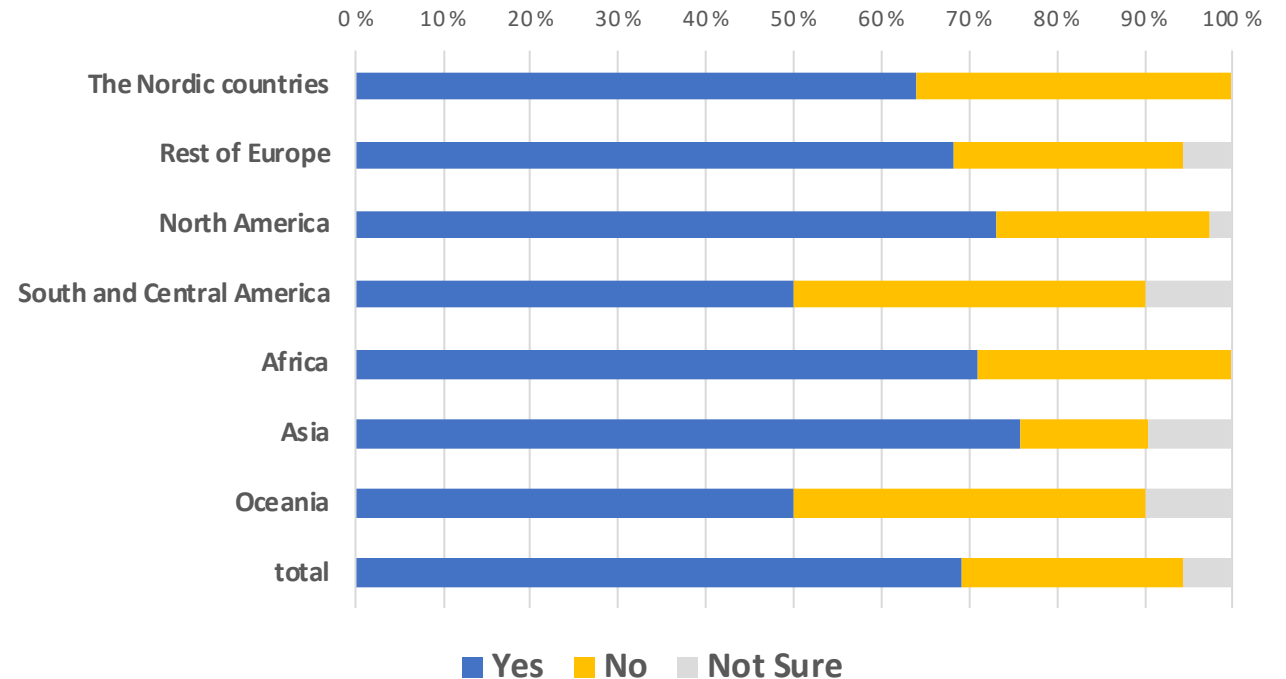
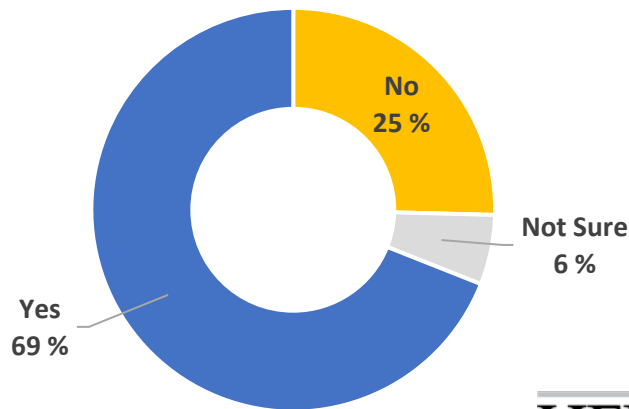
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”I think that Swedish would be easier to learn for me than Finnish”

- 82 % partly agree or strongly agree with the statement that Swedish would be easier to learn for them than Finnish
(70 % in 2009)

Are you aware of the fact that immigrants have the right to choose **Swedish as their first integration language** in bilingual municipalities?

- 69 % knew that you can choose Swedish as first integration language
- Best known among migrants from North America, Africa and Asia



Knowledge of Swedish-speaking culture in Finland

- Foreign-born residents in Finland have a strong level of awareness of the status of the Swedish language in Finland:
 - 85 % knew there was more than one official language in Finland when they came to Finland (81 % in 2009)
 - 68 % knew or guessed that the share of Swedish-speaking population is 5 % (multiple choice: 2%, 5%, 15% or 40%) (79 % in 2009)
 - 66 % knew or guessed that Finland was a part of Sweden until 1809 (multiple choice: 1500, 1809, 1880 or 1917). (74 % in 2009)
- Yet, 43 % of the respondents don't think that they have sufficient knowledge about the Swedish language culture in Finland (47 % in 2009)

Attitudes towards the Swedish language and Swedish-speaking community

- Attitudes generally positive, even more positive than in 2009:
 - 61 % partly agree or strongly agree with the claim that the Swedish language is an essential part of Finnish society. (47 % in 2009)
(Finnish speakers very similar, 62 % in 2017)
 - 68 % would like to have more contact with Swedish speakers in Finland
(42 % of Finnish speakers partly or strongly agree)
 - 29 % would not consider putting their children in a Swedish-speaking school/kindergarten (partly disagree or strongly disagree), rest positive or can't say
(25 % of Finnish speakers)

* Comparisons with Finnish-speakers from e2-report from 2017: *Puhut sie ruotsia? – tutkimus suomenkielisten asenteista ruotsin kieleen ja ruotsinkielisiin*

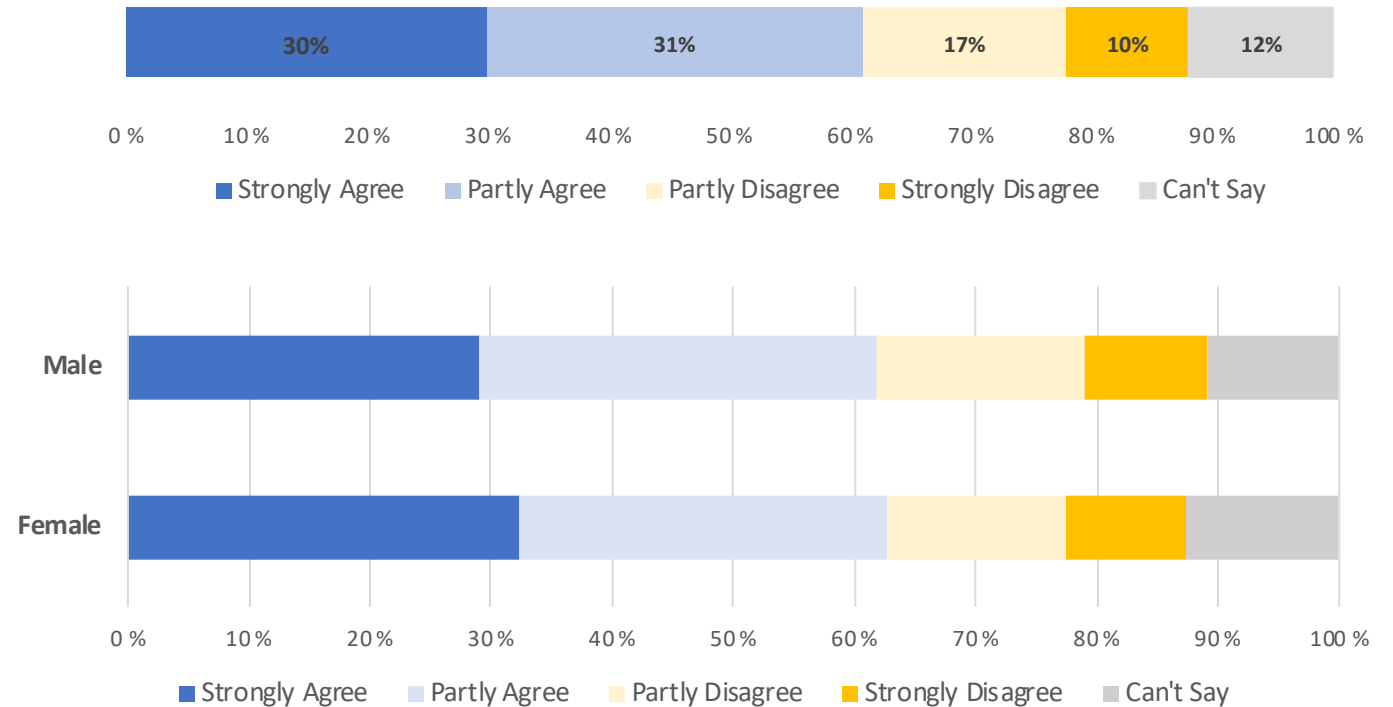
Contact with Swedish speakers

- 15 % have relatives in Finland who speak Swedish as their mother tongue
- 65 % have friends in Finland who speak Swedish as their mother tongue
- 53 % have colleagues at work in Finland who speak Swedish as their mother tongue
- (Finnish speakers: 60 % have friends, relatives or colleagues in 2017)

Attitude: “The Swedish language is an essential part of Finnish society”

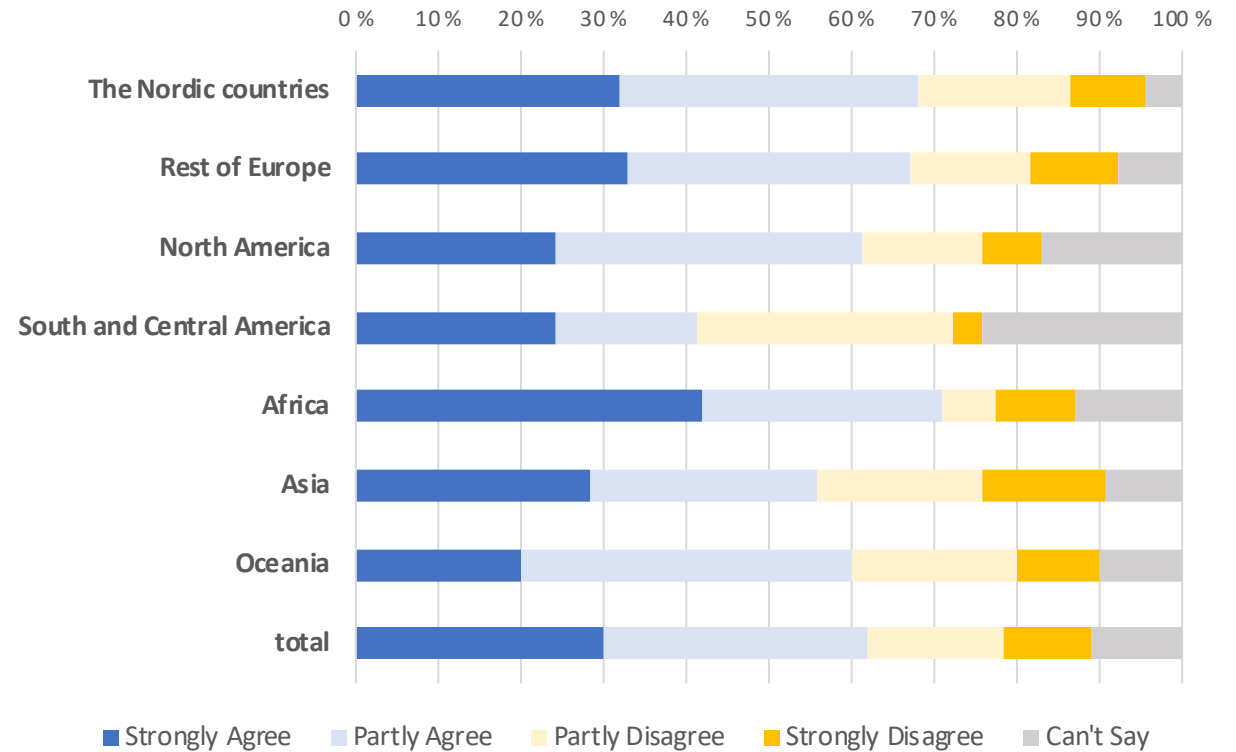
- Education, age or gender do not seem to impact perceptions on the position of Swedish in Finland

the Swedish language is an essential part of Finnish society (N=429)



Attitude: “The Swedish language is an essential part of Finnish society”

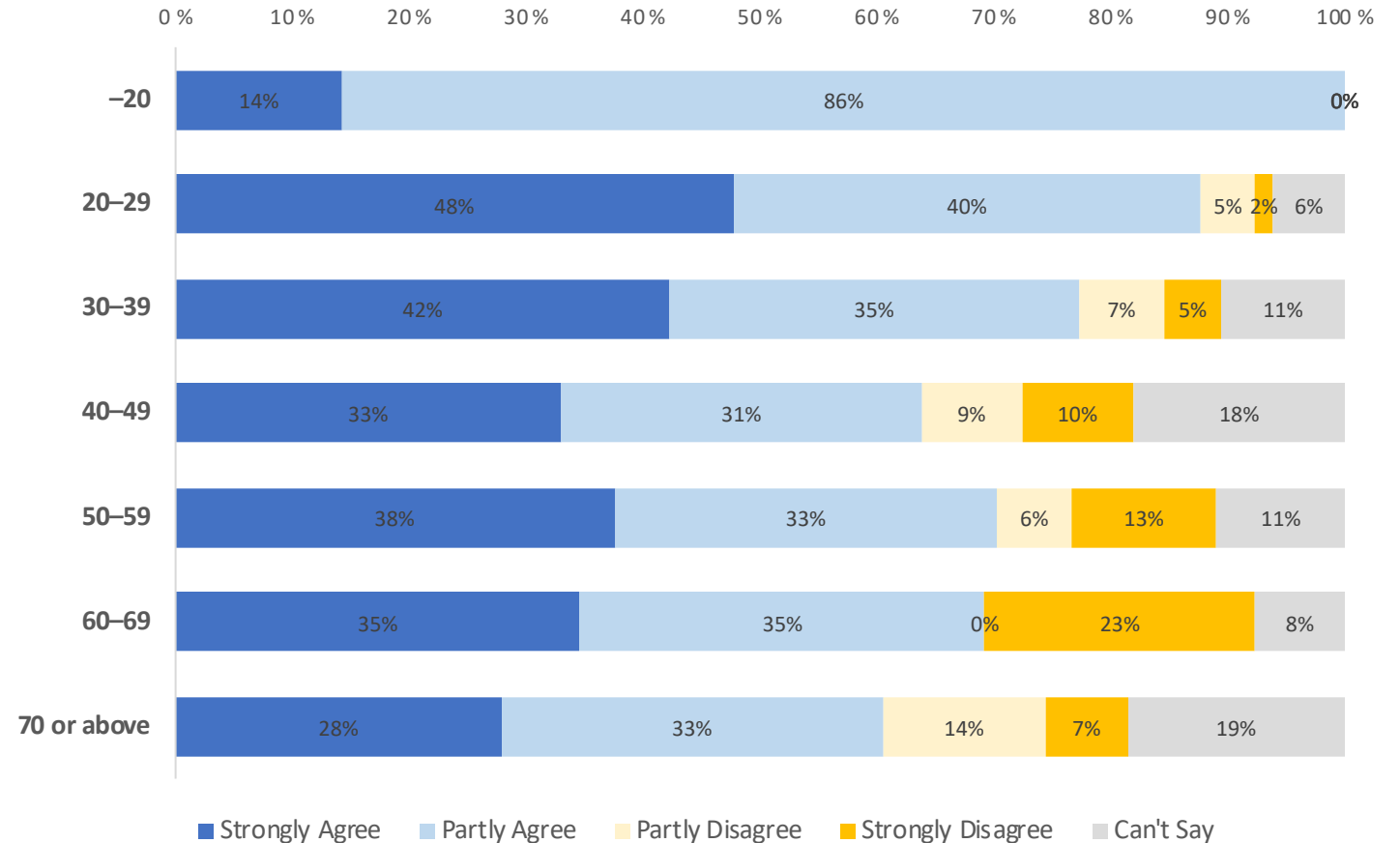
- Most positive attitudes among migrants originating in Africa (71 % agree)



Attitude: "I would like to learn (better) Swedish"

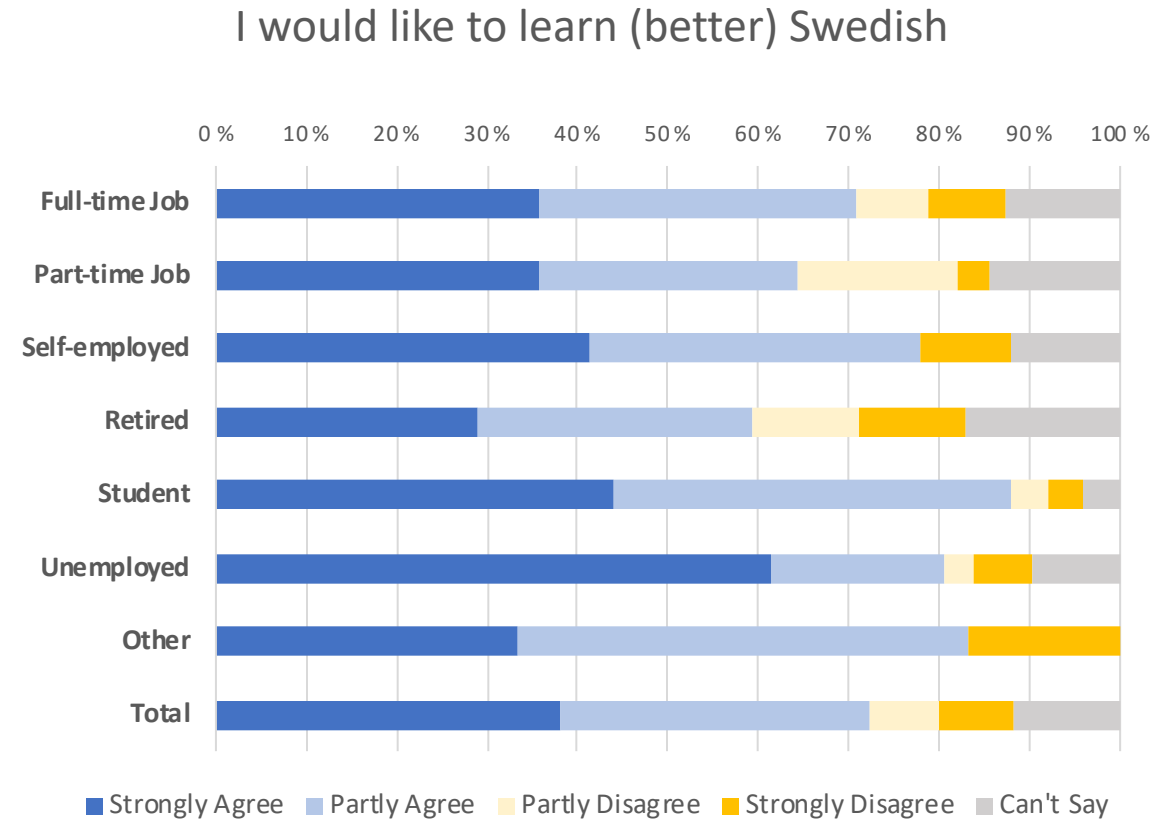
- 72 % strongly agree or partly agree that they would like to learn (better) Swedish
- Younger people more positive towards learning Swedish

(exception: under 20 yrs, but only 10 respondents)



Attitude: "I would like to learn (better) Swedish"

- 72 % strongly agree or partly agree that they would like to learn (better) Swedish
- Students, unemployed and self-employed respondents most positive towards learning Swedish



Open comments

I consider that the Swedish language is a distinct, enriching aspect to Finland's culture.. Just as the Welsh language: until relatively recently - did this become a part of the school curriculum in Britain. If you kill a language - you kill a culture. . .

I think that in order to support Swedish-speaking community and the language, government should promote the possibility to study the language much more to the foreigners. Becoming truly bilingual country would only benefit Finland. As of today, unfortunately, quite a few foreigners are exposed to hate from Finns related to the fact they have to learn Swedish, which doesn't make it attractive for them to study it.

Swedish language is not promoted well enough among immigrants. I wish I knew when I moved to Finland that Swedish was an available language option for getting a Finnish citizenship.

Swedish speaking Finns are great and generally more talkative than native Finnish speakers in my experience.

I know TE-toimisto, doesn't ALLOW or encourage people to take "kotoutumiskoulutus" in Swedish. Generally noticed the mood is against use of Swedish language in Uusimaa (what I witnessed in public places like swim pool, saunas and gyms etc .)

I would certainly learn Swedish as part of integration in Finnish society, because I am still not integrated, and rely on English language for everyday life.

My family is Swedish speaking. We speak Spanish and Swedish at home - Proud Family 🥰

I don't know much about the Swedish language and culture.

Svenska är jätteroligt

Open comments

In Helsinki area i wish they could have a positive attitude about Swedish language

Swedish is an easy language compare to Finnish and it's very useful if you plan to move to any Nordic countries, as you can manage with Swedish easily. Most immigrants in Finland choose Swedish language to pass YKI exam for getting Finnish Citizenship. Whoever want to settle in Finland will choose Finnish language as they want to integrate with the society.

I have came in contact with Swedish speaking finns and they were nicer and more friendly

My lack of interest in learning Swedish is caused by my interest in learning Finnish; I don't have the time (and I guess the mental capacities neither) to learn two languages at once, and already speaking German and English (both related to Swedish) I'm more fascinated by Finnish.

Swedish language is a part of Finnish culture.

Swedish speaking Finns do not deserve the harsh treatment they receive by the government and society.

Swedish speaking Fins are part of Finland and will always be. However, students should have a choice to decide to learn Swedish or another language in school.

Swedish language is not promoted well enough among immigrants. I wish I knew when I moved to Finland that Swedish was an available language option for getting a Finnish citizenship.

My wife is Swedish speaking.
Both kids are already in Swedish-speaking school

It is important to explain about the Swedish cultural base Finland has to Finnish speaking people far from the coast where there is a strong refuse of everything that is even close to Swedish.

My neighbor friend in her 80s is Swedish speaking, has very little knowledge of Finnish. She is treated worse than me at health center if she speaks Swedish. She gets more help speaking English. So Finland being official in two languages means nothing when it comes to any service.

There is no need for Swedish as a language in Finland. English should be spoken as the main language. Imagine how much easier life would be and how many more qualified workforce would come to Finland. I know many who have avoided coming here because of the language.

Open comments

I think it would be nice if immigrants who reside in Finland has the access to free Swedish course as well, along with Finnish course. But perhaps I am not aware if its availability:)

For me, coming from Indo-european language family culture, Swedish seems like a much better language to study. Finnish has been very difficult for me, and also because **people discourage me to study in Swedish thinking that I will not get any work in Finland if I speak Swedish (without Finnish)**. If I had a choice, I would study Swedish.

We are moving to Finland this year and my wife will be studying and we will open a business. I know about the links with Sweden even as an outsider. We have four young children and it will be wonderful for them to learn Finnish and Swedish fluently. As for me, well, I will try my best :)

After years of trying to learn Finnish, I still haven't been able to achieve the level of fluency I would like to have. My next step will be to enroll in Swedish classes.

Knowing germanic languages would make it much easier for me to learn Swedish, which i desired to do when marrying my Finnish husband, but because I teach in a predominantly Finnish speaking community, I took Finnish instead, doing quite well in the grammar lessons but forgetting many words - due to my older age I think.

I strongly feel that the Swedish speaking community is decreasing due to lack of integration and impossibility to rely on Swedish-only work. I happen to know foreigners that have learned Swedish for their citizens examination but cannot work in their sectors with only Swedish knowledge, as a lot of industries require Finnish. Furthermore, Finnish speakers have a very low fluency and also don't tend to practise the language.

I'd like to move to Sweden

I would like to highlight that I always care about a country's language when considering visiting or moving to it. That said, I would never focus on Swedish over Finnish by respect to the country and the people who live on it. **I believe that it's my responsibility to care and learn how to better communicate with the society that embraces me, therefore, I should definitely learn Finnish.** No matter what the obstacles. Right now it has been not possible because since I'm working in a full time job where English is the main language, I have no time to dedicate my studies. Specially because I moved here to raise my 2 years old son in a better enviroment. So, a lot of time spent working and parenting. No much time for myself and self-development. My wife is learning Finnish, though, because we definitely agree that someone in the family should do it as soon as possible.

Currently Im self studying swedish.