

A photograph of a family of three in Helsinki. A woman with long dark hair and a patterned scarf is smiling. A man with a beard and a blue scarf is smiling and holding a young child with blonde hair on his shoulders. The child is also smiling. They are outdoors, with a blurred city background and warm sunlight. A white speech bubble with the word 'Helsinki' is in the top left corner.

Helsinki

Development Agenda for the English-Language Services

Helsingin kaupungin englanninkielisten palveluiden kehittämisohjelma – Development Agenda for the English-Language Services in Helsinki

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6 700+

English-speaking Helsinkians

5th

English is the 5th most
spoken language in Helsinki

15.7 %

Proportion of Helsinkians who
speak a foreign language
as their native tongue

6.6 %

English-speaking Helsinkians' share
of the whole foreign-language
population in Helsinki

1 The operational environment

Helsinki is a city that is becoming increasingly international, and it grows in diversity at a faster pace than the rest of the country. Helsinki's population growth, the growth of the number of working-age people and the vitality of the entire city are heavily dependent on immigration; at present about two-thirds of the city's population growth originates in migrants from a foreign background.

At the outset of 2019, the proportion of residents who speak a foreign language as their native tongue was 15.7 percent of all Helsinki residents, and the English-speaking Helsinki residents' share of the whole foreign-language population was 6.6 percent. That is to say, there are slightly more than 6,700 English-speaking Helsinki residents, which makes English the fifth most spoken language in the city. It has been estimated that the size of Helsinki's foreign-language population will grow by almost 100,000 people up until year 2035. Thus, just above one-quarter of all Helsinki inhabitants will be foreign-language residents.

The share of English-speaking residents has been trending upwards in a sustained manner throughout the 21st century, although English has not kept pace with Arabic or Somali, to mention a few examples. However, for many immigrants, English serves as a support language before they develop language skills in Finnish or Swedish.

The City of Helsinki provides services in Finnish and Swedish, but it has expanded its language repertoire in some services due to client demand. Helsinki Info, for instance, provides counselling in several languages at Oodi Central Library and at International House Helsinki, where English, French, Arabic, Somali, Dari, Persian and Berber are spoken. Helsinki Skills Centre has on its part developed its operations to better serve the students in Russian, Sorani, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian, in addition to the languages just mentioned.

In order to sustain the vitality of industry and commerce in Helsinki, the region should be able to attract a substantial amount of international skill from abroad. In Finland, there is a shortage of university trained labour as well as skilled professionals. The shortage of skilled labour is a considerable challenge to the growth and development of business life in Helsinki as well, and the need for foreign labour will increase in coming years. At the same time, several international students who study for a degree in Finland end up having jobs that do not match their education or then they end up working somewhere else than in Finland.

*** The share of English-speaking residents has been trending upwards in a sustained manner throughout the 21st century.**

A population that is fast becoming increasingly diverse and Helsinki's international competitiveness make it necessary for the City to develop its services towards multilingualism. Well-run English-language services combined with Helsinki's other international assets, such as little corruption, the safe surroundings, good public services and good supply of housing, give Helsinki a clear advantage relative to many other European growth centres. The evaluation and systematic development of the English-language services guarantee that Helsinki is an attractive destination for international professionals.

The development of the English-language services is a necessity in anticipation of the city's population changes in coming years. Thanks to the development agenda for the English-language services, the municipality rises on its part to the challenge. Simultaneously, it helps Helsinki evolve into an increasingly international, attractive and competitive city.

Helsinki's vision towards becoming a diverse city:

Helsinki is competitive.

Helsinki attracts skilful labour and entrepreneurs to the country.

Helsinki is the world's most impactful place for learning.

Equal opportunities to education and work.

Helsinki is open and participatory.

Helsinki enhances the sense of community and reduces inequality.



It is important that Helsinki, being a resident-friendly city, takes the communications needs of its English-language inhabitants into account.

2 Improvement of the English-language services provided by the City of Helsinki

Communications and marketing

Making the City's English-language communications more efficient and improving the manner in which services are put forward to the English-language Helsinkians are among the top development objectives within the development agenda for the City's English-language services.

Helsinki, being an internationally oriented metropolis according to its strategy, also serves people whose origins are elsewhere. When people from abroad come across the City's communications, what occurs is also an encounter of diverse values, languages and cultures. In case the recipient of the communication operates within a very different cultural framework compared to the content producer, the message or some of its features may seem distant or strange. On the other hand, if those who are responsible for producing the content that is being communicated are indeed conscious of the cultural background of their readers, then the recipients have a better chance to comprehend the communication and thus to act according to the customs and rules of the community.

The City Executive Office's Communications Bureau currently applies an operations model according to which the Finnish source material is being translated into English. However, making a straightforward translation from Finnish into English does not do justice to the recipient's cultural framework. Although the translation may be comprehensible to the recipient, he or she may find it strange as far as the culture and the context are concerned. It is important that Helsinki, being a resident-friendly city, takes the communications needs of its English-language inhabitants into account by offering something more than texts that have been translated. Strengthening its native speaker level proficiency in English is a means to implement the city strategy.

Helsinki's municipal communications in English is at present fragmented and conveyed over a number of channels. The information is scattered, and to the user the service as a whole seems confusing and difficult to navigate. This is a consequence of the

fact that the English-language communications has not been developed in a concerted manner. Instead, various quarters in different parts of the Helsinki City Group have over the years set about producing English content from their own premises and distributed it over channels meant for specific target audiences. To make sure that the service as a whole is perceived as friendlier towards the user, English-language communications should be developed in a concerted manner, thus resulting in a situation where the content located at several channels constitute a coherent whole.

✳ **Strengthening its native speaker level proficiency in English is a means to implement the city strategy.**

An English-language service that is constructed with user-friendliness in mind, should offer content that has been compiled comprehensively into one site. Originated from many services and players, the data should be clearly structured and easy to find. Understandably, a continuous English-language user path should constitute the focal point. Currently, clear challenges can be perceived with regard to the English-language service paths, as an originally English service path may suddenly turn out to be Finnish. Consequently, the service paths should be charted while the client's viewpoint should at the same time be pursued as the services are developed. Part of the reform project should be to set up an integrated and easy-to-grasp body of English-language counselling services and service channels to enable English-speaking Helsinkians to find their way to the most essential services and to provide them with necessary information about events and hobbies in their hometown. These are key measures in the process of enabling the Helsinkians to have good user experiences in their interaction with the city.

The agenda proposes the following measures for the development of English-language communications and marketing:

- The digital service paths of the City's English-language web content will be checked through user testing of the continuity of the English content from beginning to end. Subsequent to the testing, the City will draw up instructions that aim at preventing the emergence of discontinuous English-language service paths as part of the digital services. The task will be carried out by the respective service owners and by a new project committee that should be set up to coordinate the measures.
 - The City will draw up a plan for the concerted development of the City's English-language info channels. After having completed the development work at hand, the City should be in possession of an easy-to-grasp body of English-language channels to serve diverse target groups. The task will be carried out though user testing by developing how the target groups, the user requirements and the objectives of the English-language content are defined.
 - The City will acquire native speaker-level proficiency in English to serve its communications operations.
 - In addition to developing its communications operations, the City is in need of support for the divisions' English-language marketing. Information about English-language and language-independent events, services and courses should be communicated more efficiently than in the past in English as well. At the same time, the City should draw up joint practices regarding the publication of events over social media in multiple languages.
- * The municipal staff is able to develop their language skills to meet the needs of a city that is becoming increasingly diverse. They can do it by taking part in language courses, and in future recruitments the City will pay more attention to what kind of language skills the task requires.**

Improving customer service and advancing the skills of the staff

The City of Helsinki endeavours to offer service to its clients in English too whenever possible, but currently the availability of services in English is always dependent on the language skills of staff that are present. The municipal staff is able to develop their language skills to meet the needs of a city that is becoming increasingly diverse. They can do it by taking part in language courses, and in future recruitments the City will pay more attention to what kind of language skills the task requires.

Regarding statutory services, the authorities are duty-bound to make sure that the client understands what he or she has been told. They must also bring in an interpreter if a common language cannot be found with the staff. To guarantee the best possible services and equal treatment, it is important to make sure that interpretation is utilised sufficiently also in the case of English-language Helsinkians.

The residents perceive the municipality above all through customer service situations. These daily encounters have a great impact on people's impression of how smoothly the services work. People's experiences of the municipal customer service may have an even very big influence on how comfortable they feel in their hometown.

To improve the English-language customer service, this agenda proposes the following measures:

- The City will clarify the criteria for language proficiency pay. Various incentives for the development and use of the staff's language skills should be pondered in situations where members of the staff use their language skills on a regular basis e.g. carrying out duties that entail providing demanding guidance to clients.
- It should be clarified whether it is possible to list the staff's language skills for the purpose of customer service tasks. Thus, clients could, where possible, be referred to a staff member who speaks the language. At the same time, the City will establish a practice according to which the language skills of staff that work in customer service will be labelled clearly, e.g. displayed on the name tag or identity card.
- The possibility to study vocational English will be improved and the importance of language skills will in future be more broadly underlined as part of the recruitment process.



The residents perceive
the municipality above
all through customer
service situations.



There are a growing number
of English-language job
opportunities in the Helsinki
metropolitan area.

Employment services and International House Helsinki

Job opportunities are often the reason that people move to Helsinki from abroad. Helsinki is even within Finland an attractive growth centre thanks to its labour market that is more diverse than that of the rest of the country and that increasingly gives opportunities to international professionals as well. Finding a job and enjoying it are also important elements of being successfully integrated into the Finnish society.

✳ Job opportunities are often the reason that people move to Helsinki from abroad.

The biggest development needs concerning the employment services relate to making sure that individual counselling in English is available and to creating web content for all the employment service channels in English as well. Although knowing Finnish is still of first-rate importance on the Helsinkian labour market, there are a growing number of English-language job opportunities in the Helsinki metropolitan area, too. English-language counselling and updating the English-language web content will also on its part help people enter the labour market and integrate into the work communities.

Regarding the employment services, the agenda proposes the following measures:

- ➔ The City will conduct a pilot study in conjunction with the Employment Corner (Työllisyyden palvelutori) concerning English-language employment and job-hunting counselling for unemployed Helsinkians. There, unemployed people who are at least 30 years old may turn to English-language counselling without appointment on matters related to employment.
- ➔ Employment-related counselling will be strengthened by regularising the operations of International House Helsinki (IHH) and by allocating sufficient resources to IHH's communications activities.

Education

English-language daycare and comprehensive education are important factors as you wish to appeal to highly educated professionals who intend to relocate to Finland. In future, English-language

educational opportunities should be enhanced with regard to upper secondary education. This applies both to upper secondary schools and to vocational training, as educational opportunities, including a range of options, should also be available to the young who are past the age for comprehensive education. Although many families think that their children should attend a Finnish-language school, especially those families that have come to Finland on a relatively short assignment should quickly be able to find daycare and comprehensive education for their children in a familiar language. Language-enriched and bilingual education is largely available to Helsinkian children. In addition to Finland's quality education, these constitute a selling point relevant to international families.

Thanks to the measures that have been included in the development agenda, the educational services for people relocating to Finland will expand and the clients will receive information about Helsinki's educational services more efficiently. Finnish schools and education are in of themselves appealing to people who intend to move to Finland to work, and hence it is important that information about them be disseminated more efficiently in English. Moreover, guidebooks and info material in English facilitate the process of adapting to the new hometown.

✳ Finnish schools and education are in of themselves appealing to people who intend to move to Finland to work, and hence it is important that information about them be disseminated more efficiently in English.

With regard to measures within the field of education, the recruitment of someone in charge of counselling is considered to be of particular importance. Thus, the families would in future be able to receive information in a comprehensive manner from the same person, who should provide guidance about educational opportunities for children of different ages and from different backgrounds. Moreover, the person in charge of counselling would be able to follow in real time whether the number of English-language educational slots is sufficient, thus enabling early intervention in case of a mismatch.

Regarding the educational services, the agenda proposes the following measures:

- ➔ More English-language information about day-care, schools and educational institutions will be added to the municipal web pages about educational matters. The agenda entails also the translation of the most important guide-books as well as registration and application forms into English.
- ➔ For the benefit of people who are on the lookout for a school or a training, the City will hire a person who is familiar with Helsinki's educational programmes and who will be in charge of providing counselling to English-language clients who are seeking training.
- ➔ As part of the effort to develop the information procedures, the various school pathways (English, bilingual, language-enriched education and local school) will be described in detail on the website to clarify the alternatives that are available to families. Additionally, the student admission and the practices for the implementation of suitability tests will be developed to streamline the procedures for applying to English and bilingual training.
- ➔ Helsinki will lobby the government with the aim to enable the passing of even the matriculation examination in English in the future.

Social services and health care

Generally speaking, in Helsinki urgent social and health care services are always well available in English, too. Currently the biggest gaps stem from the fact that English-language clients are not always referred to staff who speak English. The greatest development needs regarding social services and health care are indeed about surveying the staff's

- ✳ **In 2020, Helsinki introduces a new client and patient record system that will, in comparison with the current systems, provide English content to a larger extent.**

language skills and about the client record systems as their language selection at present is an obstacle for providing clients with information in English. Although it is currently possible to hand out some care instructions and prerequisite forms in English, e.g. part of the care instructions and client records are available in the domestic languages only. There are also development needs with regard to the online services of social services and health care, as part of them exist only in Finnish and Swedish.

- ✳ **Interpretation should be available to English-language clients of social services and health care.**

Some of the development needs will be realised in the autumn of 2020 as Helsinki introduces the new Apotti client and patient record system. In comparison with the current systems, Apotti will provide English content to a larger extent. The Apotti client portal, where the professional staff and the clients communicate online, will also enable the provision of English content to clients.

In future, the City should take into account that interpretation should be available to English-language clients of social services and health care as well. In spite of the fact that a wide range of services are provided in English, the City is conscious of the need to remember that even clients who speak English should have the opportunity to use the services of an interpreter, if the client so wishes or the subject matter so requires.

The agenda proposes the following measures for the development of social services and health care:

- ➔ The agenda entails the clarification of means to develop social services and health care to enable their English-speaking clients e.g. to review records concerning themselves. They should also be able to get the most essential forms, care instructions or a summary of the meeting content in English as well.
- ➔ Regarding the use and development of digital solutions, English should always be a user language on a par with Finnish and Swedish.

English-language daycare and comprehensive education are important factors as you wish to appeal to highly educated professionals who intend to relocate to Finland.



Culture and leisure

Having the possibility to pursue hobbies and experience new things are essential parts of settling down in your new city and feeling at home there. Helsinki's diverse cultural and hobby scene is growing increasingly versatile and serves as a factor increasing the city's attractiveness both for tourists and for people relocating to the country. The biggest development need as far as the culture and leisure services are concerned is to expand communications and marketing in English and to see to it that they will be allocated sufficient resources. In order to benefit the contentedness of the residents, it is important to inform about these matters in an equal manner.

✳ Top-notch cultural and leisure services also require quality communication to reach all Helsinkians.

In many cases cultural hobbies and physical exercises do not require that you know Finnish or Swedish well, but registration and communication procedures regarding courses and events have until present time been mostly in Finnish. The City can create better conditions for all Helsinkians to take part in Helsinki's leisure activities by enhancing marketing and communication in English and by enabling registration to courses and events even for people who are unfamiliar with the Finnish language. Top-notch cultural and leisure services also require quality communication to reach all Helsinkians.

The following measures are proposed to improve the availability of the culture and leisure services:

- ➔ In addition to the measures that are to be taken regarding communication and marketing, the Culture and Leisure Division's registration system will be developed always to enable course registration in English as a rule.
- ➔ The Culture and Leisure Division is encouraged to develop new ways to communicate and organise language-independent, bilingual and English-language courses and events as part of the range of activities it has to offer

Housing

Finding adequate housing is a prerequisite for establishing yourself in a new country and a new city. The housing situation is more attractive in Helsinki than in other big cities nearby, and the housing expenditures are also reasonable compared to many other European capitals. For Helsinki to be perceived as an attractive place where to relocate, the City should improve the availability of English-language online information about housing. At present, many private websites for rental housing serve only in Finnish, and information on the internet about housing in Helsinki is scarce.

In addition to information on the internet, Helsinkians should be able to find personal counselling in English about how to acquire a flat or a house and about other housing issues.

The agenda proposes the following measures with regard to housing:

- ➔ As far as housing is concerned, the City's housing subsidiaries Heka, Haso and Auroranlinna will produce English-language web pages for themselves. The English-language web pages should in future include the necessary facts about the services that the companies provide, and when possible, general facts and material about housing.
- ➔ The housing content of the InfoFinland website that the City of Helsinki maintains will be expanded and developed to become more user friendly and to put a stronger emphasis on the region's appeal. Moreover, the City will invest in the marketing of the site.
- ➔ Housing-related counselling in English will in future be offered at, for example, International House Helsinki.



Having the possibility to pursue hobbies and experience new things are essential parts of settling down in your new city and feeling at home there.

3 Summary of measures proposed in the development agenda for the English-language services

Improvement of English-language communications and marketing services

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
<p>The City will set up a project committee to perform the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee will chart the essential discontinuities of the English-language digital service paths and mend them in conjunction with the service owners to make them continuous in English from beginning to end. • The committee will together with the service owners draw up joint modes of operation with the aim to prevent the appearance of discontinuous English-language service paths. • The committee will determine whether there are key content areas on the municipal info channels that presently cannot be accessed in English to a sufficient degree. • Communications and marketing will be developed through user testing. 	Project committee to be set up	in 2020
The committee will draw up a plan for the concerted development of the City's English-language info channels.	The City Executive Office's Communications Bureau	in 2020
The City will allocate resources for native speaker level proficiency in English to its communications operations.	The City Executive Office's Communications Bureau	in 2020
The City will raise the awareness of key municipal services by using English-language communications and marketing and by developing communications by means of defining its goals, target groups and demands.	The divisional communications departments	2020 onwards

Improvement of English-language customer and counselling services

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
The City will clarify the criteria for language proficiency pay and create means to incentivise the staff to speak English. Possible costs will be clarified.	The City Executive Office's Human Resources Bureau in conjunction with divisional human resources departments	In 2020
The City will survey the language skills of staff whose work involves providing guidance to clients, thus making it possible to refer clients who speak English or other languages to staff members who know the language.	The City Executive Office's Human Resources Bureau in conjunction with divisional human resources departments	In 2021
The language skills of staff that work in customer service or counselling will be labelled clearly, e.g. displayed on the name tag or identity card.	The City Executive Office's Human Resources Bureau in conjunction with divisional human resources departments	In 2021
Based on the survey of language skills, the possibility to study vocational English will be improved and the importance of language skills will in future be more broadly underlined as part of the recruitment process.	The City Executive Office's Human Resources Bureau in conjunction with divisional human resources departments	In 2021
One or several people who will be in charge of counselling English-language customers in housing-related matters will be recruited to, for instance, International House Helsinki.	The City Executive Office's Human Resources Bureau in conjunction with divisional human resources departments	In 2020
The City will regularise International House Helsinki, and a separate English-language communications resource will be allocated to its operations.	The City Executive Office's Immigration and Employment Affairs Unit	At the turn of 2020

Improvement of English-language employment services

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
The employment services will provide adults with English-language counselling without appointment, e.g. jointly with the Employment Corner (Työllisyyden palvelutori). The introduction of this possibility will be publicised.	The City Executive Office's Immigration and Employment Affairs Unit	In 2019

Improvement of English-language education services

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
<p>Editing of the websites and info material in English:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City will add English introductions to the web pages of daycare centres, schools and educational institutions. • English editions of the most essential guides for parents and students and of registration and application forms will be produced. • The beginner's alternative school pathways (English, bilingual, language-enriched education and local school) will be described in detail for the benefit of the families. 	The Education Division's units that provide training	In 2020
For the benefit of people who are on the lookout for a school or a training, the City will hire a co-ordinator who is familiar with Helsinki's educational programmes and who will be in charge of providing counselling and assistance to English-language clients who are seeking training. The position may e.g. be in connection with International House Helsinki.	The Education Division	In 2020
The student admission and the practices for the implementation of suitability tests will be developed to facilitate for arrivals to apply to English and bilingual training.	Comprehensive education and development services	At the turn of 2021
Enabling student admission to take place all year round for grades 2–9. It may require the setting up of less than full groups in some grades.	Comprehensive education and development services	2020
Helsinki will lobby the government with the aim to enable the passing of even the matriculation examination in English in the future.	Education Division	Ongoing

Improvement of English-language social services and health care

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
Key online services and telephone services will be updated to serve the English-language Helsinkians as well.	The social services and health care service entities, the information system services and communications	In 2021 (After the introduction of the Apotti system. The Maisa customer portal will be made available to customers.)
Key counselling and guidance services and materials will be made available to customers in English too when necessary.	The social services and health care service entities, the information system services and communications	2021

Improvement of English-language culture and leisure services

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
Course registration and multilingual communications will be developed as part of the Culture and Leisure Division's wide-ranging updating of its websites and as part of social media.	Communications and marketing services, ICT development	2019-2021
The division will draw up a plan for increasing the number of English and bilingual courses, especially for the young and for children.	Division management, heads of the division's service entities	2019-2020
The Culture and Leisure Division will increase the volume of English-language activities through outsourcing.	Division management, heads of the division's service entities	2019-2020

Improvement of English-language housing services

→ Measure	👤 Responsible party	🕒 Schedule
The City's housing subsidiaries will draw up a plan for the provision of English-language web pages and possibly other online material in English.	The City Executive Office's Neighbourhood Construction, Housing and Investments Unit in conjunction with the City's property companies	Planning in 2019, implementation in 2020
The housing-related content on the InfoFinland website will be developed to be more user friendly and to put a stronger emphasis on the region's appeal. Moreover, the City will increase the marketing of the site.	The City Executive Office's Communications Bureau	2020

Further information

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