

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED until 30 September 2019
at 11:00

Study shows:

Residents with foreign background feel part of society, but seldom adopt a Finnish identity

In Finland, the largest language groups of foreign background feel that they integrate well into society. Still, few adopt a Finnish identity. The Somali have the highest share of those that both feel integrated to society and and feel themselves Finnish.

These are findings of To be or not to be – a study on how five language groups integrate into Finland, a publication on attitudes, identities and attachment to Finland among Helsinki Capital Region residents whose native language is Russian, Estonian, Somali or Arabic or come from a Western English-speaking country.

Authors of the first report in the research project were researchers **Ville Pitkänen** and **Jussi Westinen** at e2 Research, and special researcher **Pasi Saukkonen** at the City of Helsinki. The study was based on more than 1500 query answers, around 300 per language group.

The research project was planned and financed by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, e2 Research, the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, and the Ministry of Justice.

Estonian-speaking have little need to attach to Finland

More than three out of four Estonian, Russian, English, Somali or Arabic speakers in the Helsinki Capital Region feel that they fully or to some extent are part of Finnish society.

Much fewer feel that they are Finnish. A Finnish identity is most common among Somali-speaking (43 %) and least so among Estonian-speaking (10 %).

– The majority of the Estonian-speaking are in Finland to work, and most of them plan to return to Estonia sooner or later. They do not necessarily feel a very strong need to integrate here, notes Pasi Saukkonen.

It is typical in all language groups to identify with the country of origin, but some people adopt a double identity. This is most spread among the Somali: almost half (43 %) feel both Finnish and Somali.

Arabic-speaking feel equal with natives

Two thirds of the Arabic-speaking feel equal with the native population. In the other language groups, there is a lesser sense of equality.

Furthermore, Arabic-speaking tend to gain a Finnish identity surprisingly soon after arrival. 37 percent feel that they are completely or quite Finnish.



The majority of the Arabic-speaking have arrived as refugees and lived in Finland less than five years, and 90 percent wish to stay for the rest of their lives.

– Perhaps because of their background they have an above-average appreciation of what Finland has to offer and of the opportunity for a new start, and this shows in the study. Expectations are high, Jussi Westinen evaluates.

Somali speakers have the best command of Finnish, but scarce friends among natives

The English-speaking are more tightly integrated into Finnish society than the other language groups. Practically all have Finnish-speaking friends and acquaintances, although 40 percent of them speak Finnish at beginner's level or not at all.

In the light of the query, Somali-speaking have the best command of Finnish, but 45 percent of them lack native friends. Among Arabic-speaking, the corresponding share is 32.

– In terms of integration, it is a problem if immigrants have no contacts with natives, Ville Pitkänen assesses.

Language minorities feel negative about media exposure

Many members of language minorities feel that the media give a too negative picture about their group. This view is held by 82 percent of Somali speakers, 72 percent of Arabic speakers and 56 percent of Russian speakers. Among Estonian or English speakers, it seems to be less of a problem.

About 90 percent of the Somali feel discriminated on the job market. The share is 57 for Arabic-speaking, 51 for Russian-speaking and 40 for English-speaking. Only a fourth of Estonian speakers say that they have encountered some degree of discrimination on the labour market.

– In spite of negative experiences, 90 percent of the respondents feel at home in Finland, the researchers tell.

To be or not to be? A study on how five language groups integrate into Finland is the first of two publications within the research project "Values and identities of language minorities".

The research was based on 1,527 survey answers. Taloustutkimus gathered the material through personal interviews between 4 October 2018 and 31 March 2019. Authors of the questionnaire, analyses and research report were **Ville Pitkänen**, **Pasi Saukkonen** and **Jussi Westinen**.

The report will be publicized at the Visitor's Centre of the Little Parliament, Arkadiankatu 3, Helsinki, on 30 September 2019 at 11 a.m. The event will be opened by **Juho Eerola**, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament. A presentation of the research findings will be followed by a discussion panel with **Hanna Sarkkinen**, MP, Pasi Saukkonen, Special Researcher at the City of Helsinki, **Krista Taubert**, Head of World News and Current Affairs at Yle, and **Ritva Viljanen**, Mayor of Vantaa and **Amina Mohamed**, Project Worker at the Finland-Somalia Association and **Järvi Lipasti**, Planning Officer for Education and Integration at Tuglas-seura, the Finnish-Estonian Cultural Association.

The report is downloadable at www.e2.fi

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