



Sprachen Nordeuropas  
und des Baltikums

**Panel 3: Effective practices in teaching of  
and education in minority languages**

**Opening Comment by Anneli Sarhimaa**

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Language and the Human Rights of Minorities  
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- a vast number of Europeans' ethnic languages never have been a part of any formal / public educational scheme
- A case in point: **Karelian in Finland**
  - A cognate language to Finnish, a language of its own since late 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - an autochthonous minority language
  - has been spoken in Finland as long as the Finnish language itself but existence there only recognized in 2009
  - Today 11,000 speakers with active skills + 20,000 with receptive skills (estimations, no official info available)

## Covered by ECMRL but rudimentarily (even in Part II)

- e.g. *Report by Finland on the implementation of the Charter* does not discuss “the provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of the languages” in regard to Karelian at all (see, e.g. 2017, Part II/ Article 7, 1f, p. 58–62)

## Completely ignored in Finnish national legislation ->

- nothing concrete to refer to if one wants the child to learn Karelian at school or kindergarten
- widely varying and inconsequent interpretations of the education legislation
- many school directors and district officials do not even know that Karelian can be offered (For Karelians born in Finland: as a **foreign** language, for immigrants from Russia: mother tongue instruction possible in principle)
- no kindergarten or school curriculum for Karelian
- no teacher training -> lack of academically educated, qualified teachers

- **Lack of possibilities to teach Karelian at school:** a severe hindrance for developing teacher training for Karelian
- **No binding obligations for organizing instruction of Karelian in state-financed education system**
  - > creating possibilities for learning Karelian is left exclusively on the shoulders of revitalization activists
- 2015 ff. state subventions of 100,000 to 200,000 euro a year to Karelian Language Society to be used for a revitalization program designed and implemented by the NGO
- **Education projects country-wide:** teacher training workshops for folk high school teachers; **Pilots in Joensuu:** early-education project in kindergartens (5 kindergartens, 95 kids aged 5-6 participating), Paint & play in Karelian, Sports and play in Karelian (for kids over 7), summer day care for kids over 7 in a farmhouse, remote language instruction for kids over 7

## **Urgent need of appropriate teaching and learning materials**

**Imbalance of learning and teaching materials** between the three literary standards in favour of one whose speakers have been more active and productive than others.

## **Enormous difficulties in recruiting children for language clubs and (optional, voluntary or extracurricular) Karelian classes**

- No geographical core area -> the minimum number of pupils required for a language class not reached, even if a school is ready to offer instruction of Karelian
- The non-involvement of the state supports the view that Karelian is “unimportant”
- Parents are passive: What’s Karelian good for?
- Children are not interested: Karelian competes with languages such as French, Russian, German; the quality of available text books etc; not willing to do Karelian as “extra”, etc.

## The point being:

Even the **fundamental right of many European minorities** to be recognized in forms that would, at least on paper, lend proper legislative, societal and practical support to the realization of their linguistic human rights **is not duly respected yet.**

In education, respecting linguistic human rights starts with **guaranteeing that the option for learning (in/) the minority language within the public education system really exists.**

Our **recommendations must also take into account** the grass-root level **realities of minorities whose languages are ignored in publicly financed educational systems.**

**Because the linguistic human rights of speakers of such languages are violated most severely.**