



A LITTLE TOWN WITH A BIG HEART

THE TOWN OF JAKOBSTAD'S EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION PLAN 2026-2030

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1 FOREWORD

Jakobstad's Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan 2026–2030 guides the town and its stakeholders in their work to ensure that the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and equal treatment are integrated into all municipal activities. The plan has been developed based on the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, drafted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), as well as responses from a comprehensive resident survey. Municipalities that sign the European Charter commit themselves to preparing an equality and non-discrimination plan that publicly outlines concrete measures and priorities for promoting equality and non-discrimination within their area. The Town of Jakobstad signed the Charter in 2013.

Every municipality has a statutory obligation to prepare a plan describing the measures needed to promote equality, non-discrimination, and equality between women and men. The legislation also aims to prevent discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression. The Town of Jakobstad must be a safe, inclusive, and fair employer and service provider where everyone is treated equally and with respect. Promoting gender equality and non-discrimination is one of the fundamental responsibilities of both the state and municipalities and forms an essential part of municipal governance. The objective is to transform both structures and behaviours to achieve a society where everyone has the same opportunities, rights, and responsibilities regardless of gender or other personal characteristics.

The equality and non-discrimination survey conducted among the town's residents examined residents' opinions and experiences regarding the accessibility of the town's services and environment, equality and non-discrimination, as well as their general sense of safety. The purpose of this assessment of the current situation was to increase residents' participation in municipal affairs, identify shortcomings, and promote equality and non-discrimination in the Town of Jakobstad in the future.

This Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan is a written guideline that describes the town's objectives, principles, and measures for promoting gender equality and equal treatment regardless of background or personal characteristics. The plan applies to the town's organisation and operations and serves as a guide for interactions with residents and users of municipal services.

The main sources of the plan are the European Charter for Equality, the Act on Equality between Women and Men, and the Non-Discrimination Act. All sources used are listed at the end of the plan.

2 FRAMEWORKS OF THE EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION PLAN

Discrimination-prohibiting legislation has gradually become established in Finnish law. Finland's accession to the European Union in 1995 brought anti-discrimination legislation into the national legal system in a new and more comprehensive way. The first Act on Equality between Women and Men entered into force in Finland in 1987, and the first Non-Discrimination Act in 2004. Both laws have since been revised several times.

The municipality's responsibility to promote equality is based on the Act on Equality between Women and Men (1329/2014), which requires municipalities, as public authorities, to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based discrimination in all their activities. Since 2015, the obligation to promote equality and the prohibition of discrimination have also included discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. The Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) likewise requires municipalities to assess the impacts of their activities on different population groups and to take measures to promote equality and non-discrimination.

The Act on Equality between Women and Men (1329/2014) applies broadly to different areas of life, except for private life, and plays a significant role in situations involving discrimination. Its purpose is to prevent discrimination based on gender between women and men. The Act requires municipalities to review their equality plans annually and to update the equality-promoting measures included in the plans every year. The Act also provides for positive action measures, meaning actions aimed at improving equal opportunities for women and men. An underrepresented gender may, where justified, be given preferential treatment to achieve genuine equality between genders.

The Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) addresses discrimination based on age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, health status, disability, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic. None of these factors may affect a person's opportunities to access education, employment, or services, as fundamental rights belong to everyone. The purpose of the Act is to promote equality and non-discrimination, prevent discrimination, and strengthen the legal protection of individuals who experience discrimination.

The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life is a political and strategic instrument that promotes equality between women and men in local government and society. The Charter was developed by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and aims to strengthen commitment to gender equality. It particularly emphasizes the commitment of political decision-makers, the development of public action plans, and practical implementation. The Charter addresses the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of multiple discrimination from a variety of perspectives. It covers municipalities' and regions' democratic responsibilities and decision-making processes, governance, service provision, employer responsibilities, the prevention of gender-based violence, and sustainable development.

According to the Constitution of Finland (731/1999), all persons are equal before the law, and no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently on the basis of gender, age, origin, language, religion, belief, opinion, health status, disability, or any other reason related to the individual. Children must also be treated as equal individuals and be allowed to influence matters affecting them in accordance with their level of development. (Constitution of Finland 731/1999, Section 6.)

According to the Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014), discrimination is prohibited regardless of whether it is based on a fact or assumption concerning the individual themselves or another person. Sexual harassment, harassment based on gender, as well as instructions or orders to engage in gender-based discrimination are considered forms of discrimination under the Act.

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that intentionally or violates a person's psychological or physical integrity, particularly by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Gender-based harassment refers to unwanted conduct related to a person's gender, gender identity, or gender expression that is not sexual in nature, but which intentionally or violates the person's psychological or physical integrity and creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

3 DUTIES OF THE AUTHORITIES

The town bears responsibility for ensuring that the conditions for equality and non-discrimination are realized in society by responding to people's needs through its services, facilities, and environments. The focus of the town's equality and non-discrimination work is preventive action against discrimination, which is conducted actively across all sectors, from planning to practical implementation, while the achievement of objectives is continuously monitored.

According to the law (Duty of Authorities to Promote Equality, 15 April 2005/232, Section 4), authorities must purposefully and systematically promote equality between women and men in all their activities and establish administrative and operational practices that ensure the promotion of gender equality in the preparation of matters and in decision-making. Attention must be paid to changing conditions that hinder the achievement of equality. The promotion of equality between women and men must also be considered in the availability and provision of services.

Authorities, education providers, employers, and providers of goods or services must make appropriate and reasonable accommodations required in each situation to ensure that persons with disabilities can, on an equal basis with others, access public services, receive education and employment, use goods and services available to the public, perform their work duties, and advance in their careers (Non-Discrimination Act 20.12.2022/1192, Section 15).

According to Article 13 of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, municipalities that have signed the Charter recognize that everyone has the right to education and the right to vocational training and continuing education, and they commit to promoting equal access to education and training opportunities for women and men of all ages. According to the Non-Discrimination Act (20.12.2022/1192, Section 6), education providers, and the educational institutions they maintain must assess how their activities affect different population groups and how equality and non-discrimination are otherwise realized in their operations and take the necessary measures to promote equality. Education providers must also ensure that educational institutions have a plan outlining the measures required to promote equality and non-discrimination.

According to the Early Childhood Education and Care Act (540/2018, Section 8), in a bilingual municipality, early childhood education and care must be provided in both official languages of the municipality so that service users can receive services in the language of their choice, either Finnish or Swedish. According to the Basic Education Act (628/1998, Section 6), education within the municipality must be organized in a way that ensures pupils' journeys to and from school are as safe and as short as possible, taking into account settlement patterns, the location of schools and other educational facilities, and transport connections.

Everyone has the right to personal security and freedom of movement. Under Article 21 of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, the town is committed to developing and implementing strategies, policies, and measures that improve practical safety for women and men through planning and design measures. This includes, for example, improving the design of the local environment, enhancing street lighting and parking areas, refining cooperation with law enforcement authorities, and striving to strengthen the overall sense of safety within the community.

4 RESULTS OF THE RESIDENT SURVEY 2026

A total of 531 responses were received to the resident survey conducted in Jakobstad between 4 and 15 March 2026. Most respondents were women (FIGURE 1). The largest age group among respondents was those aged 45–64, while the other age groups were represented relatively evenly (FIGURE 2). Of all respondents, 60% were Swedish-speaking, 37% Finnish-speaking, and approximately 3% reported another mother tongue (FIGURE 3). Other languages represented included, for example, English, Ukrainian, Arabic, and Albanian. Almost half of all respondents were employed. Students accounted for 25% of respondents, while retirees and families with children each represented approximately 20%. Individuals belonging to other groups accounted for less than 5% of all respondents (FIGURE 4).

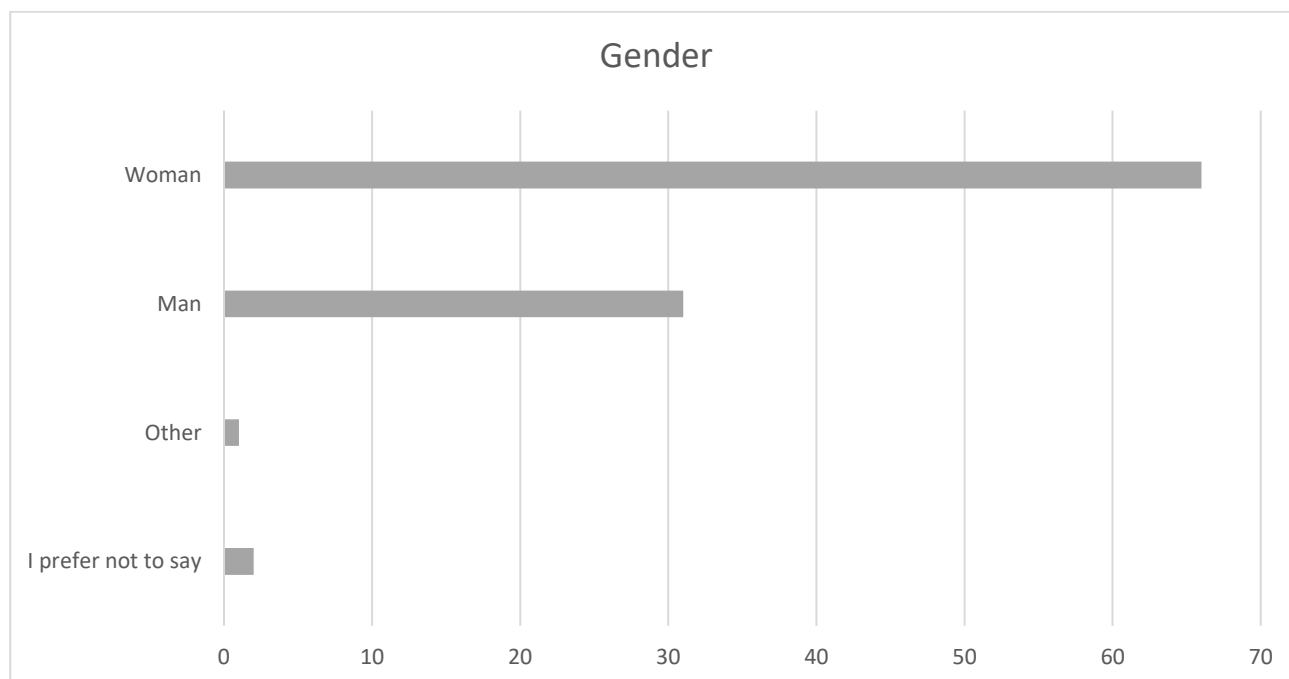


FIGURE 1. Gender distribution of respondents to the resident survey.

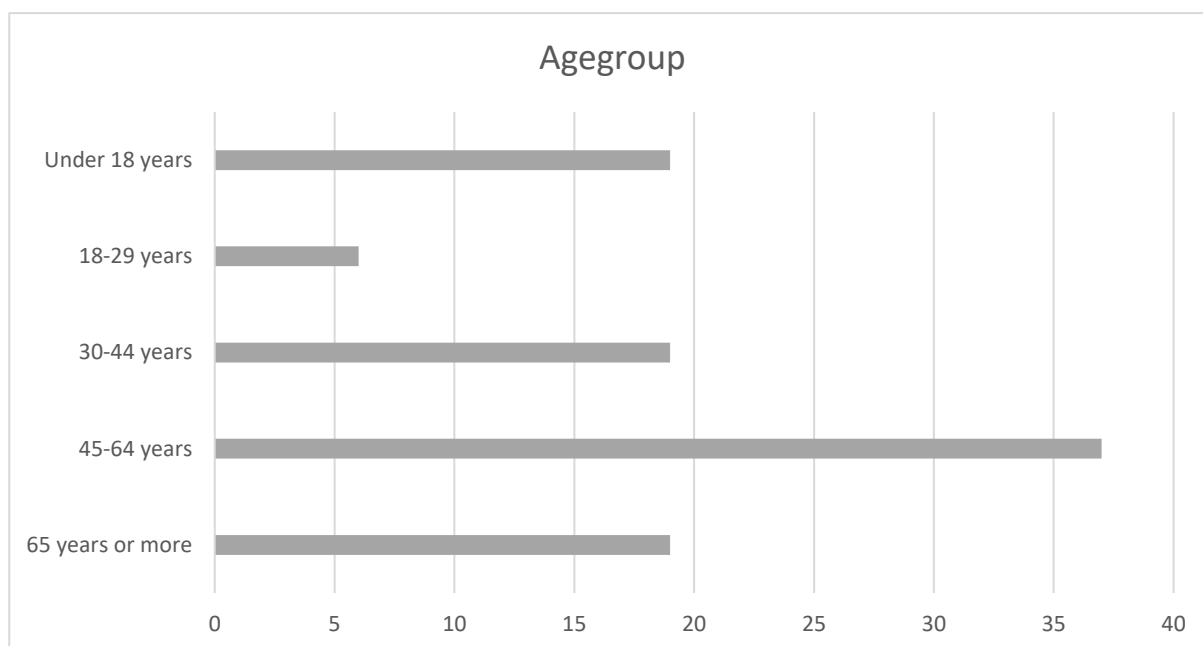


FIGURE 2. Age distribution of respondents to the resident survey.

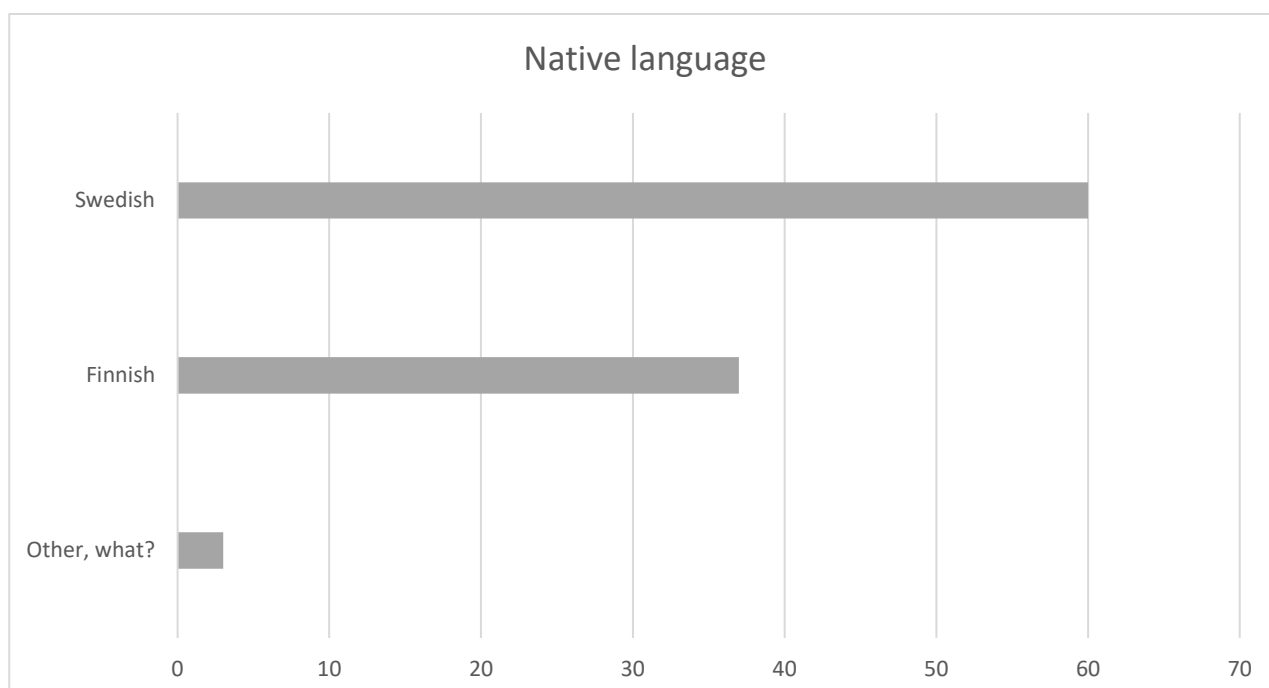


FIGURE 3. Native language of respondents to the resident survey.

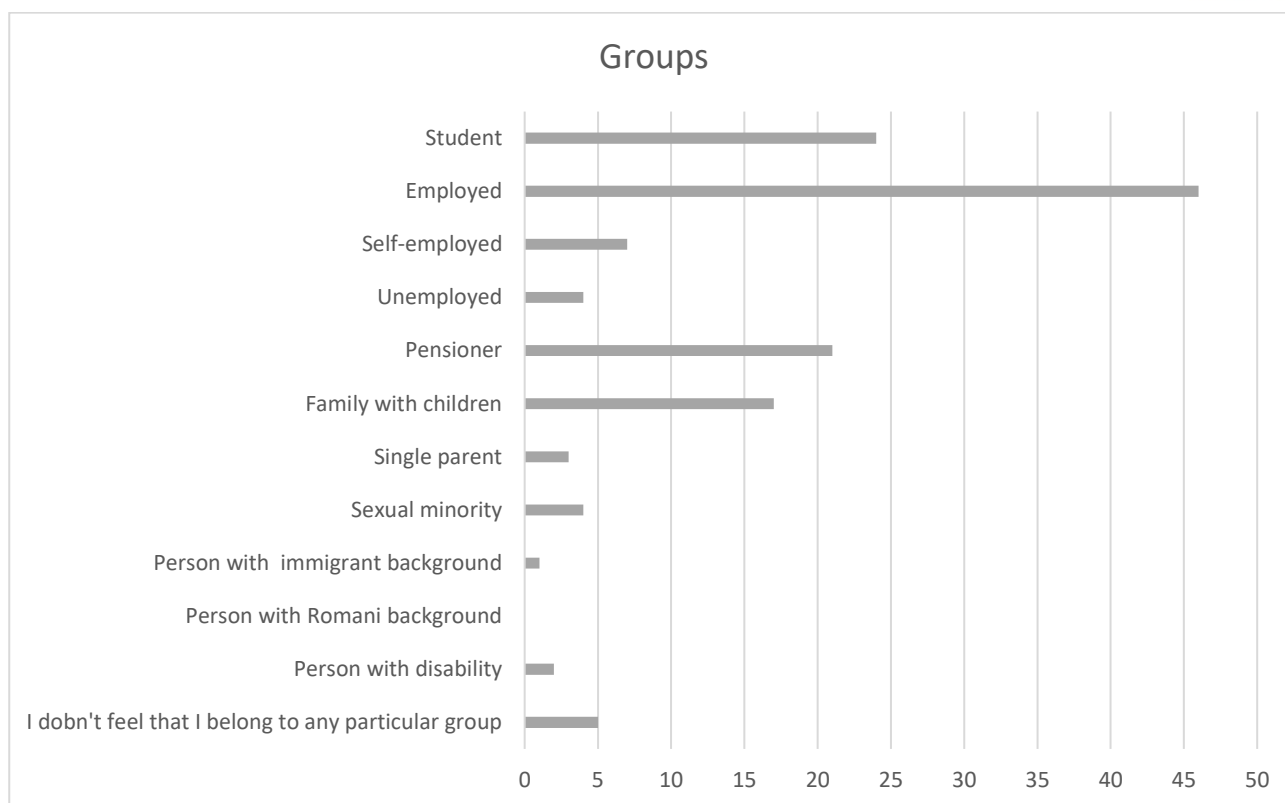


FIGURE 4. Different groups among respondents to the resident survey.

Of the survey respondents, half considered Jakobstad to be an equal and non-discriminatory place to live. However, 23% of respondents regarded the town as an unequal place to live, and 27%, approximately 150 people, reported having experienced discrimination in the town during the past year. Discrimination was perceived to be most related to language, while 18% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination based on gender. The fewest experiences of discrimination were related to religion, ethnic background, or disability and health status. Approximately 13% of respondents had experienced discrimination based on age or sexual orientation.

Among the respondents, 30% considered moving around in Jakobstad to be completely safe, while 48% considered it safe. The responses indicate that feelings of insecurity are primarily related to deficiencies in traffic safety, such as poor compliance with traffic regulations, excessive speeds, and inadequate maintenance of pedestrian and cycling routes, particularly during winter. Concerns about the increased visibility of drugs, crime, and disruptive groups of young people in the town centre during the evenings and at night have also affected residents' sense of security. Many young people and women reported fear of becoming victims of harassment or violence, which leads many to avoid moving around alone in the evenings and after dark.

Most respondents considered moving around in the urban environment to be equal and accessible. However, the responses reveal dissatisfaction with long and unevenly distributed school journeys and inadequate school transport services, particularly for Finnish-speaking pupils.

Jakobstad's urban environment is not perceived as fully equal or accessible due to shortcomings in physical accessibility. Common concerns include high kerbs, uneven pedestrian and cycling paths, and mobility barriers, especially during winter. These issues particularly affect people with mobility impairments and visual disabilities. Respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the accessibility of public buildings, businesses, and the town centre because of the difficult physical environment, the limited availability of parking spaces, and the insufficient provision of parking spaces for persons with disabilities.

The services provided by the town are generally considered accessible and equitable. However, some respondents felt that upper secondary education (general upper secondary schools and vocational education institutions) and comprehensive schools are not equally accessible to everyone. A proportion of respondents also disagreed that sports and recreational services are fully accessible and equitable. Approximately 12% of respondents were dissatisfied with employment, integration, and early childhood education services in Jakobstad.

Jakobstad is a bilingual municipality, and the main objective of the town's bilingualism programme is to promote equality between the Finnish and Swedish languages in municipal administration and services, while strengthening a positive linguistic climate so that speakers of both languages feel equally valued and comfortable living in the town. Fewer than half of the survey respondents felt that the town treats Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking residents equally. The written responses clearly demonstrate a perceived inequality between the language groups. Respondents particularly felt that education, access to information, and cultural and sports opportunities tend to favour Swedish speakers. The perceived imbalance in cultural and recreational activities is also influenced by the dominance of Swedish-speaking associations and clubs in the local leisure sector.

According to the Constitution of Finland (731/1999), everyone has the right to use their own mother tongue, either Finnish or Swedish, when dealing with public authorities. The Language Act further specifies this right by requiring that all official forms and necessary documents be available in a person's native language. Approximately half of the respondents to the resident survey felt that they receive the information and services they need from the town in their own mother tongue.

What could the Town do to promote equality and non-discrimination in Jakobstad?

A total of 199 respondents answered this voluntary question. Many of the responses repeated themes raised in earlier questions, such as the need to improve Finnish-language educational services, enhance the flow of information, and provide greater support for children, young people, and persons with disabilities. Many respondents expressed a desire for increased efforts to influence residents' attitudes, encourage participation, and invest in meeting places and events in both languages to strengthen community spirit in the town. There was also a clear demand for a Finnish-language newspaper or another information channel to ensure that all residents receive up-to-date information about municipal events, decisions, and services regardless of their digital skills.

How could the Town better promote understanding and a sense of community between different population groups?

A total of 178 respondents answered this voluntary question. Once again, the responses highlighted the importance of fostering a sense of community through inclusive events and activities where different language groups and population groups can meet, as well as ensuring equal educational opportunities for children and young people. Respondents suggested organizing genuinely bilingual events and creating new meeting places, such as parks and other public spaces. To strengthen social cohesion, participation, and mutual understanding while reducing misunderstandings, respondents called for clearer, more multilingual, and more accessible communication. They also expressed a need for the Town to take a clear stance on issues related to language climate, active integration efforts, and experiences of discrimination, and to participate actively in addressing these matters.

Other comments

A total of seventy-one respondents provided additional comments. These comments once again clearly highlighted perceived inequalities between Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking residents. Differences in employment opportunities were also raised, with Finnish-speaking respondents feeling that they are not in an equal position in the labour market. Respondents called for greater cooperation, transparency, and opportunities to influence municipal affairs, as well as measures to bring children and young people together so that language barriers could be reduced. The language immersion school was frequently mentioned as a particularly positive initiative within the town. Respondents also expressed a wish for shared responsibility in the continued development of Jakobstad.

5 OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES 2026-2030

Jakobstad must be a town where everyone has the same rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. The town must provide equal services for all. Achieving equality also requires combating discrimination on multiple grounds. Equality, non-discrimination, and accessibility must be an integral and natural part of the operations of a multicultural municipality.

A gender equality perspective must be integrated into all municipal activities to promote equality between women and men. The gender equality perspective must be considered when planning political decisions, strategies, plans, and methods that affect people's everyday lives. This can be achieved, for example, by incorporating a gender equality perspective already at the planning stage.

Gender impact assessments must be carried out across the town's areas of responsibility. They should be conducted early for all major proposals concerning policies, processes, routines, and resource allocation, with final decisions based on the assessment results.

Leaders at all levels of municipal administration must actively promote gender equality, and gender equality thinking and inclusion must become a natural part of all decision-making. The objective is to incorporate a gender equality perspective into all stages of the municipal annual cycle, from budgeting to financial reporting, and to include reporting from this perspective in the annual reports of each sector.

In the short term, the Town of Jakobstad must provide information and training on equality and non-discrimination to employees, elected representatives, and supervisors, while also identifying shortcomings related to gender equality and equal treatment within the municipality's various bodies.

The purpose of this plan is to serve as a roadmap for the different sectors in achieving and monitoring the stated objectives, while guiding day-to-day operations in a manner that promotes equality and non-discrimination throughout the town. The plan refers to the articles of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.

The implementation of the measures and outcomes outlined in this plan will be monitored annually by the Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee. During the planning period, progress will be reported twice to the Town Board and once to the Town Council during the council term. The management of each sector is responsible for compiling the reports and presenting them to the Town Board.

Town of Jakobstad Strategic Objectives 2025–2030

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Charter article	Development objective	Measure	Monitoring	Service area
Article 1 & 2 Political Commitment and Political Representation Article 7 Good Administration and Consultation	Gender equality and equal treatment as part of all planning, communications and decision-making	Develop impact pre-assessment processes when preparing matters for the town's political bodies.	The Audit Committee reviews this in connection with the annual accounts.	All service areas

RESIDENTS AT THE CENTRE OF ALL TOWN OPERATIONS

Charter article	Development objective	Measure	Monitoring	Service area
Article 3 Participation in Political and Civic Life	Resident participation in projects and decision-making. Aim to include more foreign-language-speaking residents on the town's residents' panel.	Promotion through the integration gateway and on social media forums.	Increase the share of foreign-language speakers on the residents' panel (currently 2%) so that it is closer to their actual share of the population, 17%.	Town Executive Office
Article 8 General Commitment	Strengthen residents' linguistic rights in services and operations.	Strengthen bilingualism in resident forums organised by the town. Objectives of the Bilingualism Programme 2024–2030.	Opportunity to provide feedback in connection with every resident forum. The Town Board reviews implementation of the Bilingualism Programme annually and reports to the Town Council.	All service areas Bilingualism Programme working group
Article 20 Culture, Sport and Recreation	Promote bilingualism and equality at sports and cultural events organised by the town. Community.	Bilingualism Programme 2024–2030 prepared. The town organises fully bilingual events and sports opportunities.	Resident survey every two years / self-evaluation Continuous monitoring / self-evaluation once a year.	Education and Welfare Services Sports Services
Article 36 Digitalisation and Digital Inclusion	Support for digital instruction for specific groups.	Digital information and participation. Jakobstad Town Library offers drop-in digital guidance every Thursday from 13:00 to 15:00, providing help with everyday technology.	Continuous monitoring	Education and Welfare Services Library

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Charter article	Development objective	Measure	Monitoring	Service area
Article 25 Urban and Local Planning	Develop services and the urban environment equitably for people with specific needs.	Make the town's buildings and premises accessible to everyone.	Check whether ramps and accessible toilets are included in renovation plans.	Facilities Management, Planning Department, Municipal Engineering Department and Sports Services
Article 26 Mobility and Transport		The town centre is planned and built in accordance with updated master plans.	Assessment of social accessibility in town premises.	
		Adapt public transport capacity to demand.	The town development plan is used as guidance. Budget and annual accounts; feedback from transport users.	

WELL-BEING AND SAFETY

Charter article	Development objective	Measure	Monitoring	Service area
Article 6 Countering Stereotypes	We aim to counter stereotypical representations in the town's communications.	Promote diversity in the town's communications.	Self-evaluation once a year.	Town Executive Office
Article 18 Social Inclusion	Prevent social exclusion.	Promote access to employment, housing, education, culture and social support.	Resident surveys (Health Barometer) HYTE coefficient (strategic indicator) Continuous monitoring	Education and Welfare Services; Employment Services; Town Housing Adviser; All service areas
Article 22 Gender-Based Violence Article 32 Cyber Violence	Counter gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and online violence/cyber violence.	Training Information for school staff, pupils and parents. Anchor activities.	Continuous monitoring	Education Services
Article 19 Housing	Promote access to suitable housing.	Through its operations and housing company, the town promotes a pleasant living environment throughout the town and an adequate supply of reasonably priced rental housing.	Continuous monitoring	Town Executive Office in cooperation with the Planning Department and Fastighets Ab Ebba Kiinteistö Oy.

6 DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

CEMR

Short for: The Council of European Municipalities and Regions.

Equality

Equality refers to equality between genders, including equal rights and opportunities, as well as the fair distribution of resources and power. The purpose of the Act on Equality between Women and Men is to prevent discrimination based on gender.

Bilingualism

According to the Language Act (423/2003), a municipality is defined as bilingual if it has both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking residents and the language minority constitutes at least eight per cent of the population or at least 3,000 residents.

Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Local Government Association Finland) is an organization that develops municipal operations, provides services to municipalities, and advocates for their interests.

Discrimination by Association and Discrimination Based on Assumption

Discrimination by association refers to a situation where a person is treated unfavourably because of someone close to them, for example due to that person's disability or ethnic background. Discrimination based on assumption refers to a situation where a person is treated unfavourably because of an assumption made about them.

Diversity

Diversity refers to differences between groups and individuals, such as differences in age, gender, language, and health status. The realization of diversity supports equality and non-discrimination.

Formal and Substantive Gender Equality

Formal gender equality refers to non-discrimination between women and men, equal rights, rules, and treatment, as well as the guarantee of equal opportunities, such as the right to vote. Substantive gender equality refers to equality in different circumstances and in the outcomes that result from them.

Formal and Substantive Equality

Formal equality means that people are treated the same way in similar situations. Substantive equality means actively eliminating inequalities that are based on discrimination.

Discrimination

Discrimination means that no one may be treated unfairly based on age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relations, health status, disability, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic.

Gender Identity and Gender Expression

Gender identity refers to a person's experience and understanding of their own gender, while gender expression refers to the way a person expresses their gender through behaviour, clothing, or other means.

Direct and Indirect Discrimination

Discrimination is direct when a person is treated less favourably than another person has been, is being, or would be treated in a comparable situation because of a personal characteristic. Indirect discrimination refers to a situation where an apparently neutral rule, criterion, or practice places a person at a disadvantage compared to others because of a personal characteristic.

Equality and non-discrimination

Equality and non-discrimination mean that all people are of equal worth regardless of their gender, age, origin, religion, disability, or any other personal characteristic. The opposite of equality is inequality.

SOURCES

Legislation:

The Language Act

[Språklagen \(423/2003\)](#) (in Swedish)

[Kielilaki \(423/2003\)](#) (in Finnish)

The Local Government Act

[Kommunallagen \(410/2015\)](#) (in Swedish)

[Kuntalaki \(410/2015\)](#) (in Finnish)

The Act on Equality between Women and Men

[Lag om jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män \(609/1986\)](#) (in Swedish)

[Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta \(609/1986\)](#) (in Finnish)

The Constitution of Finland

[Finlands grundlag](#) (in Swedish)

[Suomen perustuslaki](#) (in Finnish)

The Basic Education Act

[Lag om grundläggande utbildning \(628/1998\)](#) (in Swedish)

[Perusopetuslaki \(628/1998\)](#) (in Finnish)

The Non-Discrimination Act

[Diskrimineringslag \(1325/2014\)](#) (in Swedish)

[Yhdenvertaisuuslaki \(1325/2014\)](#) (In Finnish)

The Early Childhood Education and Care Act

[Lag om småbarnspedagogik \(540/2018\)](#) (in Swedish)

[Varhaiskasvatuslaki \(540/2018\)](#) (in Finnish)

Documents of the town of Jakobstad:

The town of Jakobstad (2026): [The town of Jakobstad's survey on equality and non-discrimination](#)

[The town of Jakobstad's website](#)

[Staden Jakobstads strategi 2025–2030](#) (in Swedish)

[Pietarsaaren kaupungin strategia 2025–2030](#) (in Finnish)

[Staden Jakobstads tvåspråkighetsprogram 2024–2030](#) (in Swedish)

[Pietarsaaren kaupungin kaksikielisyysohjelma 2024–2030](#) (in Finnish)

Other sources:

[The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.](#)