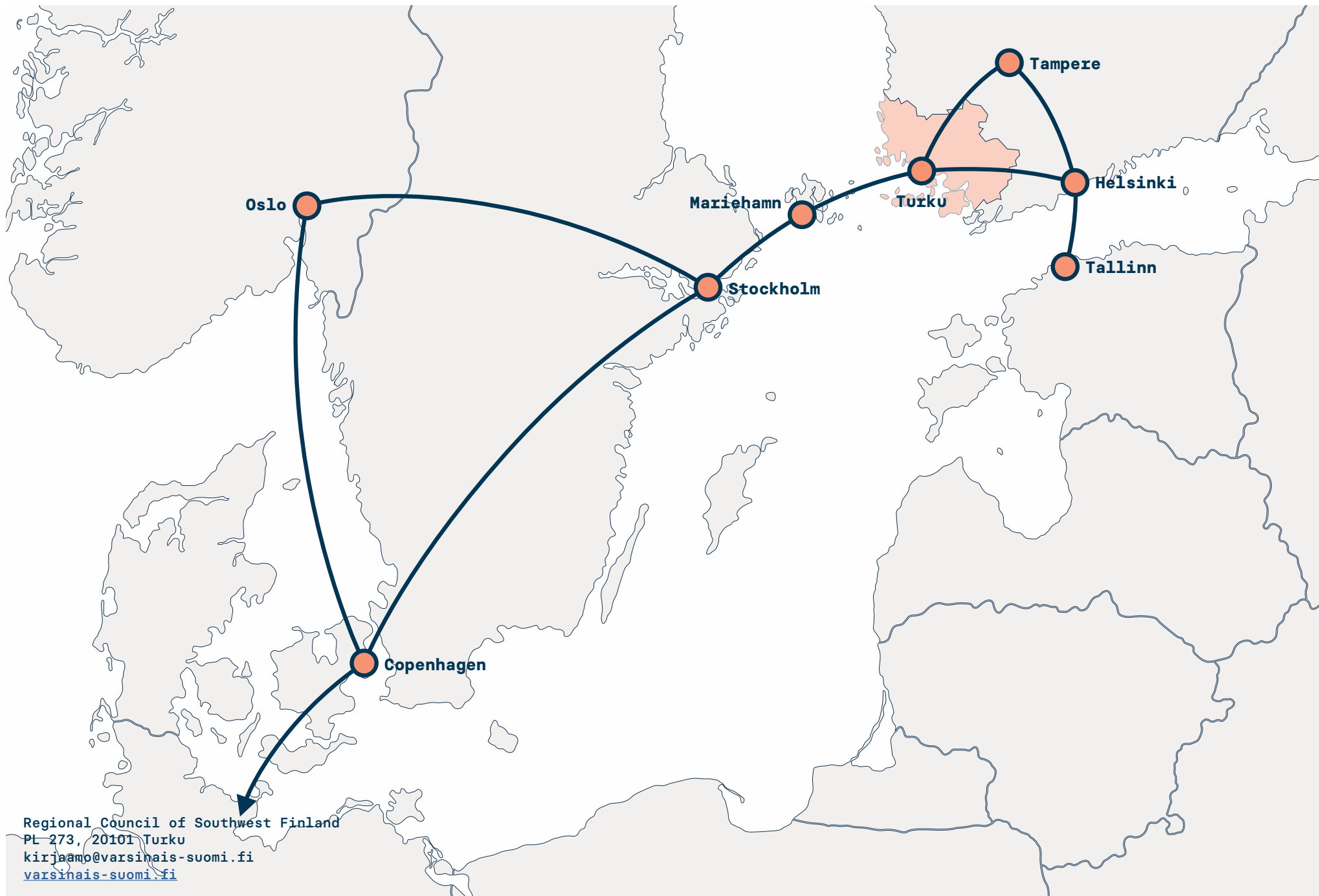


Regional Strategy
of Southwest Finland

2040+

Summary

**Southwest Finland
is a builder of
connections that
links Finland
to the West**



Regional Council of Southwest Finland
PL 273, 20101 Turku
kirjaamo@varsinais-suomi.fi
varsinais-suomi.fi

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1. REGIONAL STRATEGY OF SOUTHWEST FINLAND 2040+

The Regional Strategy of Southwest Finland 2040+ describes the shared vision of key stakeholders in Southwest Finland on how the region will succeed in the coming decades: by connecting people and communities, making use of the region's unique natural and cultural values, and cooperating locally, nationally and internationally.

In Southwest Finland, the strategy is not merely a paper document but a genuine tool for collaboration. It has been prepared under the coordination of the Regional Council of Southwest Finland in broad cooperation with municipalities, regional actors, businesses, research and education organisations, civil society organisations and residents. It is also implemented jointly through the Southwest Finland Developer Forum – a collaborative structure that brings together around twenty networks and hundreds of regional experts to work on translating the strategy into practical action.

This summary presents the Regional Strategy of Southwest Finland 2040+, a long-term statutory document designed to strengthen the region's vitality, sustainability and international competitiveness. The strategy includes both the Regional Programme and the Smart Specialisation Strategy for the years 2026–2029.

The following pages also provide a concise overview of the region, its role as part of the Nordic countries and Europe, and the key priorities of the strategy on the way towards 2040 and beyond.

*Welcome to Southwest Finland
– we look forward to working with you!*

LÄNSI VÄST WEST



Vision 2040+

Southwest Finland is a builder of connections that links Finland to the West

Strategic Goals 2040

A Vital and Sustainable Southwest Finland

A Vibrant and Attractive Southwest Finland

A Southwest Finland for You

Objectives of the Regional Programme 2026–2029

Sustainably Growth-Oriented Business

Entrepreneur- and Talent-Friendly Environment

Competent Citizenship

Advanced Transformative Technologies

Efficient and Competitive Transport Connections

Wellbeing and a Good Life

Sustainable Food and Resource Economy

Distinctive Experience-Based Services and Cultural Activities

Diverse Nature and a Shared Cultural Environment

Smart specialisation priorities 2026–2029



Maritime solutions



Food innovations and food security



Professional health solutions



Smart solutions



Sustainability Transition in Economy

Cross-cutting Themes

Sustainable Economy and Competitiveness
Nature and the Clean Transition
Resilience and Security
Capacity for Renewal and Future Readiness

Values

RESPONSIBILITY / ACCESSIBILITY / CURIOSITY / TRUST

2. SOUTHWEST FINLAND: UNIQUE NATURE, RICH HISTORY AND HIGH TECH

Southwest Finland is an international Finnish region with a diverse economic structure, distinguished by the unique Archipelago Sea, a rich cultural environment and a long history.

Finland's story began here. Southwest Finland is home to Finland's earliest known administrative centres, and many of the country's first churches, castles and administrative structures were built in this region. In historical sources, the word "Finland" originally referred specifically to Southwest Finland, underscoring the region's significance in the early development of Finnish society. The region is strategically located at the heart of the Baltic Sea and serves as an important link between Finland, the Nordic countries and mainland Europe.

The region is known, among other things, for the 800-year history of its central city, Turku, strong expertise in technology, education and research, innovation capacity, bilingualism (Finnish–Swedish) and an increasingly multi-

lingual population, and a vibrant cultural and arts scene. Southwest Finland also has the most diverse natural environment in Finland. The Archipelago Sea, with its approximately 40,000 islands, is globally unique.

Known as Finland's breadbasket, the region plays a central role in national food production. Southwest Finland produces significant volumes of wheat and rye, potatoes and eggs, and has extensive expertise in speciality crops such as fava beans, field peas, sugar beet and caraway. From a technology and innovation perspective, Southwest Finland is home to world-class expertise in shipbuilding, pharmaceutical and health technologies, artificial intelligence and language models, as well as dual-use technologies.

With around 500,000 inhabitants, Southwest Finland is Finland's third-largest region by population. As elsewhere in Finland, the population is ageing, but in recent years the number of working-age people has begun to

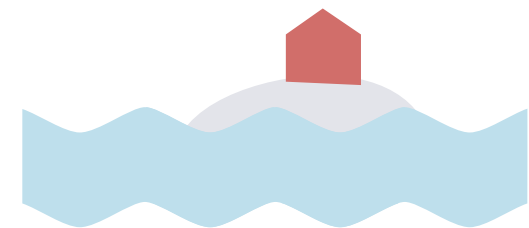
grow slightly thanks to immigration. According to forecasts, the population of Southwest Finland will increase to nearly 540,000 by 2040. Growth is mainly concentrated in the core urban area of Turku, while some municipalities require solutions based on smart adaptation. The region is strengthening its attractiveness and retention by developing and supporting business activities, skills attraction, wellbeing and cultural activities.

The development of Southwest Finland is closely linked to national and international cooperation and global change. EU policies and funding influence the region's climate, energy, agriculture and innovation activities, and Southwest Finland is an active participant in European preparedness and security cooperation.

Baltic Sea policy and Nordic cooperation are important to the region, particularly from the perspectives of maritime transport, marine protection, the maritime cluster and archipelago

cooperation. The shared Nordic vision of a sustainable and integrated region supports the objectives of Southwest Finland, too.

Global trends such as climate change, technological transformation and geopolitical uncertainty create challenges but also opportunities for the green transition, knowledge-based growth and strengthening security of supply. Experts and companies from Southwest Finland are involved in many European development and innovation networks.



Southwest Finland – Rich in Diversity

GDP

21,6

billion

GDP growth

+19,3 %

2010–2025

44 630

€/per capita (2022)

Population

500 000

Increase of

47 700

people since 2000

Working-age population grew by

8 000

(2020–2024)

122

languages spoken

11%

foreign-language speakers

6%

Swedish-speaking population

Nearly

43 000

students

Area

20 500

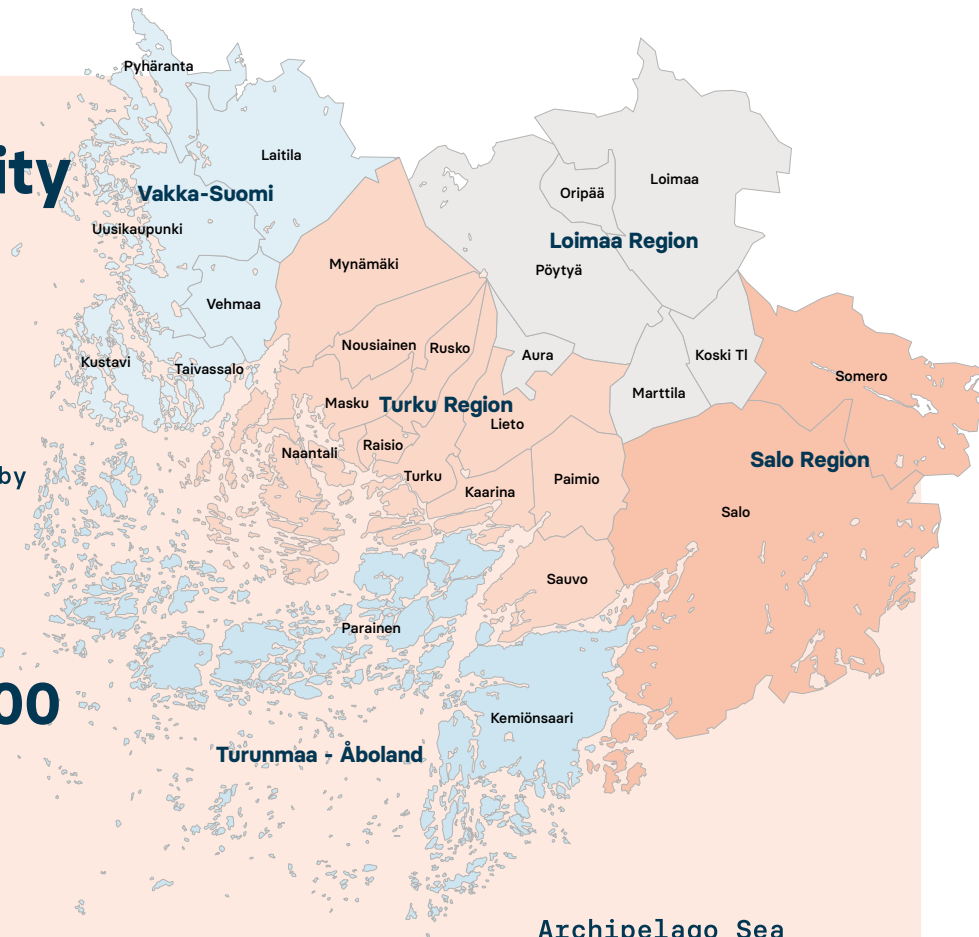
km²

47%

marine area

14%

protected natural area



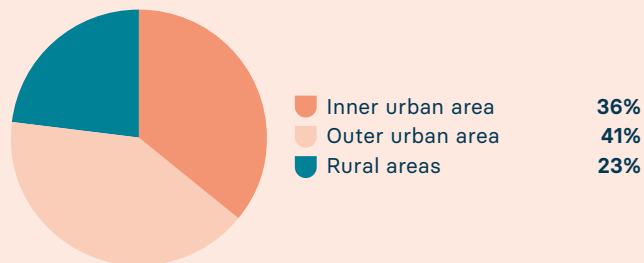
Archipelago Sea
– the world's largest
contiguous archipelago

Finland's highest number of
summer cottages

49 000

summer cottages

Majority of the population lives in urban areas



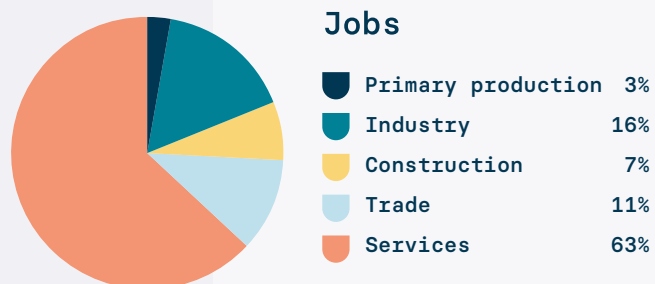
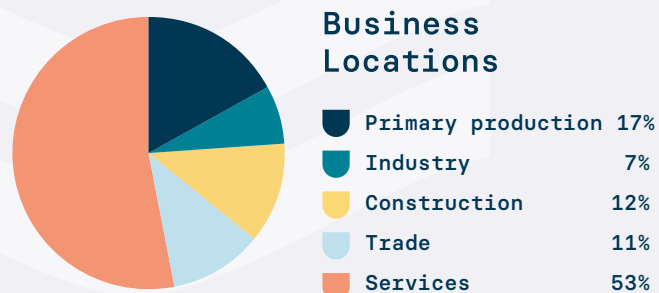
40 000
islands

23
average depth

139
breeding bird species

46
habitat types

Southwest Finland – Vibrant, Attractive and Competitive



Finland's **2nd** largest export region:
Approx. 10 % of total national exports
Goods exports € 6,7 billion (2024)

Finland's **2nd** largest concentration of culture and arts professionals

Annual travel volumes from Southwest Finland

2 million ferry trips to Sweden **2 million** train journeys from Turku **250 000** international air journeys

Port of Turku: Finland's **No. 1.** in maritime traffic between Finland and Sweden

Port of Naantali: over **50%** of Finland-Sweden truck and trailer ferry traffic

11/17 of Finland's 17 ferry routes (archipelago connections)



Over **50%** of Finland's pharmaceutical production



Order book of Turku Shipyard
€ **7,5** billion (including options)



ICT sector turnover growth **+133%** 2015–2024



Finland's **No. 1.** producer in agriculture and fisheries. The country's most diverse food production region



-46 % change in industrial fuel-related emissions 2005–2023

3. SOUTHWEST FINLAND – YOUR CONNECTION TO FINLAND!



Southwest Finland is a builder of connections that links Finland to the West – the Nordic countries and mainland Europe. In accordance with the vision of the current regional strategy, we aim to strengthen cooperation between people, cultures, ways of working, innovations and business.

The region builds connections regionally, nationally and internationally, drawing on a long tradition of partnerships. Strong internal, multi-centred connections – from the archipelago to rural areas and cities – form the foundation of regional development. The region's strengths include security of supply, technology, higher education, cultural heritage, sustainable use of natural resources and international cooperation. Our objectives are growth, competitiveness, adaptability and the green transition, supported by skills and education.

Key physical connections include bridges, routes, roads and data connections. We are particularly promoting a

fixed link to Stockholm and a new, faster rail connection between Turku and Helsinki, strengthening Nordic connectivity and the innovation environment.

The Regional Strategy of Southwest Finland 2040+ is structured around three strategic goals:

A Vital and Sustainable Southwest Finland, through which, during the 2026–2029 regional programme period, growth-oriented business activity is strengthened, RDI expenditure is increased to one billion euros, disruptive technologies related to data and dual-use technologies are developed, and sustainable food and resource economies, the green transition, and the circular economy are promoted.

A Vibrant and Attractive Southwest Finland, aiming to attract talent and investments, streamline international recruitment, improve transport connections, develop sustainable tourism and strengthen the regional brand.

A Southwest Finland for You, emphasising investment in education,

skills development and lifelong learning, supporting students' employment in the region, promoting wellbeing, inclusion and security, protecting and restoring the Archipelago Sea and biodiversity and developing cultural services.

Cooperation is guided by the values of responsibility, accessibility, trust and curiosity. Trust is the foundation of successful cooperation. In all activities, four cross-cutting themes are taken into account:

- Sustainable economy and competitiveness (innovation, resource efficiency, functional transport connections)
- Nature and the clean transition (climate change mitigation, biodiversity, the circular economy)
- Resilience and security (preparedness, security of supply, adaptation to demographic change, wellbeing)
- Inclusion and community (cooperation, culture, education)

Southwest Finland is building sustainable growth, strengthening competitiveness and taking care of

nature and wellbeing – through cooperation and by building connections – ensuring that the region remains vital, attractive and resilient in 2040 and beyond.

Contact us for more information about the objectives of the Regional Programme and their implementation!

Table 1: 22 objectives for 2026–2029 grouped under 3 strategic goals.

A Vital and Sustainable Southwest Finland	
Sustainably Growth-Oriented Business	<p>1. Companies in Southwest Finland invest and internationalise with confidence.</p> <p>2. An increasing number of SMEs in Southwest Finland engage in product development, and RDI expenditure reaches one billion euros annually.</p>
Advanced Transformative Technologies	<p>3. Southwest Finland is a frontrunner in data-driven, creative and responsible business, utilising new data technologies.</p> <p>4. Southwest Finland becomes a key developer of defence and dual-use technologies in Finland.</p>
Sustainable Food and Resource Economy	<p>5. Several new green and clean transition projects have been launched in Southwest Finland, with secure energy supply.</p> <p>6. The transition to a circular economy has reduced the use of natural resources and significantly lowered emissions in Southwest Finland.</p> <p>7. Sustainable food production is profitable in Southwest Finland, and the degree of food processing has increased.</p>
A Vibrant and Attractive Southwest Finland	
Entrepreneur- and Talent-Friendly Environment	<p>8. It is smooth and straightforward for companies and investors to establish themselves in Southwest Finland.</p> <p>9. Meaningful employment opportunities attract talent to the region.</p> <p>10. Higher education institutions and vocational institutions in Southwest Finland are among the most attractive in Finland.</p>
Efficient and Competitive Transport Connections	<p>11. Connections from Southwest Finland to the west form the core of Finland's international transport and security of supply.</p>
Distinctive Experience-Based Services and Cultural Activities	<p>12. Southwest Finland stands out with a uniquely positive profile.</p> <p>13. The Archipelago and the region's natural and cultural sites form Finland's most attractive sustainable tourism offering.</p>
A Southwest Finland for You	
Competent Citizenship	<p>14. Southwest Finland is a region of education and culture, where learning, education and lifelong and continuous learning are valued.</p> <p>15. Graduates from educational institutions in Southwest Finland remain in and are employed in the region.</p>
Wellbeing and a Good Life	<p>16. People in Southwest Finland enjoy a high level of wellbeing.</p> <p>17. Preparedness and mutual trust strengthen security in Southwest Finland.</p> <p>18. Living environments in Southwest Finland support a good quality of life.</p> <p>19. Regional rail transport forms the backbone of well-functioning travel chains in Southwest Finland.</p>
Diverse Nature and a Shared Cultural Environment	<p>20. The state of the Archipelago Sea is improving through effective measures.</p> <p>21. The intrinsic value of nature is recognised in Southwest Finland, and biodiversity is being strengthened.</p> <p>22. Southwest Finland offers the best cultural services and the most captivating cultural environments in Finland.</p>

4. INNOVATION PRIORITIES OF SOUTHWEST FINLAND



In addition to outlining future visions, strengths and development themes, the regional strategy identifies the fields and themes in which new innovations are emerging and in which the region is particularly competitive. This section forms the Smart Specialisation Strategy in accordance with the European Union's policy framework.

The aim of smart specialisation strategies is to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems that transform research and development into regional growth. Smart specialisation guides activities and funding towards areas where new solutions are created. In addition, it aims to strengthen cohesion between European regions and improve Europe's position in global competition through international cooperation.

Smart specialisation focuses on increasing competitiveness by supporting innovation. Innovation is understood broadly to include not only products and goods but also services, processes

and social innovations. While strong competitiveness supports economic success, smart specialisation also plays a key role in promoting Europe's social and environmental sustainability and renewal through innovation.

The Smart Specialisation Strategy of Southwest Finland 2026–2029 consists of five priority areas: Maritime Solutions, Food Innovations and Food Security, Clinical Health Solutions, Smart Solutions, and Sustainability Transition in the Economy.

Maritime Solutions

Southwest Finland aims to be the world's most innovative maritime industry region. The maritime industry has a long tradition in the region, with the Turku shipyard dating back nearly 300 years. Today, the region's top experts and extensive subcontracting networks build world-class cruise ships for the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas.

Together, the maritime industries of Southwest Finland and the neighbouring region of Satakunta employ around 8,000 people in approximately 450 companies, representing about 26% of all maritime industry jobs in Finland.

The Maritime Solutions priority focuses on cooperation and innovation development, particularly in shipbuilding, cruise vessels and autonomous vessels. This requires suppliers as well as expertise in design, software, systems and equipment. The development of shipyard and port infrastructure, supply chains, maintenance operations and supporting logistics plays a central role.

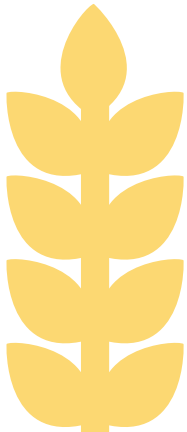
Through smart specialisation cooperation, innovation is driven across products, operating models and services, advancing maritime expertise towards greater sustainability and competitiveness. Innovations emerge in high-quality expert ecosystems, test and pilot environments, and in national

and international value chains.

Innovations in Southwest Finland focus on, for example, the development of alternative fuels and clean electricity for maritime transport. The aim is carbon neutrality in both new vessels and the construction process. Virtual testing environments and autonomous ships enable global leadership. Maritime solutions also include the development of dual-use capabilities and various maritime defence and security technologies.

Food Innovations and Food Security

Southwest Finland aims to be a reformer of a food system that promotes food security and wellbeing. The food chain has a significant regional economic role, employing over 16,000 people. More than 20% of business establishments and 15% of regional turnover are part of the food chain. The region is also



a national frontrunner in food-based sustainable development.

Food security is a key element of Finnish and European security of supply and preparedness. Food security means that all people have access to food. This requires secure food production and a supporting infrastructure and ecosystem that function and evolve in line with societal needs. Southwest Finland invests in developing food innovation ecosystems through European cooperation as well.

New innovations are pursued particularly in regenerative agriculture, sustainable and anticipatory food production, new crops and cultivation methods, research-based product development and specialised products. The potential of natural products from the region's forests – such as berries, mushrooms and herbs – is being explored. Solutions are developed with a consumer-centric and individualised approach, with particular emphasis on



products promoting health and wellbeing, influencing dietary choices, impact-based modelling, nutrition solutions and overall wellbeing. Innovations that strengthen food security and security of supply remain a core strength for the future.

Professional Health Solutions

Southwest Finland is Finland's leading region in the development of demanding health solutions. The region hosts the country's strongest concentration of pharmaceutical development, rooted in multidisciplinary top-level research and long-term competence development. This has created a foundation for diverse business activity supported through commercialisation and internationalisation.

More than 100 health-sector companies operate in the region, accounting for approximately one-fifth

of the industrial turnover and workforce. Of the 23 medicines introduced to the Finnish market, 21 have been developed by pharmaceutical companies operating in Turku. Over 75% of Finland's pharmaceutical exports and around half of its diagnostic exports originate from the region, and national pharmaceutical development is coordinated from Turku.

The position of Southwest Finland is further strengthened by its role in national and international cooperation networks and sustained investment in future expertise and technologies such as artificial intelligence, synthetic health and social data, imaging and sustainable development.

Advanced health solutions refer to products and services designed for patients, healthcare professionals and service providers, supporting clinical work, diagnostic processes or the daily lives of people living with illness. Development in this field is regulated and

requires a high level of expertise and precision.

Solutions include, alongside medicines, advanced diagnostic tools such as AI-based image analysis and information systems that support clinical decision-making and the monitoring of treatment effectiveness. Research, development and innovation activities, as well as education in regional higher education institutions and close collaboration with companies, play a central role.

These solutions are not primarily intended for consumers (with the exception of self-care products) but support the daily work of healthcare professionals, improve quality of care and patient safety and enhance service efficiency and underlying RDI activities.

Innovations are pursued broadly in pharmaceutical and health technologies, diagnostics and biotechnology, with particular focus on multidisciplinary image analysis, synthetic data,



immunology, women's health and health equity, quantum technologies and dual-use solutions. An emerging area is the cross-sectoral integration of pharmaceutical and health technology expertise with nutrition-related solutions.

Smart Solutions

Digital technologies will penetrate ever deeper into societal functions and the products and services we use. Artificial intelligence is already utilised far beyond generative language models. AI algorithms enable not only text and image generation but also smarter everyday products such as electric toothbrushes and robotic vacuum cleaners. Developing smart solutions requires deep specialised expertise and, above all, the commercialisation of research knowledge.

In Southwest Finland, the development of solutions that digitally transform industry and services has grown

rapidly. The ICT sector is one of the region's fastest-growing industries, with turnover increasing by over 50% between 2020 and 2024. Research and development in digital and information technologies at the University of Turku have been strengthened through the establishment of a Faculty of Technology, and AI research in particular is strong in the region.

In addition to AI-based technologies, smart solutions may relate to virtual technologies, cybersecurity, health and quantum technologies, as well as drone, geospatial and remote sensing technologies. Data plays a central role in all smart solutions. Without high-quality data, development and utilisation remain limited. While open data and interoperability remain important, increasing emphasis is being placed on data protection technologies enabled by commercial data and data spaces in which data producers can also offer datasets commercially.



Southwest Finland aims to strengthen the development and commercialisation of internationally significant smart products and services based on digital technology research. Innovations may also emerge in defence and security technologies. This requires strengthening smart solution ecosystems where technological expertise is utilised broadly across industry and interaction between actors is seamless.

Sustainability Transition in the Economy

The green transition refers to a shift towards an ecologically sustainable economy. Through it, new structures of production and economic activity are being created in the EU, Finland and Southwest Finland to ensure sustainable competitiveness and self-sufficiency in the future. The green transition is based on low-carbon solutions, circular economy practices, biodiversity-friendly

approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources. The clean energy transition is a core part of the green transition.

Modern industry is at the heart of the green transition and is closely linked to industrial services, placing pressure on infrastructure and skills development. In practice, the green transition is reflected in the growth of the bioeconomy, circular economy and clean technology businesses. In Southwest Finland, promising business initiatives aim to scale technologies to industrial levels. The region's strength lies in high-technology expertise and the production of high-value end products.

The hydrogen economy in Southwest Finland not only involves hydrogen production but also the processing of hydrogen derivatives such as chemicals and materials, leveraging strong regional expertise in chemistry, engineering, assembly and process technologies. The region has all the prerequisites to

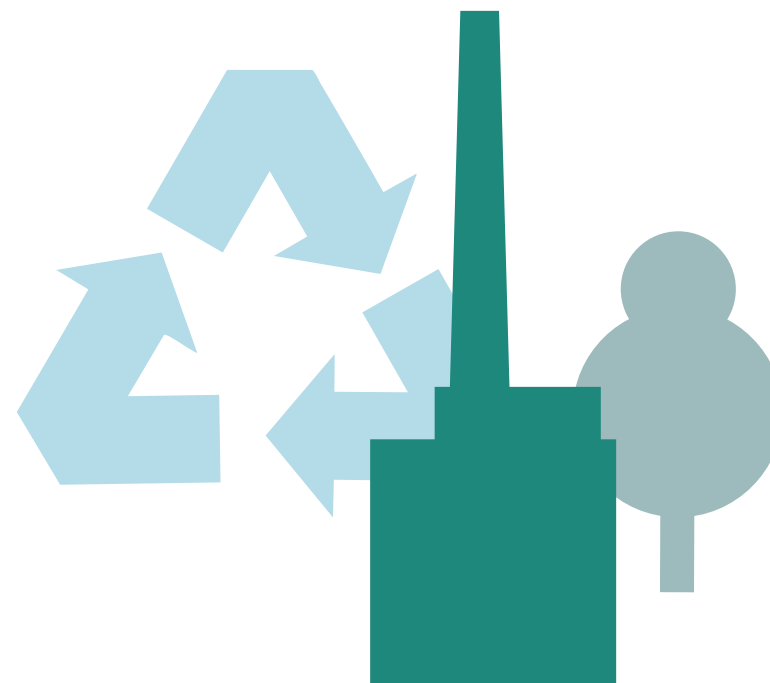
generate new innovations and sustainable industrial-scale business, thereby strengthening vitality and competitiveness.

Southwest Finland is seeking to become a frontrunner in responsible and productive business ecosystems, driven by technological expertise and investments, aiming for internationally competitive and sustainable business. It is essential to develop business, production, consumption and the economy in ways that support the sustainability transition, reduce environmental pressure and respect planetary boundaries. Decoupling economic growth from resource use is key.

Innovations are focusing particularly on replacement and alternative production, circular and hydrogen economies, clean energy and its applications such as electrified transport and battery development. These solutions enhance

flexibility and improve the security of supply. Spatial planning at the regional and municipal levels assesses the placement of green transition facilities and transmission connections to support holistic sustainability. Social innovations also play an important role, often connected to societal function, health, wellbeing and working conditions.

Special attention is given to developing more sustainable practices related to the Archipelago Sea and archipelago areas, including nutrient recycling, sustainable tourism and sustainable construction.



5. HOW WE WORK

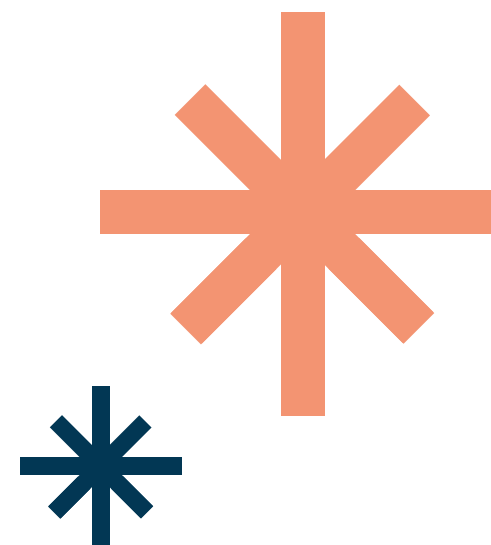
Southwest Finland has a long tradition of strategic cooperation in regional development, with a consciously developed model refined over more than a decade.

Our model is unique and based on active and experimental partnership and network-based cooperation. The Southwest Finland Developer Forum brings together more than twenty thematic networks and hundreds of experts from different organisations to seek solutions and perspectives on challenges and transformative trends affecting the region. Cooperation is voluntary, open and mutually beneficial. The role of the Regional Council of Southwest Finland is to coordinate, support and facilitate the work of the networks, while content is developed jointly.

The implementation of the Regional Strategy of Southwest Finland 2040+ relies on the activity, curiosity and cooperation of people across the region. While funding can be sought from national and international programmes, success ultimately depends on how effectively we work together, direct existing resources, generate impact and find new solutions.

The implementation of the strategy is being monitored throughout the programme period to ensure responsiveness to change and effective targeting of actions. Monitoring supports impact and continuous development.

Our networks extend beyond the region and Finland, and we continuously seek new opportunities and partnerships. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to learn more.



WELCOME TO SOUTHWEST FINLAND – YOUR CONNECTION TO FINLAND!



Regional Council
of Southwest Finland

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