

Seto in Estonia

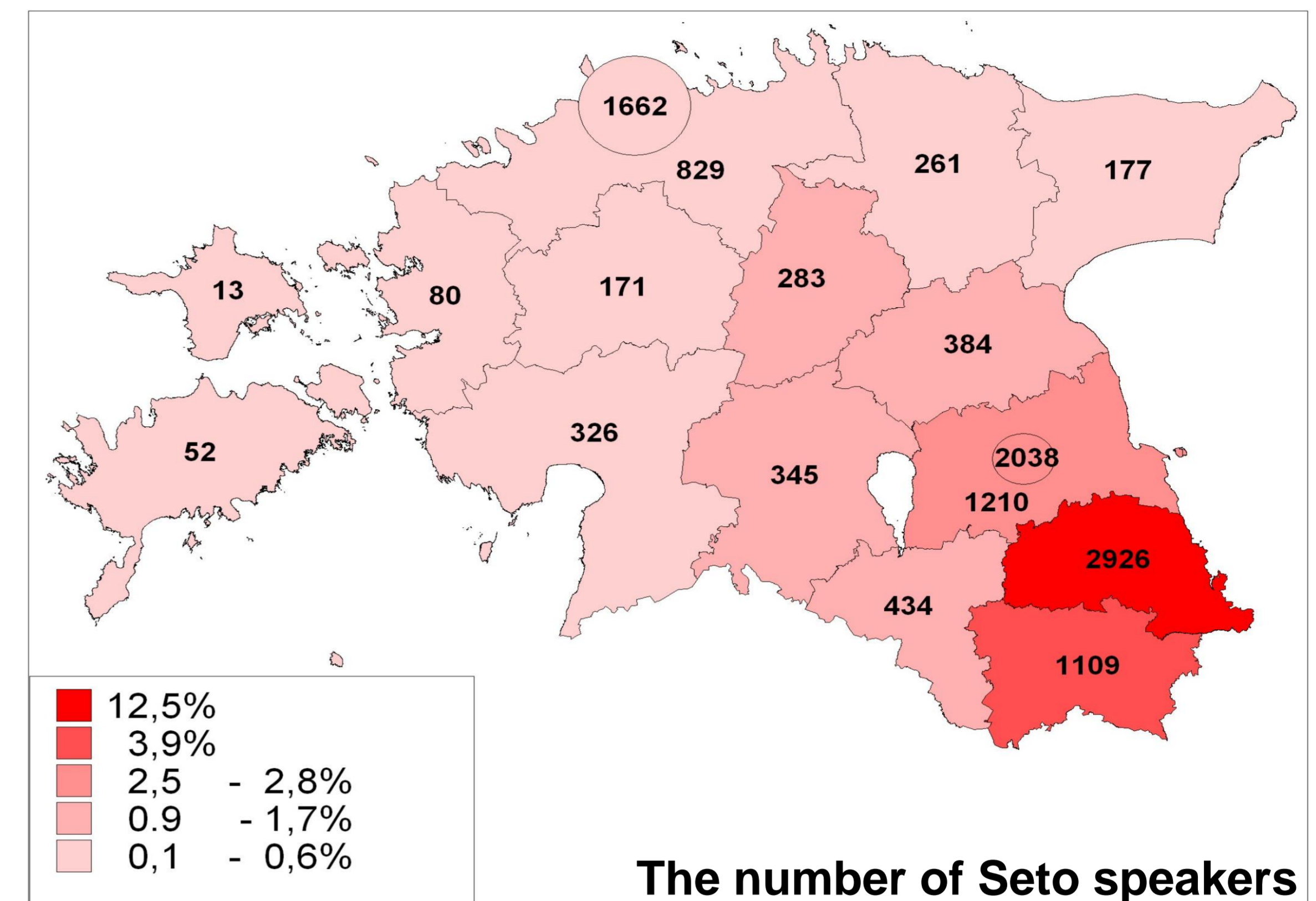
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Short facts

Seto in Estonia: Autochthonous (sub)ethnic group of ~5,000 people at the border of South-Eastern Estonia and Russia; language variety traditionally classified as a Southern dialect of Estonian.

History: formerly referred to as Pechory or Pskov Estonians (German: die Pleskauer Esten).

- First data about the Setos: 18th century; orthodox Estonians living in the vicinity of the old Western Russian areas of Pskov and Izborsk as a distinct ethn.
- Modern era: fluctuation and change of the Seto population due to war and migration; growing (academic) attention during time of Estonian nation-building at the turn of the 19th century.
- Inter-war period: Estonisation in the Estonian Republic.



Today: not recognised as an ethnic minority in Estonia

- Setos identify themselves as both Setos and Estonians. Half of the older cohort defines themselves as Seto rather than Estonian.
- 2011 Census: about 12,500 Estonian residents with Estonian as their mother tongue reported knowledge of Seto.
- In Russia: Setos have recently been included in the Common List of Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples of Russia.

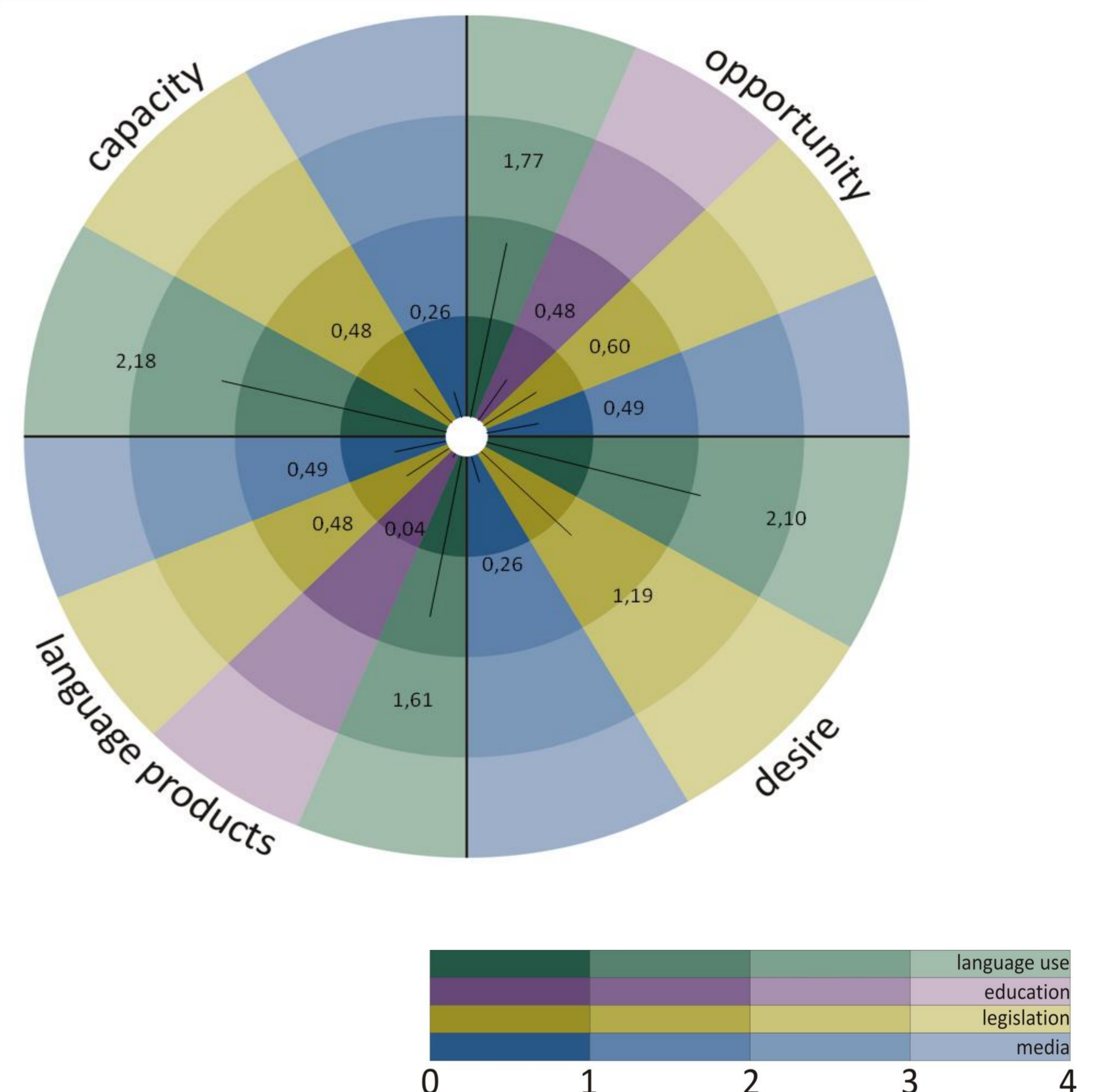
Political activism: Every three years Seto representatives meet in the Seto Congress. An executive body – the body of elders – is in charge of (legally not binding) decisions. Two broad political aims are the restoration of integrity of the Seto area (Setomaa) in the Republic of Estonia and maintenance and development of the Seto culture.

EuLaViBar

ELDIA's results

According to ELDIA, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- While Seto is the main language at home, “the language of grandparents”, it is also passed on to younger generations in 25% of cases. The degree of intergenerational language transfer varies from family to family. Strategies may include the one-person-one-language approach, situations where the home language and the language used outside the home differ, or mixing codes.
- There seems to be a strong desire to preserve Seto as a language of spoken interaction, as fluent understanding and speaking of Seto were reported by most of the informants. However, Seto has no labour market value for speakers.
- The range of available Language Products in Seto is limited, especially with regards to electronic media. While Seto appears sporadically in National Public Broadcasting Programmes, and the first Seto-language film was shot in 2008, there is a lack of media content in Seto.
- Language legislation in Estonia is a complicated area. While recent changes in the Language Act seem to favour dialects more than ever before, the status of Seto is still somewhat unclear. The majority of Setos do not know whether the law supports or prevents the use of Seto.
- Issues connected to Seto appear sporadically in the public majority media discourse.



The barometer illustrates the vitality of Seto rather clearly, rating it as severely endangered on the one hand and affected by an ongoing language shift on the other. Some dimensions - Legislation, Media and Education - scored very low in all focus areas, and this demonstrates where language endangerment is actually taking place. The Dimension of Language Use and Interaction scored highest in Capacity and Desire, but slightly lower in Opportunity and Language Products.