



European Child Guarantee

Finland's follow-up report 2024



Official Report
NATIONAL CHILD STRATEGY

Sisällys

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1. Context

Numerous changes that have shaped the operating environment have taken place during the European Child Guarantee's first two-year period. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its effects on prices and inflation have had an extensive impact on different sectors of society, affected in particular those with low incomes and those at risk of poverty. The poor state of Finland's general government finances and the growing debt ratio have forced us to look for areas to save costs in that will also have an impact on low-income families. The repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic have affected the lives of children, young people and families in Finland. The reform of health and social services and rescue services carried out in 2023 and the establishment of the wellbeing services counties have changed the organisation and structures of services, and the change is still under way.

Finland is committed to the headline target of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan set by the European Commission in March 2021 and has committed to a long-term target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 100,000 people, of whom 30,000 are children, by 2030. Indicators for monitoring progress have been set out in the National Action Plan for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion, and an interim evaluation will be carried out in 2026¹.

A social security reform is under way in Finland the purpose of which is to structurally and functionally develop social security. The reform aims for a clearer and better-functioning system that enables the reconciliation of work and social security in changing life situations. The Interim Report on the first term of the Parliament's Social Security Committee (2023) contained 31 proposals for future governments. The Committee's proposals include the development of the child benefits system, preventing and reducing the risk of child poverty, and supporting the reconciliation of childcare and gainful employment.² Children and young people have been consulted as part of the social security reform in cooperation with the National Child Strategy. In autumn 2022, a total of 1,281 young people responded to the survey and 251 young people participated in workshops around Finland. The results will be used as part of the planning of the social security reform.³

The vision of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government (2023–2027) is "A strong and committed Finland", which is capable of securing services for people of all ages, from early childhood education and care to education, health and social services and care, regardless of income level and place of residence. Services and opportunities will also be ensured for future generations. In families, communities and society, people will take responsibility for themselves and each other. Families with children and parenthood will receive support and elderly people will be cared for. According to the Government Programme, every child and young person will have the prerequisites for building a good life and pursuing their dreams. Investments in early childhood education and care and comprehensive school will create educational paths for everyone, and strengthening the physically active lifestyle of people of all ages will increase the wellbeing of Finns. The measures identified in the work on the National Child Strategy will be continued as part of the implementation of the Government's child and family

¹ Action Plan for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion by 2030. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-9999-2>

² Social security reform. <https://stm.fi/sosiaaliturvauudistus>

³ Social security for children and young people. <https://stm.fi/sotunuorille>

policy. The Government will also draw up a comprehensive action plan for the prevention of social exclusion, and to help repair the welfare deficit and mental health problems among young people.

The Child Guarantee has been implemented in Finland through the National Child Strategy, and the Child Guarantee has been coordinated by the Secretary General/Lead Expert of the Child Guarantee Strategy. At the beginning of 2023, four permanent posts were established for the National Child Strategy, which were placed in the Children and Young People Unit at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The task of the National Child Strategy Group is cross-administrative and also includes coordination and monitoring of the European Child Guarantee. Although the National Child Strategy Group has been placed at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, its coordinating role covers the entire Government. This joint work in Government is carried out in the Child Strategy working group consisting of representatives of different ministries.

The National Child Strategy Group ensures the implementation of the strategy and the coordination and monitoring of both it and the European Child Guarantee. In addition, the National Child Strategy Group is tasked with improving and promoting the collection of information on children, young people and families, education on children's rights and inclusion, the drafting of child impact assessments and child-oriented budgets, and children's participation.⁴ The Child Strategy also works in close cooperation with the Ombudsman for Children. Numerous steering, support and monitoring groups have been involved in the implementation of the different sections of the National Child Strategy's implementation plan, and actors from different regions and operating sectors have participated in these groups. In addition, the Child Strategy has also been involved in other working groups and networks of different administrative branches and agencies.

In Finland, the child guarantee is linked to the implementation of the National Child Strategy. Several dialogue-based workshops were organised for the preparation of the first follow-up report to Child Strategy's implementation plan for actors who were involved in the process in various manners. The preparation of the follow-up report was planned as a process in which extensive cooperation and dialogue with key stakeholders and authorities in the implementation of the child strategy have played an important role.⁵ The follow-up report was published in March 2023 and its results and lessons have been utilised in the preparation of the new implementation plan for the Child Strategy.

The Committee report on the Child Strategy states that a separate implementation plan will be drawn up for each government term as part of official work covering different administrative branches, and the plan will be adopted by the Government Plenary Session.⁶ The implementation plan for Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government's child strategy was under preparation at the time this report was being written and it will be adopted by the Government during spring 2024. There are no ongoing or planned separate evaluations of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Finland.

⁴ National Child Strategy Unit to be established in Finland. https://stm.fi/-/suomeen-perustetaan-kansallinen-lapsistrate-giayksikko?languageId=en_US

⁵ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

National Child Strategy Committee report. Parliamentary Committee on the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-777-5>

The autonomous region of Åland was highlighted in the Commission's recommendations to Finland on its national implementation plan for the Child Guarantee. The scope of the National Child Strategy does not include the Åland Islands, but the Åland Islands are preparing their own child strategy.

2. Target groups

At Risk Of Poverty or Social Exclusion as defined by the EU's Composite Indicator means that based on the population's median income a person is the member of a household at risk of relative monetary poverty, a household with very low work intensity or a household severely materially deprived. Just one of these risks is needed to determine a risk of poverty or social exclusion, but they may also be simultaneous. The proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Finland is lower than the European average. On average in Europe, approximately 24.7% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. According to Eurobase statistics, the figure in Finland is 14.9%. When examining the risks in more detail, it can be observed that only 1.4% of children experience serious material or social deprivation in Finland, whereas on average the figure is 8.3% in Europe, and 9.5% of children in Finland are at risk of poverty, while the proportion in Europe is more than double (19.3%).

According to Statistics Finland, there were 730,800 people living in low-income households in 2022. A total of 426,000 people lived in long-term poverty, which means that in addition to 2022, they were on low income during at least two of the previous three years. In 2022, there were 118,900 children in low-income households. The low income of those living in families with children is affected by both the number of children in the household and the number of adults earning an income. A low income level is the most common in families with children and one adult. In 2022, 25% of those living in households with one adult and children had a low level of income, compared to 6.9% of households with two adults and children.⁷ As the number of children in the family increases, it also becomes more common for the family to have a low income. In 2022, the low income rate of households with one adult and at least 4 children was 45.8%. Just under 20,000 people lived in such households, slightly less than 9,000 of them were low-income. Overall, slightly less than 300,000 people lived in households with one adult and children.⁸

Although situation concerning poverty in families with children is clearly better in Finland than in Europe on average, reducing poverty is also important in Finland, as the impacts of poverty experienced as a child have an impact on a person's health, education and labour market position in adulthood. The situation of single-parent and immigrant families in particular is worrisome. Poverty among children with an immigrant background is very often related to the family's low rate of employment.⁹ Compared to the European average, the most substantial difference in Finland concerns children living in single-parent families. In Finland, as many as 35.2% of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion are members of single-parent families compared to 23% of children in the same position in Europe. Children of families of which at least one parent has a disability are also at higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than the European average.

⁷ Statistics Finland. Income distribution statistics. <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/clos02x83gt6d0cvxzwid0ips>

⁸ Statistics Finland. Income distribution statistics. <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/clos02x83gt6d0cvxzwid0ips>

⁹ European Child Guarantee. Finland's action plan. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-784-3>

The unemployment of a parent or parents is the main reason for poverty in families with children in Finland. This is typically linked to the guardian's limited education, changes in working life and often also an immigrant background. Divorces and separations, life as a single-parent, illnesses and informal care are significant risks to the family's finances. Children living in single-parent households are at high risk of being in the lowest income categories. In terms of gender, the situation is most dire for children living with a single mother as they are predominantly in the lowest income classes. The poverty rate is higher than average in families with young children, where all children are under school age.¹⁰

The number of children placed outside the home by child welfare services decreased slightly in 2022 from the previous year (-1.5%). The share of children aged 0–17 who were placed outside the home in 2022 of the corresponding age group was 1.1%, but the share varied according to the child's age. The share of the population aged 16 or over and placed outside the home was 2.2%, which was clearly higher than in younger age groups. Slightly more than half of those in placed outside the home by child welfare services (55%) were in family care (cross-sectional examination on 31 December 2022).¹¹

Finland's Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee identifies the following groups of children to whom the measures are to be targeted:

1. Families who are socio-economically disadvantaged
2. Children, young people and families who need support for coping with everyday life
3. Groups of children and young people who are vulnerable or susceptible to exclusion:
 - 3.1 Children and young people who are clients of child welfare services, especially children and young people placed outside the home or in aftercare
 - 3.2 Children and young people with disabilities
 - 3.3 Children and young people who need mental health services
 - 3.3 Children and young people with immigrant backgrounds
- 4.1 Roma children and young people
- 4.2 Sámi children and young people
- 4.3 LGTBQ children and young people
- 4.4 Children and young people who have experienced violence
- 4.5 Children and young people who abuse substances as a symptom of their problems.

All the above-mentioned groups of children were taken into account in the implementation of the Child Strategy/Child Guarantee. The measures targeted some of the child groups directly, while others targeted them indirectly by increasing the knowledge available to guardians and professionals or general information. Few of the measures focused directly on the introduction of the services described in this report. In particular, the following measures increased the information available on the target groups:

A report on the realisation of the welfare and rights of Sámi and Roma children in Finland.

The two studies carried out by the Ombudsman for Children examined the wellbeing of both Roma and Sámi children and the realisation of their rights as reported by the children themselves. Children aged 11–17 who experienced themselves as Sámi from the Sámi Homeland and elsewhere in Finland

¹⁰ Action Plan for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion by 2030. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-9999-2>

¹¹ Child welfare 2022: A child welfare notification filed about more and more children. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2023051544509>

took part in the study. The most significant results of the study include the strong relationship between Sámi children with nature and their concern about the impacts of climate change on northern nature; the challenges posed by the sparsely populated area in terms of mobility and availability of services; the possibilities for using the Sámi languages as well as Sámi culture and the rights of the Sámi people. According to the results, the children highlighted an increase in knowledge about Sámi culture, the possibility to use the Sámi languages more in leisure time, Sámi language learning materials and qualified teachers, as well as leisure facilities, public transport, transportation and driving permits as the most important means for promoting the wellbeing and rights of Sámi children.

The Ombudsman for Children also carried out a study examining the wellbeing of Roma children and the realisation of their rights as reported by the children themselves. Children aged 11–17 who felt that they were Roma from different parts of Finland participated in this study. The results of the study can be summarised into four entities approaching wellbeing and the realisation of rights. These are the importance of the immediate and extended family; pride in the Roma culture and a willingness to learn the Roma language; experiences of bullying and discrimination, and future plans and daydreaming. According to the results, children highlighted increased knowledge on the Roma culture, joint encounters between Roma children and the general population, changes in attitudes towards Roma among the general population, and the ability to encounter Roma children as individuals as the most important means of promoting the realisation of wellbeing and rights. Based on the study, the most important measure is supporting Roma children in different transition phases of childhood and youth, such as starting school, changing schools, starting hobbies, selecting upper secondary education and starting to wear Roma clothes. The 10 measures proposed for children and young people in Finland's National Roma Policy 2023–2030 are chiefly based on this report on the Child Strategy and on the proposals made by participants in open workshops organised in connection with the preparation of the National Roma Policy in 2021.¹²

In addition, a cross-administrative **research project to investigate the situation of children and young people who are disadvantaged or at risk of social exclusion** was conducted. Its implementation was the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice, and the research project was carried out by the Finnish Youth Research Network. The "Näkymätön näkyväksi – Tutkimustietoa ja rakennusaineeksi syrjäytymisvaarassa olevien lasten ja nuorten turvallisuuspääoman vahvistamiseksi" project aims to map existing information on the threats to safety experienced, sense of security and information and skills related to safety in particular of children and young people who are especially vulnerable and to identify information gaps and create an outline for information production and assessment.

The section on indicators also describes a measure on developing an extensive knowledge base for monitoring the wellbeing of children and young people.

¹² Finland's National Roma Policy (ROMPO) 2023-2030. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-8345-8>

2. Roll-out of services

Finland's Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee is in line with the National Child Strategy. The measures set out in the Child Strategy have been used in many ways to ensure that the status of vulnerable children is safeguarded and their needs are better identified, even when the measures are not directly related to the introduction of services set out in the titles of the report. This chapter describes the various measures mentioned in the Annex to the Finnish Action Plan as a part of ongoing projects.

3.1. Early childhood education and care

The most recent ECEC statistics are from 2022. 40% of children under 3 years of age and 89% of children between the ages of 3 and 5, or a total of 234,300 children, participated in early childhood education and care in 2022. The share of children under 3 years of age participating in early childhood education and care increased by 4 percentage points and that of children between 3 and 5 years of age increased by 3 percentage points compared to the previous year.¹³ Participation in early childhood education and care is the more common the older the children are: 91% of children aged 5, 90% of children aged 4 and 86% of children aged 3 participated in early childhood education and care. Of the children in early childhood education and care, 12% were foreign-language speakers, 7% were foreign nationals and 13% had a foreign background¹⁴.

In 2022, 78% of children who participated in early childhood education and care participated in it full-time ECEC, 17% part-time ECECE and 5% in shift ECECE. The largest group to participate in part-time early childhood education and care were children aged 6 who are usually in pre-primary education and complementary early childhood education and care before or after the beginning of pre-primary education. In 2022, 80% of children aged 6 participated in complementary early childhood education and care.¹⁵

During the 2019–2023 government term, early childhood education and care was developed with many reforms. The ratios between children aged three or over and teaching and educational staff were reduced in day-care centres, the subjective right to early childhood education and care was restored, and the child's right to general, intensified or special support required by their development, learning and wellbeing was strengthened when the support provided to children in early childhood education and care was renewed on 1 August 2022. The pilot for providing two years of pre-primary education was launched and will continue until May 2024. The Right to Learn programme awarded EUR 152 million in grants to developing early childhood education and care. The cooperation project between the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare on cooperation and service

¹³ Statistics Finland. Early childhood education and care. <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/cl8l48a1oj27m0dukvmlyq0wd>

¹⁴ Statistics Finland. Early childhood education and care. <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/cl8l48a1oj27m0dukvmlyq0wd>

¹⁵ Statistics Finland. Early childhood education and care. <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/cl8l48a1oj27m0dukvmlyq0wd>

guidance between child health clinics and early childhood education and care ended in summer 2023.¹⁶

As part of the implementation of the National Child Strategy, the Finnish National Agency for Education prepared up-to-date lesson packages on the child strategy and children's rights for early childhood education and care and comprehensive school. Material was also produced for parent-teacher evenings in various languages (Finnish, Swedish, Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Northern Sámi, English, Russian, Estonian, Arabic and Somali). Webpages were created on the Finnish National Agency for Education website for the learning materials. A new webpage on the rights of the child were also published on the Finnish National Agency for Education website. In addition to the new material produced by the Finnish National Agency for Education, various organisations were asked to provide their newest materials related to the rights of the child for the website (MEASURE 16).¹⁷

3.2. Education and school-based activities

According to Statistics Finland, there were 563,100 pupils in comprehensive schools in 2022. Of these, 9,800 were in pre-primary education, 364,800 in grades 1–6, and 188,500 in grades 7–9. Of pupils 49% were girls and 51% boys. In 2022, there were a total of 109,600 students in general upper secondary education aiming for matriculation. The number of new students in general upper secondary education was 37,600. A total of 30,265 matriculation examinations were completed. This was 456 more than the previous year. The number of students in vocational education leading to a qualification was 341,600. A total of 68,300 vocational qualifications were completed. The number of students and completed qualifications was the same as in the previous year.¹⁸

Extended compulsory education entered into force in 2021. Compulsory education ends when the young person reaches the age of 18 or completes an upper secondary qualification before that age. In addition to instruction, textbooks and tools are free of charge for students in compulsory education. The aim is for every young person to complete upper secondary education. The Ministry of Education and Culture will monitor the implementation of the reform.¹⁹

In upper secondary education, quality and equality were improved through the Right to Knowledge programme in vocational education and training (VET) and through the quality and accessibility programme in general upper secondary education. The programme financing to develop VET was EUR 291 million. The quality and accessibility programme for general upper secondary education improved the quality of education and ensured accessibility across Finland. As part of the development programme, a quality strategy extending to 2030 was prepared for general upper secondary education. The programme financing was EUR 15 million in 2021–2022.

¹⁶ Service guidance and advice in early childhood education and care. [Service guidance and advice in early childhood education and care Finnish National Agency for Education \(oph.fi\)](https://oph.fi)

¹⁷ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

¹⁸ Official Statistics of Finland (SVT): Students and qualifications. <https://www.stat.fi/tilasto/opisk>

¹⁹ Extension of compulsory education. <https://okm.fi/en/extension-of-compulsory-education>

The quality of basic education and equality in education were also strengthened during the government term with the Right to Learn programme. The programme helped to prevent achievement gaps between comprehensive school students, to strengthen admission policies prioritising the student's local school, to improve literacy, to reduce group sizes and to reform financing so that it better supports the realisation of equality in education. EUR 241 million in special grants was awarded to finance the programme's measures in 2020–2022.

The aforementioned measures have been implemented in Finland for several years as part of the broader development of legislation and services on the status of children.

3.3. Healthy meal every school day

In Finland, legislation safeguards free school meals for all primary and secondary school pupils²⁰, and according to school meal recommendations, the meal must be served with vegetables/fruits and the main course, which can also be the vegetable dish served²¹. School meals are thus permanently available to all children from pre-primary education to the end of upper secondary education as part of a public catering service, the organisation of which is the responsibility of municipalities and education providers. A school's food service can be provided by the food service unit of a municipality or a municipal education and training consortium, an in-house company or a private food service company selected by a public organisation through competitive bidding.

The challenge is that the recommendations are not always implemented and the quality of school meals is not monitored systematically. Some children skip the meal or only eat some parts of the meal. According to the School Health Promotion Study 2023, only 56.2% of girls in upper comprehensive school (14-16-year-olds) eat lunch at school every day, while the majority of boys in the same age group (68.3%) eat lunch every day.²² In 2022, the Development Programme for School Meals was published in Finland²³. It aims to influence the challenges described above and to increase the supply of healthy snacks. The school meal programme was implemented in municipalities and educational institutions in 2023. A comprehensive report on its progress is not yet available.

The aforementioned measures are implemented as part of the broader development of wellbeing and services related to the status of children.

3.4. Health care

During Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government term, an extensive reform of healthcare, social welfare and rescue services was carried out, in which the responsibility for organising these tasks was

²⁰The Basic Education Act <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980628> The General Upper Secondary Schools Act <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2018/20180714> and the Act on Vocational Education <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2017/20170531>

²¹ Syödään ja opitaan yhdessä – kouluruokasuositus. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-302-791-6>

²²Nutrition of schoolchildren and students, source: School Health Promotion Study 2023. <https://www.terveyskirjasto.fi/dlk01274/kou-lulaisten-ja-opiskelijoiden-ravitsemus>

²³ Development Programme for School Meals. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-366-201-8>

transferred from the municipalities to 21 wellbeing services counties. The City of Helsinki and the Province of Åland are still responsible for the health and social services and rescue services of their residents. The HUS Group is responsible for providing demanding specialised medical care as laid down separately in legislation.²⁴

In Finland, all children are covered by either the free child health clinic system or pupil and student welfare services. The wellbeing services counties have an obligation to provide systematic and uniform services for child health clinics and school and student healthcare for all children. These are based on periodic health examinations and health counselling, which take into account the needs of individuals and families.²⁵

Child health clinic services are statutory and free of charge health services for children under school age and their families. The tasks of the child health clinic include monitoring the child's growth and development and promoting health, safety and well-being, supporting the upbringing by parents and guardians, promoting wellbeing and a safe growth environment, the early identification of the child's, parent's and family's need for special support or examinations and speaking about this with them and supporting them, supporting the family, supporting a family providing informal care to a child with a long-term illness or disability or with limited functional capacity in cooperation with other service providers and, if necessary, referral to further examinations and treatment, oral health care and multidisciplinary cross-administrative cooperation in accordance with jointly agreed policies.²⁶

Extensive, statutory health examinations carried out when each child is 18 months old and 4 years old involve multidisciplinary cooperation between child health clinics and early childhood education and care. In connection with an extensive health examinations, ECEC staff describe and, if necessary, assess the child's wellbeing in ECEC, and the information is transferred to the child health clinic. Multidisciplinary cooperation is also carried out with experts at the child health clinic when a child's development, learning and wellbeing require special attention. Monitoring and support for children and families that begins at the child health clinic will continue in school healthcare in cooperation with student welfare actors.

Student welfare is work carried out in schools and educational institutions to promote, maintain and create preconditions for the pupil's and the student's good learning, mental and physical health and social wellbeing. The objective of student welfare is to promote the wellbeing of pupils and students and the entire school or study community and environment, cooperation with guardians and student participation. The aim is also to secure individual early support for all those who need it. Education services and health and social services implement student welfare as systematic multidisciplinary work together with pupils or students, their guardians and, if necessary, other partners.²⁷

²⁴ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

²⁵ Government Decree on School and Student Health Care. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2011/20110338>

²⁶ NEUKO database: Child health clinic services. <https://www.terveysportti.fi/apps/dtk/nko/article/nla00092?toc=1112237>

²⁷ Student welfare. THL. <https://thl.fi/aiheet/laps-et-nuoret-ja-perheet/sote-palvelut/opiskeluhoito>

Student welfare is divided into communal and individual student welfare. The education provider is responsible for preparing a student welfare plan for the implementation, evaluation and development of student welfare in cooperation with student welfare actors, students and guardians. The education provider is also responsible for implementing the matters described in the student welfare plan. The wellbeing services county is responsible for organising student welfare psychologist and social worker services as well as school and student health care services for students.²⁸

The reform of mental health and substance abuse legislation entered into force for the most part at the beginning of 2023. The aim of the reform has been to improve the availability of mental health and substance abuse services for all age groups. During preparatory work for the legislative reform it was stated that the changes support the goal of developing seamless multidisciplinary service chains and new integrated services for children and young people.²⁹

In accordance with the Government Programme, the programme to address reform in child and family services was continued as part of the Future Social and Health Centre Programme in 2019–2023. The programme developed the following entities: family centres and early support for children, young people and families in everyday life, low-threshold mental health and substance abuse services for children and young people, and the multidisciplinary nature of child welfare. The objectives of the programme are to address reform in child and family services were early support for children, young people and families, strengthening wellbeing, halting the development of inequality, and ensuring the high quality, timeliness and availability of health and social services.³⁰

The aforementioned measures have been implemented in Finland for several years as part of the broader development of welfare policy concerning the status of children. The following projects related to the implementation of services were implemented as measures of the Child Strategy:

- **MEASURE 12: Action plan for supporting children and young people who abuse substances as a symptom of their problems**

The aim of the measure was to ensure that the rights of children and young people abusing substances as a symptom of their problems to the support and services they need is realised in a high-quality, systematic and regionally equal manner. The development proposals that emerged were related to the management, steering and legislative basis of support and services, the organisation and content of services and the strengthening of competence. Children and young people need services in which youth work, social welfare and health care as well as basic and specialised services work together seamlessly and the responsibility for the child and the young person is shared.

A large number of development needs were also identified in the content of the support and services offered, the most important of which was that there were thresholds for accessing services, such as referral practices, and the availability and accessibility of low-threshold substance abuse and mental

²⁸ Student welfare. THL. <https://thl.fi/aiheet/lapset-nuoret-ja-perheet/sote-palvelut/opiskeluhoito>

²⁹ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

³⁰ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

health care were poor. There is a need for more multidisciplinary cooperation, deployment and consideration for families. A key proposal is a national basic level open model for mental health and substance abuse that combines health and social services and which take a young person's daily life and the actors in their daily life such as youth work, school, family and friends into account. Services and competence should be focused on the most severe problems.

- **MEASURE 13: Increasing the effectiveness of mental health work for children and young people**

The measure identified factors that promote and hinder the effectiveness of mental health work with children and young people and proposed measures that would clarify mental health services as a whole and promote the availability and continuity of care in a manner that takes the rights of the child into account. The proposals include both measures requiring extensive long-term development and smaller measures.

3.5. Healthy nutrition

"Terveyttä ruoasta - suomalaiset ravitsemussuositukset 2014" (Health from food - Finnish nutrition recommendations 2014) will be updated on the basis of new Nordic recommendations. The new Nordic recommendations include use of a larger amount of plant products, but fish, dairy products and meat are still included in a health-promoting and sustainable diet.³¹ The new population-level recommendations will be published in October-November 2024.³² After this, target group-specific instructions will be drawn up on the new recommendations, which will be disseminated through various services aimed at children. In Finland, child health and nutrition counselling is provided both at the child health clinic and in school and student healthcare.³³ Nutrition-related measures are part of public welfare policy.

3.6 Sufficient housing

In 2023, electricity prices rose dramatically. Temporary forms of financial support were developed for households particularly affected by price increases to compensate for the effects of electricity prices. The value-added tax on electricity was reduced, the possibility of an electricity tax deduction was implemented for a portion of the price exceeding a certain limit, and households, who could not use the tax deduction in full due to their low income have had the right to financial support for electricity.³⁴ These measures were not specifically targeted at families with children, but they also benefited this group.

³¹ New Nordic nutrition recommendations. NNR2023. <https://www.norden.org/fi/node/81400>

³² Ravitsemus- ja ruokasuositukset. https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/globalassets/teemat/terveytta-edistava-ruokavalio/ravitsemussitoutus/vrn-sidosryhmaseminaari-26102023_merkkola-ja-uschwab_final_alt_t.pdf

³³ Child health clinic. <https://thl.fi/aiheet/lapset-nuoret-ja-perheet/sote-palvelut/aitiys-ja-lastenneuvola/lastenneuvola>. Pupil and student welfare. <https://thl.fi/aiheet/lapset-nuoret-ja-perheet/sote-palvelut/opiskeluhoito>

³⁴ Financial support for electricity. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sahkotuet>

During Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government term (2019–2023), the level of basic social security increased in relation to both price and earnings levels. An additional increase was made to social assistance for families with children in 2023, which increased the income level of families with children receiving social assistance. However, it should be noted that the child benefit is not index-linked, and its real value is around 40% lower than in 1994.³⁵

³⁵ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

4. Indicators, targets and monitoring

4.1 EU monitoring framework

Finland collects a great deal of information on children in various registers and statistics, but Finnish statistics do not fully comply with the classification of the EU monitoring framework, and thus not all information is available.

Early childhood education and care

In accordance with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, a child may enrol in ECEC from the beginning of the calendar month in which the child turns nine months.³⁶ The client fee charged for early childhood education and care is determined on the basis of the family's size and income and the time spent by the child in early childhood education and care. The Act on Client Fees in Early Childhood Education and Care was amended on 1 March 2023 to reduce client fees. The fee charged takes into account the income of the child, their guardian and persons living in the same household with them. At its lowest, the fee is EUR 28/child/month, and the highest payment percentage in proportion to income is 10%, but no more than EUR 295 per month. The fee may be waived or the fee must be reduced if its collection jeopardises the prerequisites for the service user's or the family's livelihood or the implementation of the child's parent's or guardian's statutory maintenance obligation. The fee includes healthy and necessary nutrition that meets the child's nutritional needs.³⁷ The pre-primary education provided in the year preceding the start of compulsory education, in which the child must participate or whose objectives the child must achieve, is free of charge.³⁸

According to Eurostat statistics, the participation of children aged 3 and over in early childhood education and care for people in Finland is higher than the European average both among those at risk of poverty and social exclusion (28.8% in Finland vs.. 21.7% in Europe) and for children not at risk (42.7%/ 38.7%).³⁹ For more information on children participating in early childhood education and care, see section 3.1.

Education and school-based activities

The PISA 2022 results show that the competence of Finnish pupils has deteriorated.⁴⁰ For example, when comparing the mathematics results of Finnish students in the highest and lowest quarters of socio-economic groupings, it is noted that the difference between the average of the highest quarter (529) and the average of the lowest quarter (446) was 83 points. The difference roughly corresponds to several years of studies, which is significant from the point of view of succeeding in further studies.

³⁶ Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2018/20180540#L1P1>

³⁷ Act on Client Fees in Early Childhood Education and Care. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2016/20161503>

³⁸ Basic Education Act. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980628>

³⁹ Monitoring and benchmarking frameworks: Monitoring framework for the Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1538&langId=en>

Ministry of Education and Culture. Pisa 2022. <https://okm.fi/pisa-2022>

However, the differences in competence between students in different socio-economic quarters are still smaller in Finland than in the OECD countries on average.⁴¹

In 2022, an oversampling of pupils with an immigrant background was selected in the PISA study to further examine the competence of pupils with an immigrant background in Finland. In the material, pupils with an immigrant background are classified as first and second generation immigrants. On average, second-generation immigrants scored 49 points less in mathematics than native Finnish pupils (average score 91). Similarly, the average mathematics score for first-generation immigrant students was 77 points lower than that of native Finnish pupils. Both differences are statistically significant.⁴²

The Act on Compulsory Education was expanded in 2021. The learning materials and tools, clothing and subjects required for instruction are free of charge for the student. However, the musical instruments, sports equipment or other similar equipment and supplies intended for the student's personal use required in studies that place an emphasis on hobbies are not free of charge and the student may also use these outside of their studies. Reasonable fees may be charged for voluntary study trips, visits, events and other similar activities complementing studies.⁴³

A healthy meal every school day

As described in Chapter 3.3, a healthy meal is served daily to all children participating in early childhood education and care and children subject to compulsory education. A daily meal is included in the daycare fee for those participating in early childhood education and care, and it is free of charge from pre-primary education onwards. According to the School Health Promotion Study 2023, only 56.2% of girls in upper comprehensive school (14-16-year-olds) eat lunch at school every day, while the majority of boys in the same age group (68.3%) eat lunch every day.⁴⁴

Healthcare

In Finland, children have access to a free child health clinic and school and student healthcare in accordance with Chapter 3.5. According to the School Health Promotion Survey, in 2023 17% of girls in grades 8 and 9 and 39% of boys of the same age felt that their state of health was very good.⁴⁵ In 2023, 34% of girls and 8% of boys in grades 8 and 9 of basic education experienced moderate or severe anxiety. The share of girls experiencing anxiety increased moderately until 2019, after which the share increased significantly in 2021 and continued to grow in 2023 for girls in grades 8 and 9.⁴⁶ If depression symptoms lasting at least two weeks are viewed based on the gender assigned at birth

⁴¹ PISA 22 first results. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe20231204151292>

⁴² PISA 22 first results. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe20231204151292>

⁴³ Act on Compulsory Education. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2020/20201214#L4P16>

⁴⁴ Nutrition of schoolchildren and students, source: School Health Promotion Study 2023. <https://www.terveyskirjasto.fi/dlk01274/kou-lulaisten-ja-opiskelijoiden-ravitsemus>

⁴⁵ Time series of the School Health Promotion Study, basic education, grades 8 and 9, upper secondary school, vocational institutions, 2006–2023. https://sampo.thl.fi/pivot/prod/fi/ktk2/nuoret/fact_ktk2_nuoret?row=measure-952439.988117.&column=alue-886778.&column=vuosi-952479.&column=ka-987857.&column=taustatekija-888288&column=sp-888243&fo=1

⁴⁶ Wellbeing of children and young people - School Health Promotion Study 2023. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe20230913124224>

and gender identity, the symptoms of depression in transgender youth are many times higher in relation to young people who identify as cisgender.⁴⁷

As a rule, public health care for children is free in Finland. In addition, a maximum limit for out of pocket healthcare costs has been defined. The fees charged for services used by persons under the age of 18 are added to the fees charged for services used by their guardian. After the maximum sum of payments is exceeded, the services are free of charge for all persons whose payments have jointly accumulated the maximum limit.⁴⁸ Legislation has been laid down on the maximum limit on out-of-pocket costs for Kela reimbursable medicines. After the limit has been exceeded the client only pays a EUR 2.50 out-of-pocket fee for each medicine.⁴⁹ This also applies to people under the age of 18. Social assistance is last-resort financial assistance under social welfare, which can also be granted for healthcare-related costs. Costs taken into account include those arising from the use of public healthcare services in Finland. When a person is granted social assistance, they will usually be granted an electronic payment commitment for pharmaceutical expenses at the same time.⁵⁰

As required by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Finland, undocumented children are also entitled to healthcare services on the same grounds as minors who have a municipality of residence in Finland.

The country report by the OECD and European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies was published on 18 January 2024. The 2023 reviews pay particular attention to recovering from the coronavirus crisis, mental health and preparedness for new health crises. Households themselves pay more for healthcare services in Finland than in other Nordic countries, especially for medicines and dental care.⁵¹

Problems related to the availability of health services in Finland are particularly related to long waiting times. The waiting times for non-urgent procedures grew longer in Finland, especially in 2021–2022. As part of Finland's recovery and resilience plan supported by the EU, special funding will thus be allocated to improving access to health services. The report also describes the shortage of employees in healthcare and long-term care as well as difficulties experienced by employers in recruiting professionals such as doctors, nurses and home care workers. The report states that Finland has fewer doctors than the EU average, but a noticeably larger number of nurses.⁵²

⁴⁷ No Major Improvement in Mental Health after COVID-19 Pandemic Among Finnish Youth: A Repeated, Cross-Sectional, Population-Based Study (Preprint). <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4723056>

⁴⁸ Terveystuella maksukatto. (payment ceiling for healthcare costs) <https://stm.fi/terveydenhuollon-maksukatto>

⁴⁹ Annual maximum limit on out-of-pocket costs for medicines. <https://www.kela.fi/laakkeet-laakekatto>

⁵⁰ Types of expenses for which you can get basic social assistance. <https://www.kela.fi/toimeentulotuki-mihin-menoihin>

⁵¹ State of Health in the EU. Suomi. https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/2023_chp_fi_finnish.pdf

⁵² State of Health in the EU. Suomi. https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/2023_chp_fi_finnish.pdf

Healthy nutrition

According to the School Health Promotion Study, 58% of boys and 53% of girls in grades 8 and 9 of basic education reported that they eat breakfast every weekday morning.⁵³

Changes in the prevalence of overweight among children and young people (including obesity) between 2021 and 2022 were minor. The stabilisation observed in 2021 seems to have continued or the trend seems to even have turned slightly downwards between 2021 and 2022. The prevalence of overweight (ISO-BMI \geq 25 kg/m²) in the age group 13-16 was slightly less than a percentage point lower than in 2021.⁵⁴ In 2022, the prevalence of overweight was 27% for boys aged 2-16 and 18% for girls of the same age. Starting from 2014, the prevalence of overweight (including obesity) has increased by two percentage points among boys and girls aged 2 to 16. In 2022, the prevalence of obesity (ISO-BMI \geq 30 kg/m²) among boys aged 2-16 was 8% and 4% among girls of the same age. No significant change had taken place compared to 2021. Starting from 2014, obesity has increased by about one percentage point among both boys and girls.⁵⁵

Sufficient housing

At the end of 2023, there were 123 homeless couples and families in Finland (change to the previous year -32), with a total of 180 children (+11).⁵⁶ The majority of homeless families with children in Finland are referred to as the hidden homeless, i.e. they live temporarily with acquaintances or relatives. For example, the City of Helsinki has a goal of eliminating homelessness by 2025.⁵⁷

4.2 National monitoring framework

Finland's European Child Guarantee Action Plan listed a number of possible monitoring indicators to be specified in the future. As part of the implementation of the National Child Strategy, a knowledge base on children has been developed, which will also help in the monitoring of the European Child Guarantee. As a key measure, Statistics Finland produced a comprehensive description of the knowledge base for monitoring the wellbeing of children and young people. Particular attention was given to strengthening the knowledge base on children and young people who are most vulnerable. A framework for the structured compilation of indicators was created for different areas of wellbeing. All indicators describing children were compiled in the same roadmap classified by area of wellbeing (excel file). The roadmap provided an overall picture of the amount information on children, its coverage and its different sources.⁵⁸

⁵³Time series of the School Health Promotion Study, basic education, grades 8 and 9, upper secondary school, vocational institutions, 2006–2023. https://sampo.thl.fi/pivot/prod/fi/ktk2/nuoret/fact_ktk2_nuoret?row=measure-952439.988117.&column=alue-886778.&column=vuosi-952479.&column=ka-987857.&column=taustatekija-888288&column=sp-888243&fo=1

⁵⁴ Overweight and obesity of children and young people. <https://thl.fi/tilastot-ja-data/tilastot-aiheittain/lapset-nuoret-ja-perheet/lasten-ja-nuorten-ylipaino-ja-lihavuus>

⁵⁵ Overweight and obesity of children and young people. <https://thl.fi/tilastot-ja-data/tilastot-aiheittain/lapset-nuoret-ja-perheet/lasten-ja-nuorten-ylipaino-ja-lihavuus>

⁵⁶ Homeless people. [https://www.ara.fi/fi-FI/Tietopankki/Tilastot_ja_selvitykset/Asunnottomuus/Asunnottomat_2023\(66463\)](https://www.ara.fi/fi-FI/Tietopankki/Tilastot_ja_selvitykset/Asunnottomuus/Asunnottomat_2023(66463))

⁵⁷ Homelessness. <https://ym.fi/asunnottomuus>

⁵⁸ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

Before drafting a detailed national monitoring framework, Finland waited for the European monitoring framework, which is now quite extensive and comprehensive. For this reason, there is no need for a separate national monitoring framework.

5. Financing

The implementation plan for the Child Strategy took into account approximately 120 central government projects, which in some respect met the objectives set out in the Child Strategy. Many of these projects are linked to the above mentioned areas of the children's rights and promotion of these, which are also strongly reflected in the European Child Guarantee.

The National Child Strategy's own measures for 2022–2023 aimed at developing existing structures, establishing good practices, mapping new opportunities and modelling these. The projects were implemented in cooperation between various agencies, organisations, municipalities and research institutes. Funding for the Child Strategy totaled EUR 6 million, and these funds were also used for the implementation of the Child Strategy's measures set out in the Action Plan for the Child Guarantee.⁵⁹

Child-oriented budgeting was piloted in Finland for 2022 as part of the general budget proposal.⁶⁰ The Ministry of Finance prepared a child-oriented budget as part of the general budget process for 2023 and 2024. The summary review of child-oriented budgeting takes into account the expenses (statutory and discretionary) directed directly at and allocated to children just under the age of 18, as well as expenses that clearly target families with children under the age of 18. In certain services, the share of the children in the service's target group has been taken into account. Expenses that are indirectly targeted at children are not included in the review, as such cost estimates do not actually describe expense-related decisions or changes affecting children, and no conclusions related to the appropriation level for children can be drawn from the calculated examination.⁶¹

The appropriations in the budget proposal for 2023, directly intended for children or families with children total about EUR 10.4 billion, taking into account the statutory and discretionary measures of different items. Of these, approx. EUR 2.2 billion is the calculated central government transfer for basic services to the 0-17 age group. The imputed share of central government funding for wellbeing services counties for the 0-17 age group is approx. EUR 3.7 billion.⁶²

In addition to the appropriations applicable to the 0-17 age group, the state budget proposal includes priority areas for which separate funding has been allocated. The most important of these is the funding allocated to the implementation of equal opportunities and support for vulnerable children. The separate funding for the measures mentioned in the budget proposal for 2023 totals approximately EUR 360 million. The appropriations in the budget proposal for services intended for the 0-17 age group are almost entirely appropriations for education and teaching as well as social welfare and health care services. In addition, some of the funding for culture and arts, outreach youth work and youth workshop activities as well as organisational activities in youth work, sports and physical activity is targeted at the 0-17 age group. Compensation paid to municipalities and wellbeing services counties

⁵⁹ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>

⁶⁰ State Budget Proposal 2022. 7. Child-oriented budgeting. <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2022&lang=fi&main-doc=/2022/tae/hallituksenEsitys/hallituksenEsitys.xml&opennode=0:1:3:69>:

⁶¹ State Budget Proposal 2023. 7. Child-oriented budgeting. <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2023&lang=fi&main-doc=/2023/tae/hallituksenEsitys/hallituksenEsitys.xml&opennode=0:1:3:69>:

⁶² State Budget Proposal 2023. 7. Child-oriented budgeting. <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2023&lang=fi&main-doc=/2023/tae/hallituksenEsitys/hallituksenEsitys.xml&opennode=0:1:3:69>:

for the reception of refugees and the promotion of integration includes costs related to promoting the integration of children. Funding for benefits is primarily an income transfer related to social security.⁶³

Future funding

The Child Guarantee is being implemented as part of the national Child Strategy. A total of EUR 0.5 million has been allocated to the Child Strategy each year, mainly to cover the operating expenses of the Child Strategy Group. Most of the measures will be carried out as official duties.

The appropriations in the budget proposal for 2024⁶⁴, directly intended for children or families with children total about EUR 10.5 billion, taking into account the statutory and discretionary measures of different items. Approximately EUR 2.0 billion of this calculated central government transfer for basic municipal services will target the 0-17 age group. The imputed share of central government funding for wellbeing services counties for the 0-17 age group is approx. EUR 4.1 billion. Some of the appropriations intended for the entire 0-17 age group will be directed to the prevention of social exclusion of children and young people. The 2024 budget proposal contains approximately EUR 420 million in such appropriations.

The budget proposal contains several measures concerning 2024 in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture that target children and young people. In accordance with the Government Programme, equality funding for early childhood education and care and pre-primary and basic education will be established and a sum of EUR 65.2 million will be proposed as grants in 2024, as high-quality early childhood education and care and pre-primary and basic education will promote the prerequisites for learning and increase equality in education. EUR 10 million will be proposed for 2024 to develop and implement a system of clear and seamless support for learning extending from the transition phase to the completion of the upper secondary qualification. The aim is to streamline the education choices made during the transition phase, reduce drop-out rates, improve the students' preconditions for completing a qualification and strengthen the wellbeing of students. In order to promote the physical activity of the population, the Government will launch a cross-administrative programme *Suomi Liikkeelle*, which aims to see an upturn in the physical activity of all age groups. Work to prevent the social exclusion of young people will be implemented in accordance with the Government Programme.

The most important income transfers in the 0-17 age group include child benefits, housing allowances and social assistance included in the main title of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Most of the discretionary funding for the 0-17 age group includes grants from the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (Stea) to organisations and projects focusing on children and young people. In addition, the discretionary options include measures that promote the wellbeing of families with children and prevent and correct problems as well as a child strategy function.

The budget proposal contains several measures concerning 2024 in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health that target children and families with children. Improvements will

⁶³ State Budget Proposal 2023. 7. Child-oriented budgeting. <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2023&lang=fi&main-doc=/2023/tae/hallituksenEsitys/hallituksenEsitys.xml&opennode=0:1:3:69>:

⁶⁴ State Budget Proposal 2024. 7. Child-oriented budgeting. <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2024&lang=fi&main-doc=/2024/tae/hallituksenEsitys/hallituksenEsitys.xml&opennode=0:1:3:69>:

be made to the status of families with children with a family package that includes an increase of EUR 26 in the child benefit for children under the age of 3, an increase of EUR 10 in the single-parent supplement for children and an increase of EUR 10 in the child benefit for a 4th and 5th child. Their combined impact is EUR 54 million. The rehabilitation of and rehabilitation services for neuropsychological disorders in children and young people will be improved through discretionary rehabilitation provided by Kela in a fixed-term programme for which approximately EUR 17 million is proposed.

On the other hand, child increases to unemployment security will be eliminated starting 1 April 2024. In addition, unemployment security is subject to a number of other measures that aim at increasing employment by approximately 20,000 people and significantly strengthening general government finances. In 2024, the EUR 300 income deduction will also be removed from the general housing allowance, and the basic personal liability of the general housing allowance will be increased and the level of housing allowance will be revised. The basic part of social assistance will also include a basic personal liability of five per cent of the client's necessary housing costs. The changes are expected to bring savings of EUR 360 million to general government finances. In addition, the index increases to benefits linked to the national pension index and consumer price index (excluding social assistance, child maintenance allowance, pensions and disability benefits) will not be implemented.

6. Lessons learned and future development

The implementation plan for Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government's child strategy was under preparation at the time this report was being written and it will be adopted by the Government during spring 2024. The plan contains various measures that promote the rights and status of the child in general. In addition, it contains measures directly promoting the objectives of the European Child Guarantee, especially those linked to early childhood education and care, free of charge leisure activities, school meals and healthy nutrition. Work with stakeholders will continue and be further strengthened.

The following areas will also be taken into account in implementation:

Adequacy and usability of knowledge base related to children

A consistent child and family policy requires a comprehensive and versatile knowledge base on children and families. As part of the implementation of the Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee, the knowledge base concerning children and its usability are to be developed. There is an abundance of information available on children, but it is scattered and therefore difficult to utilise. In addition, there are shortcomings in access to information, especially information regarding the wellbeing and health of vulnerable children. Developing a comprehensive knowledge base will require long-term cooperation between numerous different actors. Efforts will be made to establish a permanent structure for coordinating the production of information on children, and the development of an extensive child information resource will continue. This will also ensure the continuity of information and the availability of regional information and ensure sufficient information production from blind spots.

Coordination of benefits and services

There is still much to do in the coordination of the service system and social security. Based on an international comparative analysis, the coordination of benefits and services is a challenge in all five countries included in the study, including Finland. The coordination of services and benefits is difficult because the objectives of the systems are different and the administrative structures are inflexible. Key lessons from Finland's perspective include balancing of the rights and obligations related to social security, development of service paths and the provision of earlier and more timely services. This will facilitate transitions between benefits, services and employment.⁶⁵

⁶⁵[Different paths to employment : Special features and challenges of the Finnish social security system in international comparison \(valtioneuvosto.fi\)](https://valtioneuvosto.fi) The report produced research data on the problems related to the coordination of social assistance and services in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and the Great Britain.

Needs of vulnerable children

An essential part of the implementation of the Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee, is that the needs of vulnerable children are made more visible in decision-making. During implementation methods for identifying and solving the changing challenges related to increasing inequality in the growth environment of children and young people will be developed in extensive cooperation. As part of the implementation of the Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee, online training is to be organised on the impacts of harassment and discrimination and on their prevention and combatting.

Basic security and benefits for families with children

During Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's government term, the incomes of families with children will be improved by raising the child benefit for children under the age of three and by increasing the single-parent supplement for child benefits, developing the provider supplement for students and increasing the child benefit for families with multiple children. The Government will reform social security so that the system is simpler and increase incentive to work, as the unemployment of a parent or parents in Finland is the main reason for poverty in families with children. The Government will also implement an overall reform of social assistance, which will aim to strengthen a person's independent coping, reduce long-term dependence on social assistance and clarify the role of social assistance as a discretion-based last-resort financial support under social security.

Accessible services for children, youth and families

Petteri Orpo's Government Programme aims to increase the participation rate of, in particular, children with an immigrant background in early childhood education and care. This will improve their Finnish and Swedish language proficiency and integration into Finnish society and support the integration and language learning of the entire family. As part of the implementation of the Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee, there are plans to develop service counselling in early childhood education and care for children and families with an immigrant background.

In accordance with Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government Programme, the current Government will draw up a comprehensive action plan to prevent the exclusion of young people, to repair the welfare deficit and treat mental health problems. The Government Programme has a strong emphasis on promoting mental health, and the Government is currently preparing measures to ensure equal access of children and young people in basic services to short-term psychotherapy or other effective psychosocial treatments (the so-called therapy guarantee for children and young people in accordance with the Government model).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ A strong and committed Finland: Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government 20 June 2023. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-818-5>

The Finnish model for leisure activities has been used to secure a hobby for every child regardless of where they live. Petteri Orpo's Government Programme secures the right of every child and young person to at least one hobby they enjoy. Children's and young people's leisure activities as a whole will be developed in cooperation with leisure activity organisers. Legislation on the Finnish model for leisure activities will be evaluated, and possible support for leisure activities during school holidays will be examined as part of the work.⁶⁷

Improvement of learning outcomes

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government Programme 2023–2027 proposes that the Government launch an extensive foresight project for comprehensive schools to assess the development needs of the comprehensive school. Comprehensive school as a whole will be developed in the long term on the basis of information and research in broad-based cooperation with various actors. The decline in learning outcomes throughout the 21st century is particularly worrying. The aim of the work is to gather a wide range of researchers and experts from different fields and parts of the education sector to assess the development needs of comprehensive schools. A parliamentary monitoring group will be set up to support this work. The required legislative amendments and other measures will be prepared by the end of 2025.⁶⁸

Housing

In accordance with Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government Programme, a national programme to eliminate long-term homelessness has been launched. Key ministries, urban regions, the wellbeing services counties and organisations are involved in the work. The programme will strengthen cooperation between the state, the wellbeing services counties and cities that aims to eliminate long-term homelessness, which will take in particular young homeless people into account and promote the establishment of supported housing units for young people.⁶⁹ An effort will be made to improve the status of children placed in substitute care as part of the overall reform of child welfare, the legislation on which is to be submitted to Parliament in autumn 2025.

Priority of the best interests of the child - child impact assessment and child-oriented budgeting

The implementation of child impact assessments has increased and understanding of these has improved, but it is still often point-based and in many situations superficial. In addition, officials often do not receive sufficient support for carrying out assessments. Support for the introduction of child impact assessments will continue as part of the implementation of the Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee

⁶⁷ The Finnish model for leisure activities. <https://okm.fi/suomen-malli>

⁶⁸ A strong and committed Finland. Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government 20 June 2023. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-818-5>

⁶⁹ Programme for the elimination of long-term homelessness by 2027. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/hanke?tunnus=YM075:00/2023>

by preparing in-depth guidelines for different situations and by implementing training. The aim is to work together with various actors in creating models so that child impact assessments are a systematic part of the preparation of decisions affecting children, young people and families, and the monitoring of their implementation.

The pilot for child-oriented budgeting in two wellbeing services counties will continue in 2024, and the wellbeing services counties' child-oriented budgeting network created in connection with the pilot will strive during this government term to establish the introduction of child-oriented budgeting, especially in the wellbeing services counties.

7. Conclusions

General

Only 1.4% of children in Finland experience serious material or social deprivation, whereas an average of 8.3% of children in Europe experience these. However, children live in relative poverty in Finland. Low birth rates, poverty in families with children and intergenerational exclusion are challenging our society. A smaller share of children are at risk of poverty than the European average, as the Finnish share is 9.5% and the European average is more than twice this at 19.3%. In terms of relative poverty, special attention should be paid to vulnerable children and families, such as single-parent families and families with an immigrant background.

As regards the population as a whole, there were no significant changes in the share of people with a low-income between 2018 and 2022. The share of children (0–17 years) with a low income has decreased slightly. Finland has comprehensive social security for the entire population, and the level of basic social security has increased in relation to the general price level and earnings level over the past five years. All children have the right to basic services.

According to the Government Programme, the Government will promote policy that is favourable for families with children, and the measures identified in work on the Child Strategy will be continued as part of the implementation of the Government's child and family policy. The Government has committed to assessing the possibilities of making new investments in reducing poverty and inequalities within the spending limits during each budget session.

Implementation of the recommendation and good practices

Regarding the implementation of the recommendation, some of the reported measures are matters that have existed in Finland at the legislative level for decades. The work will continue as part of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, but also at the national level to the extent that reporting indicates shortcomings in the knowledge base or measures.

Examples of best practices

Children's voices and views heard. Two studies carried out as part of the Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee examined the wellbeing of both Roma children and Sámi children and the realisation of their rights as reported by the children themselves. So far, very little information has been available on Sámi and Roma children living in Finland, especially collected experience data produced by the children themselves. For example, the issues raised by Roma children were taken into account comprehensively as part of the measures of Finland's National Roma Policy.

Free early childhood education and care/income-based client fees. The client fee charged for early childhood education and care is determined on the basis of the family's size and income and the time spent by the child in early childhood education and care. The fee charged for early childhood education and care takes into account the income of the child, their guardian and persons living in the same household with them. At its lowest, the fee is €28/child/month. The fee may be waived or the

fee must be reduced if its collection jeopardises the prerequisites for the service user's or the family's livelihood or the implementation of the child's parent's or guardian's statutory maintenance obligation. The fee includes healthy and necessary nutrition that meets the child's nutritional needs.

Extended compulsory education and free study equipment at upper secondary level. Education is a significant factor that helps prevent intergenerational exclusion. Extended compulsory education entered into force in Finland in 2021, in line with which compulsory education ends when the young person reaches the age of 18 or completes an upper secondary qualification before that age. (matriculation examination or vocational qualification). As a result of the reform, student guidance and support increased to make it easier for young people to find a suitable study place. In addition to teaching, textbooks and tools are free of charge for students completing compulsory education. The aim is for every young person to complete upper secondary education.

A hobby for every child. The Finnish model for leisure activities aims to provide every child and young person with an opportunity to engage at school in a leisure activity that they enjoy and one that is free of charge. The aim is to establish the model as a permanent operating method in municipalities. At the beginning of 2023, provisions were added to the Youth Act (955/2022) on leisure activities for young people in accordance with the Finnish model of leisure activities and on discretionary government transfers granted for these activities. The Ministry of Education and Culture commissioned an assessment of the model, the purpose of which was to produce information on the realisation, functioning and impacts of the objectives. Particular attention has been paid to what experiences and opinions children and young people have concerning hobbies.

Investigating the thresholds to hobbies As one of the measures for the Child Strategy, the Ministry of Education and Culture carried out a pilot project on outreach leisure activities and a cooperation model for youth work will be implemented in cooperation with municipalities in the Finnish model of hobbies. The aim of the pilot was to help examine the obstacles that lay in the way of vulnerable children engaging in leisure activities and modelling ways in which the work of those organising leisure activities could better promote the encouragement of children and young people and help strengthen their social skills. The pilot comprised three very different ways for involving young people without hobbies in hobbies. The experiments have helped in finding possible means for ensuring that Finland's model for leisure activities reaches all children and young people in the future.⁷⁰

Multidisciplinary cooperation and early identification of support needs. Extensive, statutory health examinations carried out when each child is 18 months old and 4 years old involve multidisciplinary cooperation between child health clinics and early childhood education and care. In connection with an extensive health examinations, ECEC staff describe and, if necessary, assess the child's well-being in ECEC, and the information is transferred to the child health clinic. The assessment provided by ECEC staff is part of the assessment of the child's holistic growth, development and wellbeing as well as of the early identification of support needs in multidisciplinary cooperation. Multidisciplinary cooperation is also carried out with experts at the child health clinic when a child's development, learning and wellbeing require special attention.

⁷⁰ Follow-up report of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019–2023) on the implementation of the National Child Strategy. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-515-3>