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## Investing in children:

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

*A Study of National Policies*

Finland

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# Investing in children:

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

A Study of National Policies

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COUNTRY REPORT - FINLAND

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## Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>

European Commission's recommendation "Investing in Children and breaking the cycle of disadvantage"<sup>2</sup> has been welcomed in Finland. When in April 2013 the Finnish parliament was presented by the response to the Commission's recommendation on social investments, prepared by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health,<sup>3</sup> the Finnish government clearly stated its position as supporting the Commission's objective of strengthening social policy in Europe and welcoming the wide-reaching approach of the package, drawing more attention to social inclusion and cohesion issues. Finland was more critical of the social investments approach and conditionality, emphasising that the model implemented in Finland is based on principles of universality, non-discriminatory availability of social and health services. Finland considers that the Commission's view of social services and benefits, increasing means-testing and conditionality are not the right direction. Universalism of policy has in the Finnish case been found as the best way of benefitting the most vulnerable groups. Finnish government also emphasised the fact that the responsibility for funding must also in the future remain with the Member States. Finland did however warmly welcome the fact that the children are paid considerable attention in the communication, and issues such as early school leavers and their families' situation were seen as essential.<sup>4</sup>

Other organisations and third sector have also addressed the Commission's recommendation. Save the Children for instance welcomes the recommendation and emphasises the importance of using Structural Funds and other European instruments in order to put it into practice, as well as calling for ensuring that the potential of schools for ensuring social inclusion is fully utilised and outside school activities are provided free-of-charge, as they also provide an important instrument in supporting social inclusion of children from less wealthy backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

Although children and families are high on the European agenda, this is much less the case in Finland where austerity measures and financial concerns have dominated the debate. The Finnish system of governance and the effectiveness of its service system has been considered of good quality, but early school-leavers are a constant concern. For this reason Finland did receive a Country Specific Recommendation in this policy domain, i.e. recommendation to implement and monitor closely the impact of on-going measures to improve the labour-market position of young people and the long-term unemployed, with a particular focus on the development of job-relevant skills.

Children's rights and access to quality services are relatively well organised and catered for in Finland, with the main responsibility being embedded in the municipalities / local authorities. Due to the great number of municipalities and their varying size and resources, it is national level legislation and standards which are

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<sup>1</sup> Readers should note that the drafting of this report was completed in September 2013 thus it does not include an analysis of data or policy developments that became available after this date.

<sup>2</sup> In Finnish "Sijoitetaan lapsiin ja katkaistaan vähäosaisuuden kierre".

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation addressed in a written procedure by the Parliament on the 5th of April 2013, "Komission tiedonanto kasvua ja yhteenkuuluvuutta tukevista sosiaalisista investoinneista, mukaan luettuna Euroopan sosiaalirahaston täytäntöönpano vuosina 2014–2020".

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, electronic link to the Finnish position available at: [http://www.eduskunta.fi/triphome/bin/thw/?\\${APPL}=akirjat&\\${BASE}=akirjat&\\${THWIDS}=0.16/1380784036\\_242731&\\${TRIPPIFE}=PDF.pdf](http://www.eduskunta.fi/triphome/bin/thw/?${APPL}=akirjat&${BASE}=akirjat&${THWIDS}=0.16/1380784036_242731&${TRIPPIFE}=PDF.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Save the Children statement 2013: [http://www.pelastakaalapset.fi/@Bin/1098424/Lausunto\\_Save+the+Children+Statement+E+C+Child+Poverty+Recommendation.pdf](http://www.pelastakaalapset.fi/@Bin/1098424/Lausunto_Save+the+Children+Statement+E+C+Child+Poverty+Recommendation.pdf)

essential when it comes to determining the quality of services and equality of access. This naturally requires clear and effective coordination at the national level between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Education.

Still the extensive responsibility and involvement of local authorities makes it difficult to ensure an even service standard across the country. Moreover in the current negative economic climate many local authorities are really struggling to maintain the quality of the children's services in their territory. The need to ensure effective preventive measures and integrated services for children and families is perhaps the most pressing local need and it is also an area where most attention has been paid to in recent years. This has been developed and promoted also through specific measures, programme and activities, funded through both national and European Funds. As is seen from the analysis above, the European Funds have been under-used in this area, largely due to the national strategy drafted for 2007-2013, where families and children as topics were not explicitly addressed. It is the view of the expert that this should not be repeated in the 2014-2020 programming period, as the explicit reference to the type of end beneficiary seems to be necessary to ensure the desired attention. The current draft programme for Structural Funds 2014-2020 is titled "Growth and employment: The Finnish Structural Funds Programme for 2014-2020", so again at least at the level of headlines families and welfare are not seen as priority topics. In the programme document draft itself, there are three references to children or families, none of which address empowering children or directly improving their well-being (the references are in conjuncture to family policies and ensuring the better integration of mothers in the labour market).

The integrated approach to services is clearly an area of priority, which also requires most attention in policy terms. The national programme "KASTE" has been particularly active in this area, while the European Structural Funds and European Social Fund having been quite weak, with 69 EU-funded projects implemented, representing only 0.4% of the total number of projects.

The areas that would need most urgent help in the Finnish context involve:

- 1) Ensuring that the threat of inter-generational poverty and social exclusion is addressed and the threat of parents' unemployment, poverty and social exclusion is tackled. This puts particular focus on social services, primary education and quality of family services.
- 2) Ensuring that children's voice in their own matters is heard. The service system is based on the voice and empowerment of adults and in many cases parents' voice is ensured at the expense of the child.

Another important point of attention is to make sure that there is an evidence-base and that it is used for policy-making. Social impact assessments could be more comprehensively implemented in Finland. Effects on legislation and policy for children have increasingly been raised as one part of these assessments by social inclusion, children's rights and well-being experts.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thl.fi/thl-client/pdfs/c1f41be0-cbc2-4955-9a78-bc0d91b459cf>

## 1. Assessment of overall approach and governance<sup>7</sup>

The services for children are provided by local authorities, municipalities of which there are currently almost 340. With a population of only 5 million, this means that there are many very small municipalities and the municipalities have extensive responsibilities in service provision. 2/3 of public services are provided by the local authorities and in the area of social affairs, health and education, which are key policy areas of relevance to children and families, local authorities are almost a monopoly role. While the municipal reform has been on the agenda of two previous governments, as reported in previous reports, change has been extremely slow. Municipalities are currently expected to put forward plans on how they are going to ensure a more sustainable municipal structure, i.e. how they plan to ensure the service structure by investigating the possibility of merging with the neighbouring municipalities. Such a plan is expected from all municipalities by the end of November 2013.

On the national level, the ministries of social affairs and health have traditionally been responsible for young children's education, including early childhood education and care. This was changed in 2012, when the coordination responsibility for these issues was moved to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Between 2004 and 2012 the responsibility for early childhood education and care was in some local authorities under the auspices of social services and in others, under the auspices of education. This also implied challenges for the uniformity and equality of services across the country. The 2012 legislation was intended as an improvement and as a means of achieving a more standardised model and quality of services. Housing policy remains the main responsibility of Ministry of the Environment.

Responsibility for children's services lies with the local authorities, as is the case with most social and health services and basic education. The standards are national and legal rights of children are ensured by the government, with responsibilities currently shared between the ministry of social affairs and health and ministry of education. The government programme promotes an integrated approach to social inclusion, but this is a long process as the sector ministries have for a long time been responsible for various aspects of it. The fact that the responsibilities lie in different departments is clearly an issue that has over the years and decades made and an integrated multi-dimensional strategy as well as synergies between relevant policy areas and players difficult. There has been insufficient coordination and dialogue between the ministries and an integrated approach to children's rights and an effective mainstreaming of children's policies and rights has not been successful. These have however been addressed in policy programmes and initiatives (e.g. National programme for Health and Well-being, KASTE, which we return to at the end of the report). Also the fact that Ministry of Employment and the Economy is currently responsible for social inclusion (when it comes to labour market policy and European Structural Funds) has to some extent lead to more integrated approach. The various parties and stakeholders are included through hearings and processes of consultation, as well as working groups and programmes.

Another issue involves the use of evidence-based evaluation in policy-making. Social impact assessments could be more comprehensively implemented in Finland. Effects on legislation and policy on children have increasingly been raised as one part of these assessments by social inclusion and children's rights and well-being experts.<sup>8</sup> In most

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.thl.fi/thl-client/pdfs/c1f41be0-cbc2-4955-9a78-bc0d91b459cf>

cases, individual programmes and policy initiatives are evaluated separately, and not enough exchange of information or meta-level analysis of the findings is achieved. An important exception here was the assessment of the effectiveness of social inclusion policies addressing the young, already referred to and described in more detail in our previous report.<sup>9</sup> The monitoring of the government programme as a whole should be used more actively as an integrative instrument in this regard.

As for the stakeholders, an important additional element of the governance system relating to children's rights is the **Ombudsman for children**.

In its annual report, the Ombudsman's office reported on the number of contacts taken by citizens, which was used as an indicator of the awareness of the office and its profile. During 2012, the office was contacted by citizens 523 times. The fact that the figure stabilised at a high level indicated according to the annual report that there is need to develop a better dissemination of information on the services provided by municipalities and authorities. The online services of the Ombudsman for Children were seen as important part of the effort to make finding of correct information easier.<sup>10</sup>

In its annual report the Ombudsman summarises some of the key concerns today relating to children's wellbeing and welfare. These include:

- 1) Children receiving sufficient up-to-date information about decisions influencing their lives, this is the basis upon which the decisions are based, children's rights and the authorities responsible for children's protection;
- 2) A system where a child has his or her own social worker, whom he/she can contact independently of the parents, as well as enough time for the social worker to attend to the needs and questions and concerns of the child;
- 3) Every child should have at least one adult in his or her life protecting his or her dreams and aspirations in life;
- 4) Adults should work to counter-act the prejudice against children in family placement or other outside one's own family care at schools and everyday life;
- 5) Parents' rehabilitation and wellbeing should be promoted more actively (in cases of drug or alcohol abuse in particular).<sup>11</sup>

Other important issues that were raised in the annual report addressed the need to further promote methods and working practice based on early intervention, as well as the need to address effects and impacts of policies on children ("Social Impact Assessment" including children as an important part).<sup>12</sup> Here also indicators developed to better monitor the children's wellbeing are referred to. According to Child protection legislation (12 §), each municipality in Finland should draft a plan on how the wellbeing of children, young people and families are effected by its services provided by different policy sectors. Such an integrative approach is essential, as it has been found that the problems relating to children often stem from the insufficient integration of services across sectors. There are currently many structural changes, not least the municipal and health care reform on-going, which are going to be highly

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<sup>9</sup> Source: Heidi Ristolainen, Sampo Varjonen & Jukka Vuori (Consortium of National Institutes for Health and Wellbeing, (SOTERKO)) 2013: What do we know about the effectiveness of policy measures in reducing social exclusion and welfare differences among children and young people? A review and assessment of the effectiveness of policy measures. Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office.

<sup>10</sup> Ombudsman for Children, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

relevant for children and the Ombudsman's office has expressed their view and has been active on these.<sup>13</sup>

One of the key functions of the Ombudsman is to raise the awareness for children's rights, both amongst the general public and the local authorities who are responsible for ensuring the services. In lobbying work at a municipal level, the key message of the office has been that 'the municipality of children and young people creates well-being'. In 2012 a survey was undertaken by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children among the members of the **Finnish Children's Parliament** were used for drafting a list of basic statements of the Ombudsman for Children and Young People, issued before the municipal elections. The list was signed by a record number of municipal candidates, 4,224. The Child Advisory Board's municipal division prepared in collaboration with young people a statement to those making decisions on the municipal reform and mergers, which was handed over to the Minister of Public Administration and Local Government in November 2012.

The Children's parliament is also worth mentioning as part of the governance system and example of social innovation seeking to empower children. Children's parliament was established in 2007. The basis for the establishment of the parliament was the Youth Act, which requires municipalities to consult with children, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Union Youth Policy White Paper. These high level international statements were however not seen as sufficient and it has been important to provide a forum for children to discuss and decide on matters concerning themselves.

Each Finnish municipality has selected two representatives to the parliament. The Parliament convenes once a year to a plenary session, complemented by online organised plenary sessions and thematic committees. The sessions are intended to discuss and vote on matters concerning children. The Parliament currently has, among other things, eight committees, an Online initiative channel, and chat-like conversations. Local children's parliaments have been organised in fifteen municipalities across the country. The management of the parliament includes 9 persons and a Secretary-General, responsible for organising the activities and communication, meetings and training.

Internationally Finland usually is ranked very well when it comes to children's health and children's rights. An example was the report published by Save the Children in 2012, which reported that according to their motherhood index (consisting of factors such as Lifetime risk of maternal death; Under -5 mortality rate; Expected number of years of formal schooling; Gross national income per capita; Participation of women in national government), Finland is the best place in the world to be a mother. The same factors that make motherhood such a positive factor in Finland are also naturally reflected on the children: the health, safety and societal factors are clearly in place for children to be raised in safe circumstances.

Finland also has the lowest risk-of-poverty rate in the whole EU.<sup>14</sup> Finland is one of only four Member States where children are less at risk than the total population (Denmark, Slovenia, and Cyprus being the three other ones).

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<sup>13</sup> The need for social impact assessment of legislation in general and impacts on children in particular has often been raised in policy debate, but there are still many areas where this is underdeveloped or children as a target group are forgotten or overlooked. Few exceptions do exist, though even here it is argued that the actual effects and impacts of children are often under-valued in comparison to those of adults (e.g. Law on measures to prevent the distribution of child pornography. An Evaluation of the Effects of the Law.)

<sup>14</sup> Frazer and Marlier 2012, p. 9-10.

***While children's rights and access to quality services are relatively well organised and catered for in Finland, it is clear that the extensive responsibility of local authorities makes it difficult to ensure an even service standard across the country and in the current economic situation the local authorities are really struggling to maintain an even quality of children's services across the country. The need to provide preventive measures and integrated services where the child and his/her needs are placed at the heart of service provision is a major challenge. This is not only a matter of sufficiency of resources (whilst that is also in question in the current economic situation, the ageing population and the sustainability of the public deficit), but also a matter of working practice and service culture where integrated services are historically not the norm. This is the area which still requires the most attention in policy terms.***

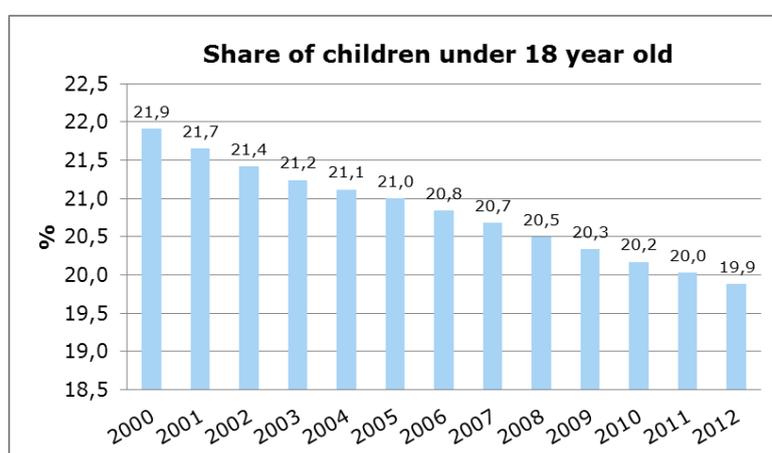
## 2. Access to adequate resources

In Finland there were approximately one million children under 18 years old in 2012 (see table 1) which is 19.9% of the whole population (see figure 1). The amount and the share of children are descending: during the years 2000 – 2012 the share has decreased two percentage points.

**Table 1. Number of children under 18 years old in Finland 2006–2012.**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Number</b>	1,099,713	1,096,025	1,091,560	1,088,456	1,084,296	1,081,766	1,078,730

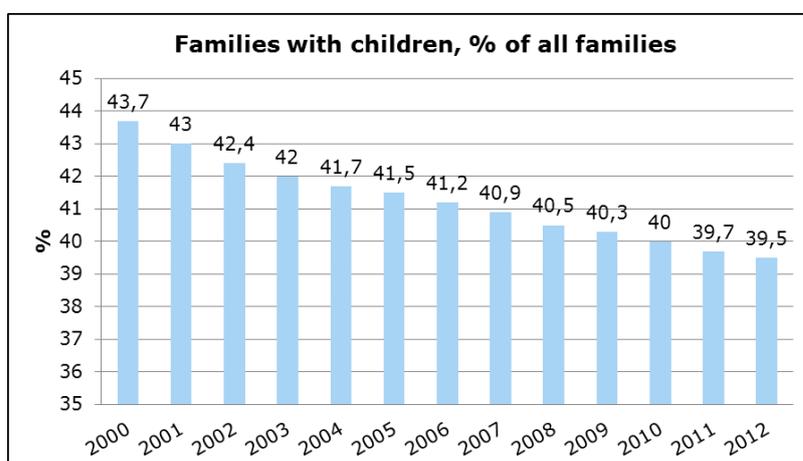
**Figure 1. Share of children (under 18 years old) of the whole population in Finland.**



Source: Statistics Finland.

Despite the fact that Finland has been ranked well in comparisons where children's and mother's rights are assessed, the birth rate has been decreasing. The norm and economic realities stipulate the need for both parents to be working while the early childhood education and care is well organised, the fact that personal choices of education, career and work are predominant tends to lead to most parents to have children at a relatively late stage of their lives, which is reflected on birth rate. The share of families with children has decreased 4.2 percentage points during the years 2000 – 2012 from 43.7% to 39.5% (figure 2).

**Figure 2. Share of families with children received income support, % of all families with children.**



Source: SOTKANet.

At the same time as the general income level has been rising, the share of families with children in poverty has increased (here poverty/low income level = income per consumption unit is lower than 60% of the equivalent median money income of all households, see Statistics Finland 2013).

In 1995, 52,000 children under 18 years old lived in a poor family. In the early 2000s, children under 18 years old lived in a poor family and in 2007, already 151,000 of children lived in poor families. The amount has increased almost three-fold during 1995 – 2007 (SOTKANet 2013).

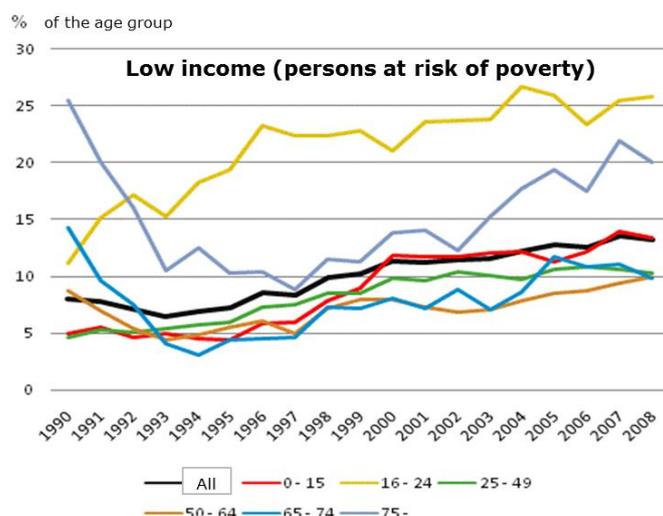
Year 2011 Child poverty was 11.1%. Child poverty was highest at 2007. During 2007 – 2011 the share of children at risk of poverty decreased one percentage point.

**Table 2. Child poverty (%).**

	1995	2000	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Child poverty (%)</b>	4.3	8.8	9.7	12.1	12.1	11.5	11.8	11.1

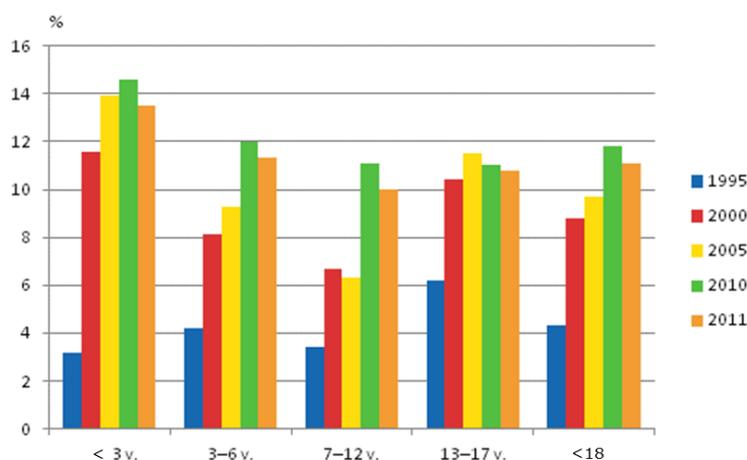
Children's poverty has significantly increased after the 1990's recession in Finland. Before the recession children under 18 years old had a very low risk of poverty, while after the recession children's poverty began to rise faster than risk of poverty for the population as a whole. Children's poverty increased in the 2000's at the same level as the overall risk of poverty and has since fluctuated along with it (see figure 3). Children's poverty risk is at its highest when the child is under school age (see figure 4), at the same time also most vulnerable and dependent on adults.

**Figure 3. Low income (persons at risk of poverty).**



Source: Statistics Finland.

**Figure 4. Child poverty (under 18 years old children with low incomes) 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2011.**

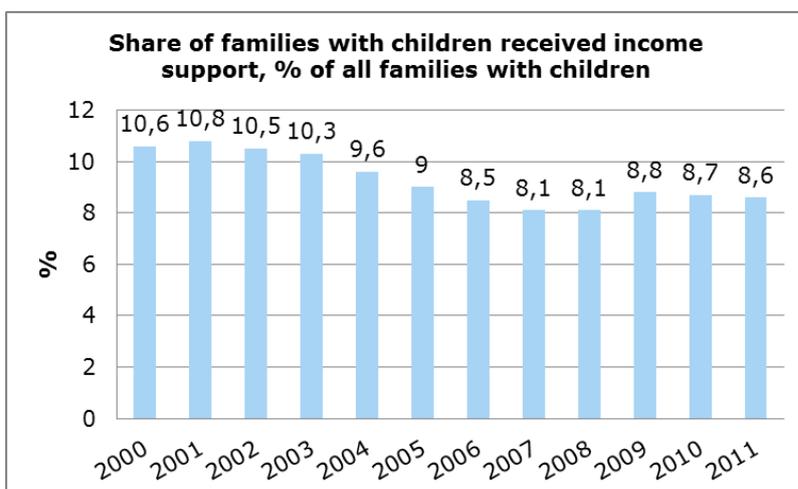


Source: Statistics Finland.

A higher risk of poverty is also linked to the family type: single parents have a three times higher risk compared to a family of two parents. Greater number of children in the family also increases the risk (Statistics Finland 2013). Today, 25% of Finnish single-parent families have low incomes (compare to the mid-1990s, 10%). The vast majority of low-income single parents are women: one third of the children living below the poverty line, live in single mother families (SOTKANet 2013).

In 2011 8.6% of all families with children received income support (see figure 2). The share decreased during years 2000 – 2007 but increased after 2008 and turned into a slight decrease after 2009 (see figure 5).

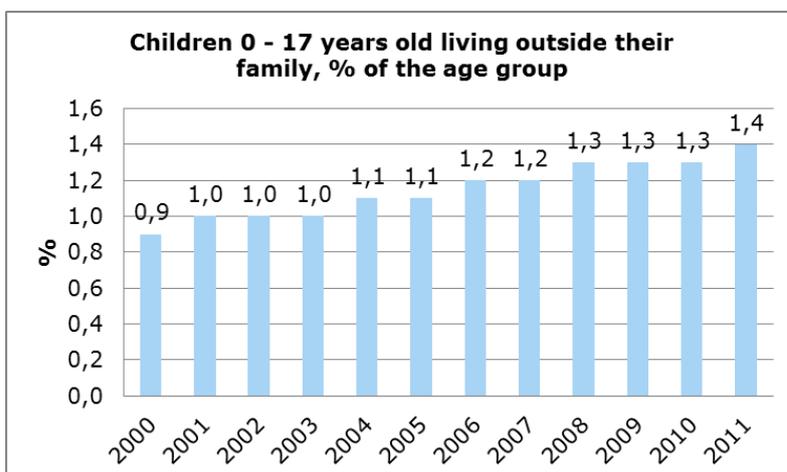
**Figure 5. Share of families with children received income support, % of all families with children.**



Source: SOTKANet.

In 2011, 17,400 children lived in an alternative care placement outside their family home. The number of children in such placements has doubled in 20 years. Between the years 2000 – 2011 the increase in the share was 0.5 per cent. Year 2011 the share of children living outside their family was 1.4% of the age group (figure 6). This reflects the parents' increasing difficulty of taking care of their children which puts more children at risk.

**Figure 6. Children 0 – 17 years old living outside their family, % of the age group.**



Source: SOTKANet.

***Both the placements outside the home in alternative care and the increased poverty rate reflect a worrying trend in the Finnish society, where children are the first to be affected by the social and societal problems. This is further proof of the need to create and support a well-developed impact assessment culture within public services and policy-making. Social and human impact assessment should always put the needs of the most vulnerable, i.e. the children as their highest priority.***

### 3. Access to affordable quality services

The service system in Finland is based on universality of service provision and children's services are universal across the country. Yet due to the fragmented geography of Finland, the small size of municipalities and the high degree of local authority autonomy, the equal access to quality services following universal norms and standards is sometimes difficult to ensure.

**Prenatal services** are used very actively in Finland and the universal availability of services is one of the key elements of the Finnish system. The services reach to nearly all families with children and thus have a key role in exclusion prevention: The services reach 99.5 – 99.8% of families with children, only 0.2 – 0.5% of families with children do not use the services. Approximately 60,000 clients yearly visit a maternity clinic and 400,000 children and 600,000 parents yearly visit a child welfare clinic.<sup>15</sup>

In 1993 the central government gave municipalities' greater responsibility and freedom to organise and finance the prenatal care services. In practice, municipalities searched for savings, especially in labour reduction, which affected the quality of the services provided. Many child welfare clinics inspection, preventive family training and home visits were reduced. Primary care clinic visits for children 0-7 thousand-year-old per in 2010 was still lower (2,971) than in 1994 (3,104).<sup>16</sup>

In 2009, the municipalities were subject to a binding regulation (380/2009), the aim of which was to ensure adequate and regionally uniform prenatal care services. The main objective was early intervention in children's and families' problems, as well as prevention of social exclusion. A major innovation of the regulation was the broad health surveillance which assesses not only the child's health, but the whole family's living conditions and well-being. The checks form a fifteen-year continuum for families. The regulation related to periodical checks came into force in 2011.<sup>17</sup>

**Early childhood education and care** intends to promote healthy growth, development and learning (Ministry of Social Affairs 2012). Early childhood services include municipal and private day-care, pre-school, open early childhood education and school children's morning and afternoon activity. Over 60% of children under school age are in day care (private or municipal) and 97% of the age group of six year olds participate pre-school.<sup>18</sup>

There have been important developments to ensure equality of access and quality of services across the country, but this is still an issue where more attention should be paid to. The aim at providing a system that is attentive to the needs of the whole family all through the child's life and incorporates health with social services, as well as educational aspects, is still far from reality.

While the development of a practice where health is seen as a more comprehensive issue and health checks on small children for instance are used as a means of assessing more broadly the needs of the child and his/her family are seen as a useful development, concerns still remain. A working culture incorporating social and health issues in an integrated way takes a long time to become embedded and there are repeatedly concerns raised that the personnel resources needed to ensure such an integrated approach may not be sufficient.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Wiss, cited in Ristolainen et al.

The sufficiency of welfare and social protection has been considered relatively good in recent decades and work as a means of fighting social inclusion has been the standard view in Finland, as those at work, together with pensioners have been least likely to be affected by poverty.<sup>20</sup> However this situation seems to be increasingly put under pressure, as the issue has become more complex and other factors are increasingly coming into play (single parenthood, part-time work, etc.).<sup>21</sup>

As the Finnish municipal service system and structure are currently under review, the need to ensure equal access and standard quality of services across the country, while also improving the integration of various services (most importantly social, health and education) has been the expressed concern.<sup>22</sup> Thus far anxieties have been raised on this equality of access and equality of services and in particular on the project activities seeking to address them. For instance by the National Audit Office who has criticised that projects seeking to address social segregation have tended to be marked by problems relating to short-term focus, lack of continuity and fragmentation. Also the synergy and integration between projects and day-to-day work has been an issue for concern, though this has been addressed quite actively through active work of exchange of best practice, mainstreaming, etc.<sup>23</sup>

The support for parents to enable them to be fully integrated in the labour market has been one of the key areas of the current government programme, which states for instance:

*Support will be provided to enable parents with small children to combine family and work in a flexible manner. Children's day care will be maintained as a subjective right. The day care system will be developed to offer families with more flexible opportunities to use day care services. Safe and high quality children's day care will be secured.*

*Day care will be developed as a service preventing social exclusion, and will be maintained free of charge for families on a low income. Any charges collected will not form a barrier to employment. Special attention will be paid to the position of single parents. The right to keep the same day care placement will be maintained even if a child is temporarily in home care.<sup>24</sup>*

There was however a change in the recent budgetary negotiations of August 2013, where it was proposed that the subjective right should be limited and the family leave more evenly distributed between the parents. Home care assistance can apply to a family whose child under 3 years is not in municipal day care.

Currently the **child home care allowance** is a universal allowance, which is independent of the family income allowance and care allowance, which in turn is influenced by the family's income level. This means that the allowance is entirely universal and independent of needs, no means-testing is involved. Every family gets the same amount of money per child, depending on the number of children. The care allowance is paid for each entitled child individually. The monthly allowance for a 3 year-old child in 2013 was EUR 336.67 per month for the first child, with the subsequent children under 3 years of age each bringing a support of EUR 100.79 per

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<sup>20</sup> Niemi & Ritakallio, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Flexicurity and activation measures have been actively discussed and investigated across the 2000s. (See for instance: Kannustavan sosiaaliturvan haaste. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus 2003:5].

<sup>22</sup> This has been a view reflected for instance by the Finnish Association of local and regional authorities; <http://www.kunnat.net/fi/Kuntaliitto/media/tiedotteet/2013/01/Sivut/palvelujen-saatavuus-uudistuksen-lahtokohdaksi.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Ristolainen et al., p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Prime Minister's Office 2011, p.52.

month. At the moment, children can be cared for by one of the parents. The government is however now proposing a change where the supplementary support should be divided fifty-fifty between both parents (to accommodate co-parenting?).

The shift in the support system has not been without its critics and even children's charities and experts have disagreed on the final expected effects of the change. It has previously been estimated that the equal sharing of parental leave is unrealistic and change (before the new legislative requirement) was extremely slow, when compared with some of the neighbouring countries, in particular Sweden.<sup>25</sup>

The uneven responsibility for parenthood in the early years is reflected, not only by the unequal right of fathers to parenthood, but also in economic terms: the pay gap in Finland is still significant, as it is mostly mothers who take responsibility for childcare in the early years and average hourly wages of women in regular employment is 83.2% of the male wage.<sup>26</sup> While about half of the gender pay gap is explainable by the fact that women and men work in different areas and in different positions within the labour market, there are also clear indications of other factors at play: when looking at the same age group of men and women with the same educational background and operating in the same industries and jobs, the pay for women is still about 10% lower than for men.

Dividing the allocation of the current family allowance to both parents and limiting the subjective right to early childhood education and care (e.g. as a part-time solution when a parent is at home on) has led to considerable discussion. In the current system, parental leave starts after maternity leave and the national pension system pays out parental support for 158 days in total. Either mother or father can take parental leave, but due to the way the pay is calculated, in many cases the family situation is such that mothers take the leave, as the majority of them receive lower wage than their spouses. In the recent debate on parental leave, it has been argued that the right to care, such as early childhood education and care services, is not only a right of the parent (to have his/her child in such services), rather it is also a right of the child to have support exterior to the home environment. Increasingly the subjective right to care has thus come to be seen as a right of the child (to quality care).

Early childhood education and care, parental support and inclusion in the labour market are important factors in fighting social segregation and child poverty. It has however been reported in recent years that even in Finland the poverty of children and families with children has been increasing.<sup>27</sup> Even if it is true that Finland does very well in European comparison, there are still issues to be addressed. It has been shown in recent studies that children's risk of poverty and poverty of families with children has increased and one of the key issues here are the high cost of living, in particular in urban areas. The high costs level is not an issue that has emerged as a consequence of the recession, but the increase in unemployment has influenced the situation negatively.

In addition to income level and support level available for children and families with children, housing is the other side of the coin in this regard. The Finnish housing system is largely based on home ownership. Single parents are more likely to be faced with poverty and they also less frequently own their home due to the high price level of housing. Out of two-parent households, 82% lived in their own home (2009), while

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<sup>25</sup> [http://yle.fi/uutiset/suomessa\\_200\\_vuoden\\_matka\\_lastenhoidon\\_tasa-arvoon/6467098#](http://yle.fi/uutiset/suomessa_200_vuoden_matka_lastenhoidon_tasa-arvoon/6467098#);  
For debates on the extensiveness and quality of the Finnish day care system see for instance Kalliala 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Statistics Finland, Consumer price index 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Source: Institute for Health and Welfare 2013; Source: Iivonen 2013, Iivonen 2012.

only 48% of single parent families did. There has been a large increase in indebtedness amongst families with children and the vulnerability of families faced with unemployment is considerable.<sup>28</sup>

The costs and negative effects of segregation of families and children are another area, where considerable research efforts have been made over the decades and a significant amount of policy initiatives have been initiated. Efforts have been made through various programmes and legislation to strengthen preventive measures in order to reduce care orders and institutional placements. Yet the opposite has happened: the most serious seizure measures are still increasing. Most children and young people are doing well, but an increasing minority of them are not. The demands of society are growing, but conditions for coping with them are not. Calls for research and evidence on the cost-efficiency of policy measures are increasing universally, also in Finland. Very little information is still collected on the problems and problem management of Finland's children and young people, and there are difficulties associated with using such information. A national research programme would therefore be useful in supporting evidence-based and well justified policy.<sup>29</sup>

***The universal model of welfare and social services has been at the core of the Finnish system. Concerns have been raised over the increasing regional differences in social inclusion and welfare across the country. The sufficiency of welfare and social protection was considered as relatively good in recent decades and work as a means of fighting social inclusion it has been the standard view in Finland, as those at work, together with pensioners have been least likely to be affected by social exclusion or poverty. Increasingly this has come under pressure, as the issue is becoming more complex and other factors are coming into play (single parenthood, part-time work etc.). The one-sided focus on the working population and on tax-payers rather than on the most vulnerable (children in particular) is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.***

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<sup>28</sup> The reform of the social benefit system has also been debated from this angle: due to the extremely high housing costs in Finland, in some areas, in particularly in the metropolitan areas, applying for a housing benefit may at times be a more lucrative option than to seek work UNCLEAR does the benefit make it easier to find work? (e.g. <http://www.soininvaara.fi/2013/08/06/sosiaaliturvasta-vastikkeellisempaa/>).

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Sipilä & Österbacka 2013.

## 4. Addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the European Semester

Child poverty and social exclusion have not been directly addressed in the Country Specific Recommendations (CSR), due to the situation being quite a good one, in comparison to some other issues on the agenda. There are no targets of relevance here either.

Of indirect relevance to families and more generally is the issue of reconciliation of work and family life and the activation measures related to this topic. These have been nationally promoted activities rather than recommended or put forward by the Commission as such.

In spring 2013, the Government decided to promote the reconciliation of work and family life with a new flexible child home care allowance. The monthly allowance supports employment and part-time work. Further changes on this legislation and system have been put forward in budgetary negotiations of August 2013, as described previously in this report. Equality of parenthood is a right for the parents and children alike and the fact that despite its equal character, the Finnish society still suffers from issues such as rights of fathers being at times compromised in favour of the mothers (due to the traditional perception of parenthood, putting particular emphasis on the biological relationship between the mother and the child), as well as the pay differences between men and women (reflected in the majority of parental leave being taken by the mother, thereby also further exacerbating the wage difference, as mothers' careers are more fragmented than those of their male counterparts).

The national target of reducing early school leaving to 8% has been predominately promoted through four measures:

- **Education guarantee (a study place for everyone finishing basic education, introduced in 2013);<sup>30</sup>**
- **Starting places quota in vocational basic education increased (in 2013) by 1,700;**
- **Enhancing pupil and student welfare (2013);**
- **Preparing immigrants for upper secondary education (2013).**

It is too early to judge the effects of these measures. Education guarantee is currently under review, the evaluation findings are not available yet. With the annual budget of 60 million euro, the guarantee has received considerable visibility and the pressure is on to deliver results. It is our view that it is important to identify successes and development needs at an early stage and also the experiences of the young people themselves needs to be taken into consideration in the assessment, as the young persons who participate in these measures deserve to be heard more fully than is usually the case. Evaluations tend to focus on the level of the implementing organisations rather than on the vulnerable target groups themselves. In any case the target remains an ambitious and important one and all means are necessary to achieve it.

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<sup>30</sup> Finnish National Board of Education website.  
[http://www.oph.fi/english/education\\_development/current\\_reforms/education\\_guarantee](http://www.oph.fi/english/education_development/current_reforms/education_guarantee)

## 5. Mobilising relevant EU financial instruments

In Finland the activities funded within the European Social Fund (ESF) programme context are used to support projects that promote employment, competence and competitiveness. Special focus is given to groups at a disadvantage and to promoting equal opportunities. The programme will receive approximately EUR 1.414 million in public financing, of which the EU's total contribution is EUR 615 million. The ESF programme consists of the national section and four regional sections. Approximately half of the ESF financing will be directed to national thematic projects. Besides Southern, Western, Eastern, and Northern Finland each have their own regional sections, which are based on the employment, industrial, and knowledge strategies of the areas. Eastern Finland has a special position as it has its own financial framework, and it will receive financing separately from the national section.

The national section is based on the objectives and priorities set in the programme document of the Finnish ESF programme. The action lines of the four regional sections are the same but with regional characteristics and focus points. These action lines are:

- 1: Developing work organisations, workforce and entrepreneurship;
- 2: Promoting employment and preventing exclusion;
- 3: Developing innovation and services systems that promote the functioning of the labour market;
- 4: Cooperation between member states and regions in ESF activities;
- 5: Technical support.

**The ERDF** supports projects that develop businesses, the creation of innovations, networking, knowledge, and the accessibility of areas. Along with financing from the ESF programme, financing from the ERDF programmes is used for the promotion of competitiveness and employment. The ERDF programme is implemented in Finland through five regional programmes (Southern, Eastern, Western, Northern Finland and Åland Islands), each having their own objectives and characteristics following the general action lines, which are:

- 1: Promoting entrepreneurship;
- 2: Promoting innovation activities and networking and strengthening competence structures;
- 3: Promoting attainability and operating environment of the regions;
- 4: Technical support.

The programme areas and their funding shares are summarised in the following table.

	Percentage of total funding	Funding (MEUR)	EU contribution (MEUR)
Southern Finland	16%	345	138
Eastern Finland	35%	731	366
Western Finland	19%	398	159
Northern Finland	30%	623	311
Total	100%	2,097	974

As an analysis of the action lines and funding allocation points out, promoting the wellbeing of children and families has not been among the main focus points within the ESF and ERDF programmes in Finland. Much more attention has been paid e.g. to immigrants and long-term unemployed with children and families more like indirect target groups. The following section presents the results of a more detailed ESF and ERDF project analysis.

## ESF/ERDF project analysis

This section presents the results of ESF/ERDF project database analysis. The analysis was conducted by going through data on relevant ESF and ERDF projects in the EURA RR-database, the main reporting and monitoring database available for Structural Funds activities in Finland. In the first phase, projects related directly and explicitly to children and families were identified using keywords "lapsi\*" (child-), "lasten\*" (children's) and "perhe\*" (family). After this the initial results were analysed manually and irrelevant projects were removed based on the names and substance of the projects concerned.

In addition to project-level analysis it is clear that the centrality of working-life, entrepreneurship and competitiveness topics within the national strategy for Structural Funds 2007-2013 is a clear indication of the relative absence of children and families in the strategic priority-setting of 2007-2013. The era was marked by employment and labour-force dominance, as well as competitiveness, entrepreneurship and innovation themes. Most attention in the programme was given to companies and organisations addressing working-life issues and as target groups, perhaps at the expense of children and families.

The EURA-database contains to date a total of 18,452 projects (2,385 ESF projects and 16,067 ERDF projects) for the programme period 2007-2013. Approximately 500 (2.7%) of these project descriptions contain one or more of the abovementioned keywords. This relatively low share is partly explained by the fact that 87% projects in the database are ERDF.

After going through these projects manually, it turned out that only 69 projects were more or less *directly*<sup>31</sup> related to the promotion of children's and families' situation. The remaining over 400 projects were primarily aimed at other target groups and children and families only as secondary target groups.

These 69 projects represent only 0.4% of the total number of projects. The result is only indicative and it should be noted that children and families may in fact be indirectly affected by many other projects as well. However, the result validates the working hypothesis and the abovementioned fact that children and families are not strongly represented in the current priorities of the ESF/ERDF programmes and the centrality of children and families with children is relatively low in project activity.

These 69 projects, target directly to children and families, received public funding in total of EUR 17.1 million (years 2007-2013). Most (49%, EUR 8.4 million for 27 projects) of this funding has been allocated to ESF action line 2 (Promoting employment and preventing exclusion). The results of the analysis are presented in more detail in the following table.

	ESF action lines					ERDF action lines					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Projects related directly to children and families*	11	27	7	2	0	9	2	7	2	2	69
Public funding* (MEUR)	2.7	8.4	2.4	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.08	0.6	0.7	1.8	17.1

<sup>31</sup> The analysis excluded projects that were not directly aimed at children and families i.e. where children and families – based on the project description – were not the principal target groups. Also infrastructure projects (within ERDF programmes) were excluded even in cases where they had indirect relevance to children or families (e.g. investing and building family leisure resorts).

After this general statistical analysis, 5 case projects were selected among the ESF projects from the database for a closer analysis in order to get a picture of the kind of projects that have been funded. The results of this analysis indicate that the objectives and expected results are very diverse and at 'micro' or regional level. The following table presents the results case by case.

Case / action line	Description	Expected results / objectives
<b>Isät työelämässä (Fathers in working life)</b> ESF 1 EUR 182,988	The project aims to provide education courses, fora and lessons to promote fathers consciousness on rights and possibilities related to combining work and family life.  Target group: fathers and to-be-fathers, families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a more equal use of family leave between men and women</li> <li>▪ increased consciousness of the fathers</li> <li>▪ more information for professionals working with families (e.g. schools)</li> </ul>
<b>Perhehoidon täydennyskoulutus (Family care further education module)</b> ESF 2 EUR 42,200	The project created a learning 'module' for foster parents and social workers in order to increase information and improve common understanding and processes of private childcare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ increased information and common understanding on private childcare</li> <li>▪ improved cooperation between parents and social workers</li> <li>▪ improved quality of private childcare, give support to social workers</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoimisuus koulussa - osallistamisen ja syrjäytymisen ehkäisyn toimintamalli (multi-actor model at schools to promote participation and prevent social exclusion)</b> ESF 2 EUR 98,934	Design and establish a multi-professional 'safety net' for children and their families in order to tackle exclusion at early stage. This includes implementing early prevention social work in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ improving wellbeing of children and families by empowering families and creating a multi-professional culture in schools</li> <li>▪ enhance the cooperation between school staff and shareholders</li> </ul>
<b>Oppimisympäristöjen työelämälähtöinen kehittäminen lastensuojelutyössä</b> ESF 3 EUR 152,000	The project aims to develop cooperation between childcare actors, improve regional networking and exchange of knowledge. This includes e.g. giving additional education for persons working in institutional child care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ improving the status of the region as a quality service provided in foster childcare.</li> <li>▪ smooth services processes and knowledge exchange in foster childcare</li> <li>▪ improved working life focus in vocational education</li> </ul>
<b>Open minds – Learning minds</b> ESF 4 EUR 93,500	The project complements another ESF project which created new methods and materials for life-long learning in relation to preventing educational exclusion of children. This project focused on collecting and disseminating relevant good practices between Finland and other European countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ dissemination of good practices between Finland and other European countries</li> </ul>

It is too early to assess or judge the effectiveness of the Structural Funds activities 2007-2013 for children. It is likely to remain relatively low however, as we know from

the on-going evaluation that there has been a considerably stronger focus on working life and working-age people and target groups.

Out of the topics addressed in the current ESF programme, integration of family life and working life has in fact been rated as one of the weakest ones, as assessed in the self-evaluation of the projects themselves.<sup>32</sup>

It is clear that the Structural Funds programme implemented in Finland have very little connection to addressing children or families with children as a direct beneficiary or target group. The main bulk of the funding goes to projects and activities that target persons in working age. In our view this should be corrected in the 2014-2020 period but after looking at the draft programme this does not yet seem to be the case.

## **KASTE programme**

National policies and programmes tend to be seen as complementary to the European ones and therefore it does seem logical that they should have more focus on the families and children, who are not key target groups in the EU programmes implemented in Finland. On the national level the main programme instrument for addressing social segregation and inclusion for children and families with children has been the National Development Programme for Social Welfare and Health Care (Kaste). "Children's Kaste ("Lasten Kaste programme") is one of the six sub-programmes within national Kaste programme aiming to 1) reduce the inequalities in wellbeing and health and 2) improving the organization of social welfare and health care services in a client-oriented and economically sustainable way.

The objectives of the Lasten Kaste programme include strengthening preventive and early support services; developing preventive child welfare and reduce custodies; introduce new methods to support families, parenthood and adults working with children. Three strategic focus points for programme period 2012-2015 are 1) family centre activities, 2) student welfare (e.g. developing school health care) and 3) child welfare (e.g. multi-professional methods).

The overall budget of the whole Kaste programme (six sub-programmes) for the years 2012-2015 is approximately EUR 70 million (EUR 17.5 million yearly). In 2012 the "Lasten Kaste" sub-programme financed three national level projects with a total of 820,000 Euros. However, in 2011 the financing was EUR 5.2 million for two projects.

The move from the previous KASTE programming period has sought to address testing new service models in preventive services to making these services part of mainstream. As described by Hastrup et al. (2013):

*The objectives for the first programme period of the KASTE programme (2008–2011) were ambitious. Its purpose was to achieve a reform of services for children, adolescents and families with children across the board, developing and integrating services for supporting development and for preventing and correcting problems and disruptions, at the basic level and across sector boundaries. The idea was for specialist services to provide support for basic services with various operating options introduced directly into the development environments of children and adolescents: homes, day care, schools and leisure activities. Another aim was to de-institutionalise services and to create new service concepts. The objectives of the programme were rooted in research findings about the developmental environment of children and adolescents.*

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<sup>32</sup> "to what extent have you achieved your project goals thus far?"; Tempo Economics and Ramboll Management Consulting 2011, p. 32 & 2013, p. 25.

*During the first Kaste programme period, progress has been made according to the objectives and implementation plan of the programme. To achieve reform in service structures from the perspective of the wellbeing of families with children, 'Lasten Kaste' ('Children's Kaste') projects have involved developing strategic work, extensive networking models and multi-professional cooperation across local government and sector boundaries. Collecting services for families with children at family centres and improving their management systems is an example of a regional service model. The contribution of NGOs has been leveraged by setting up well-functioning partnerships with public services, and an increasing number of meeting places for families have also been set up. Operating models developed in broad-based cooperation in a number of projects have been adopted as permanent practice and are now being propagated from piloting regions to neighbouring municipalities.*

*The national objective for the first programme period of the Kaste programme was that at the end of the period a change process would be ongoing nationwide to reform the developmental environments and services for children, adolescents and families with children comprehensively, including the management and cooperation structures and working methods supporting them. Such a change process is indeed now going on. However, there is still a long way to go with the reform of services for children, adolescents and families. It was already known when the programme was planned that at least 10 years of concerted efforts would be needed to achieve such an extensive change in operating practices. The original idea was to develop and pilot services in a specific region, and the extending of the reform to cover the entire country brought an added challenge.<sup>33</sup>*

It is clear that better collaboration between organisations, service structures and policy areas is a key element of renewing working practices in the area of services for children and families. Here different forms of collaboration and exchange of information are essential. There is a close collaboration between the National Institute for Health and Welfare, the main expert organization for research and expertise on children, young people and families, and NGOs, ministry of social affairs and health and other stakeholders. The research community provides many forms of pro-active information and services, including a nationwide website for people who work with children.<sup>34</sup> The target group of the website is primarily health and social service professionals working with children, young people and families, specifically staff at maternity and child welfare clinics, early childhood education and care services, schools, as well as policy-makers in social welfare, health care and education services. Other website users include staff specialised in health and social services, families, researchers, journalists, NGOs, students and teachers at vocational institutes, polytechnics and universities. These types of information pools and exchange-of-experience communities are indeed an important resource in providing up-to-date information on what works, even if the Finnish government has not yet provided a model of "What-works-centres", as implemented in the UK for instance, or systematic impact assessment as is the policy ideal across the EU.

***It is clear that the Structural Funds programme implemented in Finland have addressed children's and families' needs in an insufficient way, focusing too heavily on those already in the labour market and on competitiveness issues. There is only a weak connection between Structural Funds 2007-2013 to addressing children or families with children as a direct beneficiary or target group. The main bulk of the programme funding, projects and activities***

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> See: [http://www.thl.fi/en\\_US/web/kasvunkumppanit-en](http://www.thl.fi/en_US/web/kasvunkumppanit-en)

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***targets persons in working age. In our view this should be better addressed in 2014-2020 programming period. The draft programme currently under review does not seem to provide much of an improvement in this regards.***

***National measures and policies have perhaps been more attentive to the needs of the most vulnerable groups, e.g. KASTE programme. Better integration and assessment of the synergy between European and national resources and initiatives should be addressed during 2014-2020 period, as resources are increasingly scarce and needs become all the more pressing.***

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Children's rights and access to quality services are relatively well organised and catered for in Finland, with the main responsibility being embedded in the municipalities / local authorities. Due to the great number of municipalities and their varying size and resources, the national level legislation and standards are essential in determining the quality of services and equality of access to them. This naturally necessitates clear and effective coordination on the national level, which has been provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, as well as Ministry of Education.

The Finnish model has been based on universality of services. The means-tested, conditional models, where social investment is seen as the mode of operation, are at the moment not particularly easily adaptable to the Finnish context. The on-going policy debate and the economic and demographic pressures are however raising concerns over the future feasibility of maintaining the Finnish model in its traditional form.

It is clear that the extensive responsibility of local authorities makes it difficult to ensure an even quality of service standard across the country and in the current economic situation the local authorities are really struggling to provide children's services across the country. The need to ensure effective preventive measures and integrated services for children and families is perhaps the most pressing need and it is also an area where most attention has been paid to in recent years. This has been developed and promoted also through specific measures, programme and activities, funded through both national and European Funds. As is seen from the analysis above, the European Funds have been under-used in this area, largely due to the fact that the national strategy drafted for 2007-2013 did not explicitly address families and children as potential end beneficiaries.

### **The areas that need most urgent help in the Finnish context involve**

- 1) Ensuring that the threat of inter-generational poverty and social exclusion is addressed and the threat of parents' unemployment, poverty and social exclusion is tackled. This puts particular focus on social services, primary education and quality of family services.
- 2) Ensuring that children's voice in their own matters is heard. The service system is based on the voice and empowerment of adults and in many cases parents' voice is ensured at the expense of the child.

Another issue involves the use of evidence-based evaluations in policy-making. Social impact assessments could be more comprehensively implemented in Finland. Effects on legislation and policy on children have increasingly been raised as one part of these assessments by social inclusion and children's rights and well-being experts.

The integrated approach to services is clearly an area of priority. This is the area which still requires most attention in policy terms, also in terms of using European funding to promote goals of relevance for children and families.

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