

*Country*  
**FACT SHEET**  
**2020\***



# FINLAND

**Contributor:** Central Union for Child Welfare

\* The information provided in the country fact sheets reflects the situation by end of August 2020.

**first years**  
*first priority*

**A FAIR START  
FOR *every* CHILD  
IN EUROPE**

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

*Finland has made adequate efforts over the past year to deliver on early childhood development policies and to support families with young children.* ●●●●\*

*Finland has a national law or act guaranteeing access to basic ECD services in Education, Health, Nutrition, and/or Social and Child Protection for all children under six.* YES

In the past few years, Finnish families and young children have experienced increased inequalities, especially in terms of access to basic social security and equal opportunities of all children, including children in vulnerable situations and the youngest children. Regional disparities and the inadequate availability of services accelerate inequalities. In general, there is a lack of coordination of child policies at the national level and a lack of coordination of services for young children and families at the local level. A comprehensive national child rights strategy is urgently needed as a framework for consistent national child and family policies and for harmonising other national policies that are related to protecting children's rights. The preparatory work on the child strategy that has already started is very welcome.

As of 2020 a new action plan, Non-violent Childhoods, for the prevention of violence against children, contains 93 measures for preventing violence against children up to the age of 17, will be implemented in Finland for the period 2020-2025<sup>1</sup>.

## IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE DURING THE FIRST WAVE

According to a study conducted by CUCW's "Kaikille eväät elämään" project in April and May 2020, the COVID-19 crisis made the existing disparities among families even more visible: the crisis hit hardest those who were already in the most vulnerable situations. As many as 55,000 families have experienced financial hardship because of the crisis and they have been more prone to use pay-day loans and other high risk measures to cover their expenses. Besides this, the study highlights how harmful the disruption of everyday structures such as schools or early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been for children with special needs.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the Federation of Mother and Child homes and shelters has conducted another study about the consequences of the pandemic on families' mental and physical health. The study revealed a rise in stress, quarrels, and domestic abuse and violence.<sup>3</sup>

To mitigate the side effects of the restrictive measures adopted to tackle the pandemic, the Finnish government has introduced a wide-ranging package of measures, worth approximately €320 million, that aims at promoting the wellbeing of children and young people<sup>4</sup>. Additional funding has been ensured for:

- early childhood education (€14M) and comprehensive education (€70M) in order to meet the increased need for support among children;
- municipalities to improve their social services and mental health care for children, young people and families (€112,3M);
- training and services for unemployed young people (€60M).

\* This country sheet is based on a contribution from national coordinators, including the ratings - between ○○○○ (worst) and ●●●● (best)

1 <https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/-/new-action-plan-provides-means-to-prevent-violence-against-children>

2 <https://www.lskl.fi/julkaisut/paikoiltaan-siirretty-arki-selvitys/>

3 <https://ensijaturvakotienliitto.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Ensi-ja-turvakotien-liiton-lapsiperheiden-koronakyselyn-raportti-19.5.2020.pdf?x88089>

4 [https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/10616/hallitus-paatti-vuoden-2020-neljannestalisatalousarvioesityksesta?languageId=en\\_US](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/10616/hallitus-paatti-vuoden-2020-neljannestalisatalousarvioesityksesta?languageId=en_US)

However, it is anticipated that the COVID-19 crisis may cause pressure for budget cuts and possibly decrease the government's willingness or ability to carry on with all proposals as planned.

## EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The 2020 Country Report published in the framework of the European Semester highlights that in Finland participation in early childhood education and care remains low compared to other EU countries, especially for children aged between four and the starting age of compulsory education (87.8%, compared to the EU average of 95.4% in 2017), with large regional disparities.

Education funding is expected to increase over the coming years, progressively offsetting significant budget cuts in 2016-2019. Between 2016 and 2019, the government reduced spending in early childhood education and care by around €155 million. According to the General Government Fiscal Plan 2020-2023, the total annual expenditure on education will be increased to about €518 million by 2023, with additional spending totalling €455 million. The 2020 budget predicts a 6% increase in expenditure (11% more in general education including early childhood education and care).

Another figure that needs to be explored is fertility rates, which have dropped dramatically in the last ten years, with the country now ranking among the lowest in the EU. The causes of this sudden drop are unclear, but the following possibilities could be considered as reasons: i) difficulty in reconciling work and family life; ii) concerns about the future; iii) the postponement of having children; iv) increased childlessness; and v) policy measures that discourage people from having children, such as the non-indexation of the universal child allowance or limitations to the universal right to child-care, which have been eased since 2020.

The 2020 Country Specific Recommendations for Finland mainly focus on tackling the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and facilitating economic recovery and do not tackle ECD. The only reference to vulnerable groups concerns the digital divide they are experiencing. Ensuring that disadvantaged learners have access to quality education will be key addressing this. In general, the EU suggests that in the medium term, it will be important for Finland to reform the social benefits system to boost employment and to prepare the country's welfare system for the future.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct child impact assessments on each decision concerning children.
- Sustain social security aimed at children and families.
- Increase subsidies for local government to prevent them from having to cut from services for children, young people, and families.
- Ensure that Finnish Roma children other children in vulnerable situation attend early childhood education and care.
- Strengthen and develop support in ECEC to reduce and prevent learning differences arising from children's socio-economic background, migrant background or gender. In addition, strengthen the coordination of services for small children so that all the children and families get the help they need.



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## The partnership

- **Eurochild** is a network of almost 200 member organisations from 35 European countries working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. Eurochild influences policies to build internal capacities and facilitates mutual learning and exchange practice and research.
- **International Step by Step Association (ISSA)** is an early childhood regional network founded in 1999, which through its programs and services connects the early childhood practice, research, and policy to improve the quality of early childhood systems in Europe and Central Asia. More than 90 ISSA members from 43 countries implement programs and cooperate to ensure quality and equitable early childhood services for young children, especially the most vulnerable.
- **European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)** is Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. A member-led organization made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups, EPHA works to improve health, strengthen the voice of public health and combat health inequalities across Europe.
- **Roma Education Fund (REF)** was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and the ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. To achieve this goal, the organization supports policies and programs which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

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**National Coordinators:** Pomoc Deci (Serbia), Plataforma de Infancia (Spain), Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso (Portugal), Central Union for Child Welfare (Finland), Family, Child, Youth Association (Hungary), Child Rights Alliance (Ireland), Trust for Social Achievement (Bulgaria), Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development (Romania), Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance (France).