

Response by Finland

Pursuant to the Government Programme, the Government of Finland has initiated a Key Project on children and families with the aim of making services even more child- and family friendly, preventive and effective. The best interest of the child and support to parenthood are priorities of the service system. The project covers for instance the furthering of child effect evaluations, as well as further development of budgeting carried out from a population-based approach. The key project is considered significant for the rights of the child because of its broad scope.

Education

According to the Constitution of Finland, no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the grounds of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or any other reason that concerns his or her self. Finland has also committed to international agreements, programmes and declarations which require provision of education to guarantee learning for children and young people at a common school for all.

According to Section 29 in the Basic Education Act of 1998, a pupil participating in education shall be entitled to a safe learning environment. The education provider shall draw up a plan, in connection with curriculum design, for safeguarding pupils against violence, bullying and harassment, execute the plan and supervise adherence to it and its implementation.

The National Board of Education approved the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education on the 22nd December 2014. The basic values, according to the National Core Curriculum, are, among other things, that basic education is based on the perception that childhood has an absolute value, that each child is unique and precious just the way he/she is, that each child has the right to grow to his/her full potential as a human being and a member of society. Each child has the right to good education and success in the school work. It is also stated that the starting point for provision of education, guidance and support is attendance to a good and safe school day.

The new Government Programme was launched in May 2015. The Programme contains various approaches to promote children's interests. For example, in the section for health and well-being, it is stated that schools and early childhood education will be developed in support of children's wellbeing. Furthermore, access to art and culture will be facilitated so that children and young people would become more active in this field.

The legislation on pupil associations and pupil welfare was amended in 2013. The work on peace in schools was encouraged and the wellbeing and the participation of pupils in decision-making were increased with these changes. All schools and educational institutions have to have a pupil/student association that has to be heard before decisions are made affecting the pupils/students.

The Finnish basic education system has been based on the philosophy of inclusion for a long time. Basic education is the same for all. There is no streaming, but children are supported individually so that they can successfully complete their basic education. Amendments to the National Core Curricula for pre-primary and basic education (2010) include a new systematic way of organising support. The focus is on earliest possible support in order to prevent the emergence and growth of problems. Support for growth, learning and school attendance is organised in three categories:

- o general support,
- o intensified support and
- o special support.

The University of Turku, with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, started developing an the programme KiVa Koulu in 2006 against bullying in comprehensive schools. It is a successful, evidence-based programme to prevent bullying and to tackle cases of bullying effectively. The programme has been implemented in some other countries too. <http://www.kivaprogram.net/>

The government has targeted grants for the education providers to use for measures to promote educational equality in their areas. The aim is to lower gender differences significantly in competencies and education, to lessen the effect of the socio-economic background on participation in education, and to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups in education.

Child And Youth Policy Programme 2012-2015

It is important to ensure an adequate cross-sectoral coordination in order to improve children's and young people's living conditions and the promotion of active citizenship. The Youth Policy Development Programme is prepared in Finland according to the Youth Act (72/2006) under which the Government shall adopt a youth policy development programme every four years. The aim is to step up cross-sectoral youth policy action and improve young people's growth and living conditions. The programme is prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture in collaboration with other ministries. The latest "Development Programme for Child and Youth Policy" covers the years 2012–2015.

http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Nuoriso/nuorisopolitiikka/Kehittxmisohjelma_2012-2015/?lang=en

The United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/RES/50/81) called for as early as in 1995 the preparation of multi-sectoral national action programs. This requirement has been repeated in numerous UN resolutions and the documents of the Council of Europe. The Finnish Development Programme, mentioned above, contributes also to these requirements and to the Resolution of the Council of Europe on a European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015 (2014/C 183/02).

Ombudsman for Children

The following duties of the Ombudsman for Children are defined by law:

- Monitor the welfare of children and youth and the implementation of their rights;
- Influence decision-makers from the viewpoint of children;
- Maintain contacts with children and youth and convey information received from them to decision-makers;
- Convey information concerning children to professionals working with children, decision makers and the public;
- Develop cooperation between actors concerned with child policy;
- Promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Ombudsman for Children reports annually to the government on the welfare of children and youth and the implementation of their rights. The annual report covers the activities of the Ombudsman, the implementation of children's rights, the development of child welfare and shortcomings in legislation.

In carrying out lobbying work, the Ombudsman assesses pending government projects from the perspective of the UN Convention. An important task performed by the Ombudsman is to convey the opinions of young people to decision-makers. These are recorded using surveys and reports and by personal meetings with children and youth.

The Ombudsman for Children acts with the assistance of the Child Advisory Board, which was established by the government.

The tasks of the Advisory Board include:

1. To make proposals and issue statements in the situation of children and the promotion of children's rights
2. Promoting cooperation between different national and international actors on matters concerning the situation of children and children's rights
3. Following up and assessing national and international developments in matters concerning children
4. Acting to strengthen the position of children in society and exerting an influence to develop positive attitudes to children and promoting the availability of information on the situation of children and their rights
5. Dealing with other matters within its sphere of work which are raised by the Ombudsman for Children.

The Advisory Board is composed of representatives of various administrative sectors, the regional and local levels, non-governmental organizations and other bodies. The Ombudsman for Children is the chairperson of the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board meets four times a year. It is briefed by specialists from different fields, arranges conferences, issues statements and position papers, disseminates information on children's issues and cooperates with many bodies and actors.

The Advisory Board is divided into two parts: the working group on child information and the child protection division both involve specialists from different fields in development activities.