

2024

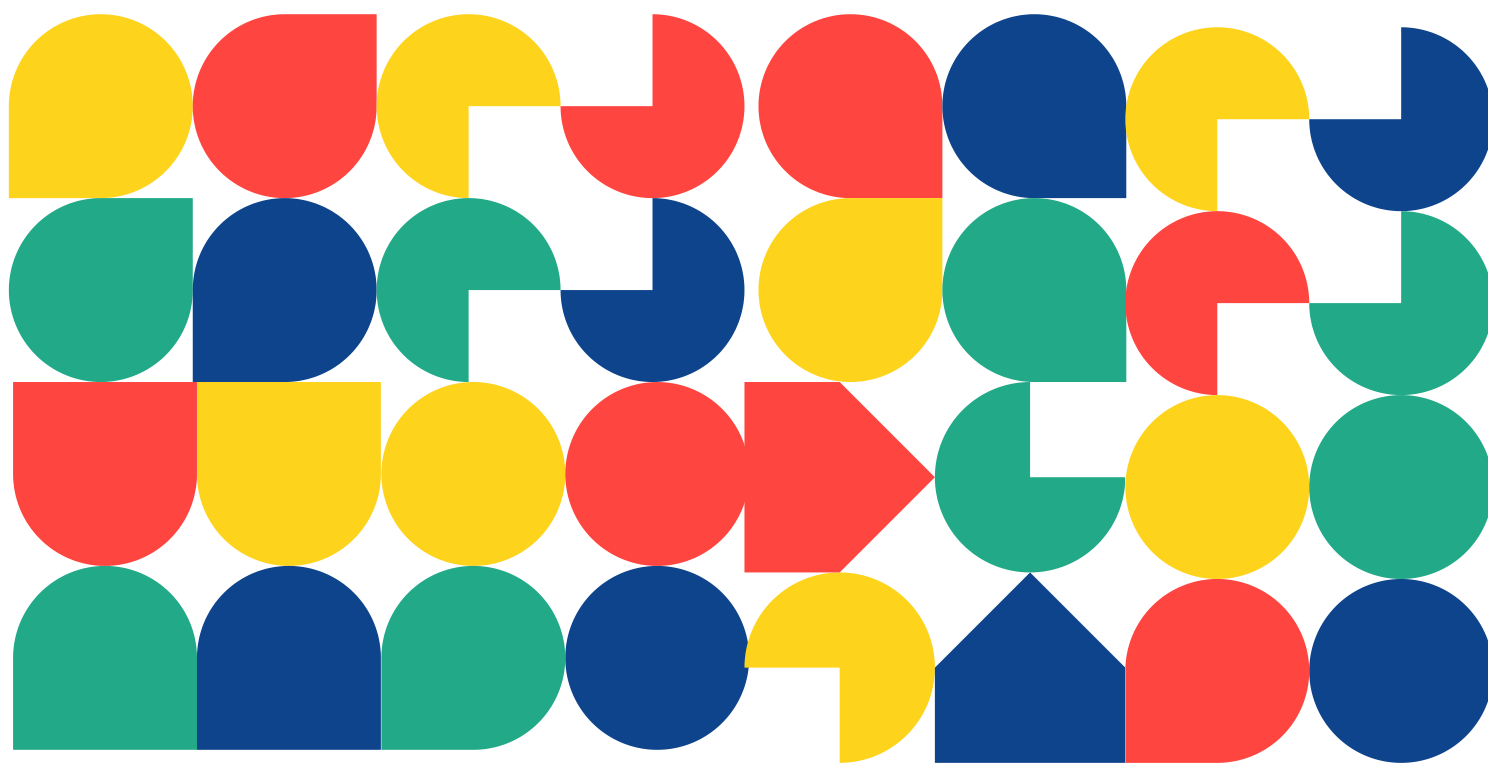


Child Guarantee analysis

FINLAND

Support to children with disabilities within the National Action Plan for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee

Country Fact Sheets



Date of publication

National Action Plan (2022) [EN](#)

Biennial report (2024) [FI](#) / [EN](#)

Overall Opinion

Finland demonstrates a strong commitment to upholding the rights and well-being of children. As part of its National Strategy for Children ('Child Strategy'), Finland has introduced national child-oriented budgeting since 2023 – following a successful pilot in 2022 – and child impact assessments supported with guidance and training to ensure the effective evaluations by officials. Strengthening these two key elements of child-oriented policies is central to its National Action Plan (NAP) implementing the EU Child Guarantee, which is coordinated, monitored and funded through the Child Strategy. During the 2019–2023 term, extensive reforms were piloted in early childhood education, healthcare and social welfare. These measures enhanced the identification of special support needs, supported families caring for children with long-term illnesses or disabilities and ensured that early childhood support was tailored to each child's needs. Despite the significant initiatives under the 'Child Strategy', the NAP does not establish concrete targets or deadlines and only briefly addresses children with disabilities. Additionally, it fails to provide detailed data on children in need.



Key data and figures

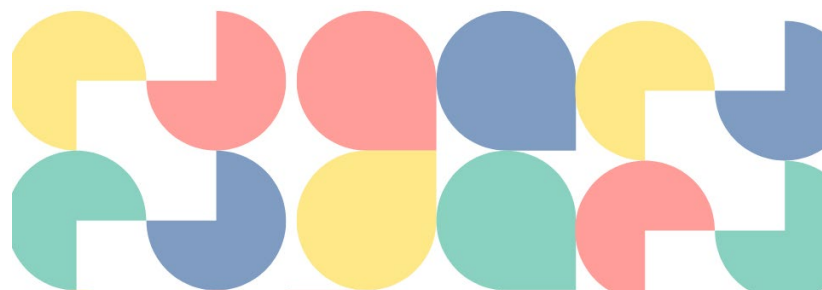
While the National Action Plan identifies children and young people with disabilities and mental health issues as “children in need,” it lacks specific data and information on these groups. The Biennial report highlights these gaps, notably on children’s wellbeing and especially of vulnerable groups. Efforts are underway to establish a permanent structure to coordinate data production and develop a comprehensive repository, ensuring continuity, access to regional data and addressing data gaps.

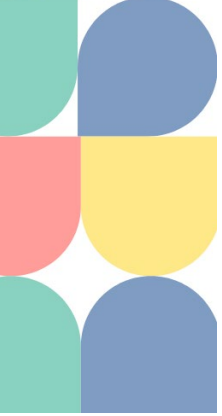
Key challenges

- **Discrimination** faced by children due to ethnicity, skin colour, religion, language, disability, illness, gender or sexual orientation.
- **Shortcomings in the coordination of services for disabled children** and their families are a major hindrance for supporting the children’s development.
- **Mental health issues** are a significant public health issue. Mental health services are not currently realised to the same level as other social and healthcare services.
- **High level of stress and turnover among the personnel** of many social welfare and healthcare services.

National legal framework

- **National Child Strategy:** The NAP is implemented as part of the National Child Strategy and its [implementation plan](#), both published in 2021. The strategy envisions a child- and family-friendly Finland that respects children’s rights, aligning with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For the period 2022-2023, the Child Strategy received a total funding of €6 million, this includes financing measures under the NAP for the Child Guarantee.
- **National Action Plan on the UNCRPD:** At the time of the publication of the NAP and its Biennial report, Finland was running its second Action Plan on the UNCRPD (2020-2023). Since then, the third UNCRPD Action Plan was published in December 2024, covering the period 2024-2027.



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- **Child Welfare Act reform:** The reform is still ongoing; it is planned to be submitted to the Parliament in the autumn of 2025. Pilots for hearing children and young people have been carried out. Among others, it aims to improve the status of children placed in substitute care.
 - **New Act on Disability Services and Assistance reform:** Effective since January 1, 2025, it emphasises inclusion, equality and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities, along with tailored services to support their needs and independent living. New features include specific support for inclusion and supported decision-making, while existing services are extended to additional groups. Most services remain free of charge.

Key targets and objectives

No specific targets nor objectives have been established toward children with disabilities, children with mental health issues or children living in institutional settings. Nevertheless, relevant indicators have been set up:

- The number of children with intellectual disabilities living in facilities.
- The National Action Plan on the UNCRC and its indicators relevant to the Child Guarantee.
- National data about the welfare of children and young people with disabilities.

Key measures

Child-oriented budgeting

- **National child-oriented budgeting:** In 2022, Finland piloted its first-ever national child-oriented budgeting¹. Before that, a few municipalities had been developing child-oriented budgeting. A standardised version was subsequently introduced. For 2023 and 2024, the Ministry of Finance prepared a child budget as part of the general budget process.

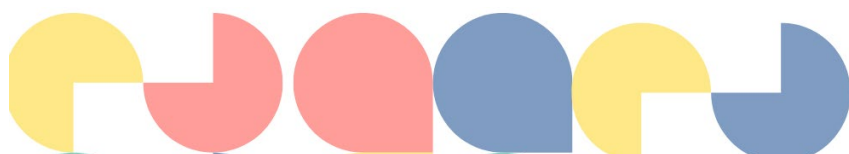
¹ Child budgeting is a method of allocating public funds that prioritises the needs and rights of children. It ensures that budgets are analysed and adjusted to support policies and services that benefit children's development and well-being, promoting transparency and accountability in financial planning. In Finland, this pilot was managed under the National Child Strategy and the Finnish Committee for UNICEF has provided coordination resources.

ECEC and Education

- **The reform of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)** entered into force in August 2022. It aims to ensure equality for all children by specifying levels and forms of support through a three-tiered model: general, intensified and special support. The need for support is individually assessed. Changes include new working methods, guaranteeing children the right to necessary support and mandating a personal plan for every child.
- **Improving support through family benefits** for learning and attendance for early childhood education and schooling.
- **Improving the quality and accessibility of programmes** for general upper secondary education.

Healthcare

- **Extensive reform of healthcare, social welfare and rescue services:** Child health clinic services are statutory, free healthcare for children under school age and their families. These services include monitoring growth and development, promoting health, safety and well-being, supporting parenting and fostering a safe environment. They also involve early identification of special support needs, assisting families, providing informal care to children with long-term illnesses or disabilities and referring them to further treatment if needed.
- **Structural reform of health and social services (Sote reform):** The implementation of the reform is underway and will run until 2027. Responsibilities for health, social and rescue services will be transferred from municipalities to larger organisers (welfare counties and the city of Helsinki). One of the goals is to guarantee the equal access to health and social services and to reduce inequalities in health and well-being.
- **Early screening:** Extensive, statutory health examinations are conducted when a child is 18 months and 4 years old, involving multidisciplinary cooperation between child health clinics and ECEC. During these examinations, ECEC staff assess the child's wellbeing in care, sharing the information with the health clinic. If a child's development, learning or well-being requires special attention, further collaboration with experts at the clinic takes place. Support for children and families initiated at the child health clinic continues in school healthcare in cooperation with student welfare professionals.

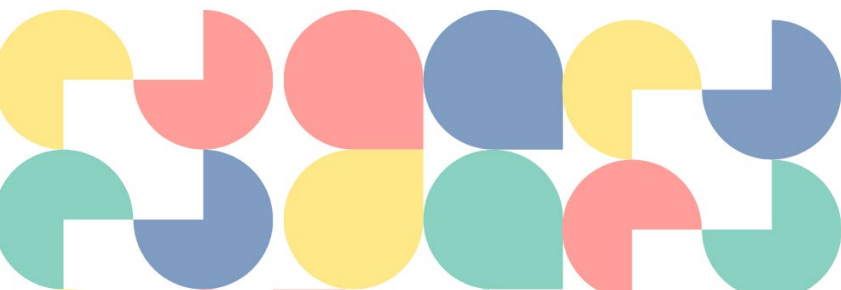


- **Reform of child and family services:** This was done as part of the Future Social and Health Centre Programme (2019-2023). It focuses on developing family centres, early support for children, young people and families, low-threshold mental health and substance abuse services for youth and promoting a multidisciplinary approach to child welfare. It aims to provide early support, strengthen well-being, prevent inequality and ensure the high quality, timeliness and accessibility of health and social services.
- **National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020-2030:** Published in 2020, it includes a focus area on the mental health of children and young people.

Data collection

- **Identification of the situation of disadvantaged or at risk of social exclusion children/young people:** A cross-governmental research project was carried out; new indicators were developed based on new data collection. A framework for structure compilation indicators on different aspects of well-being was developed. All indicators were compiled in the same roadmap, classified by well-being domains. It provides an overview of the coverage, amount and average and different sources of data on children.
- **Report on abuse in foster care:** Preparation of an up-to-date report on abuse occurring in foster care.
- **Improve the effectiveness of mental health work:** Through surveying development needs for children and young people and supporting good practices and competence. These include the planning of an indicator system for the wellbeing services counties to enable the monitoring of children's and young people's mental health services as a whole with harmonised indicators.

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