



Finland

Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children

A Study of National Policies

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The First Semester Report 1) describes and analyses the extent and nature of child poverty and wellbeing in Finland; 2) describes and assesses the overall framework for coordinating and developing policies, and identifies and assesses the main policies in place to both prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion and to promote the wellbeing of children in Finland; and 3) describes and assesses arrangements in Finland for monitoring the implementation and impact of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion amongst children and to promote the wellbeing of children.

Summary

Poverty in families with children is less common in Finland than in many OECD countries. According to various studies and statistics, children at risk of poverty are most often members of single-parent families and families with several children. The occurrence of child poverty is especially connected to the labour market status of single mothers, many of whom have part-time or low-paying jobs. The current childcare system does not fit the needs of single mothers well. Thus, one of most important questions to be addressed by Finnish family policy is: How can we solve the problem of reconciling the work and family lives of single mothers and families with several children? Our welfare system prevents children from falling into extreme poverty. Public programmes and activities aimed at alleviating and preventing poverty among families with children are quite extensive; multiple daycare systems, municipal healthcare programmes and financial support systems are the backbone of the wellbeing of families with children in Finland. Despite this, the welfare system is not perfect. Several weaknesses can be found which seem to cause problems particularly for single-parent families and families with several children. Increasing income transfers is not the only way to solve problems of poverty and social exclusion. It should be noted that Finnish municipalities have lately been under severe financial pressures, which have in turn affected the quality of public services such as daycare and healthcare. The official monitoring and evaluation of matters concerning child poverty is mainly conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The evaluation is based on data, statistics and information provided principally by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) and Statistics Finland. The official system is complemented by private evaluation and research companies, as well as universities.

1. Nature and Trends of Child Poverty and Wellbeing in Finland

The wellbeing of children and their families is often a central issue in contemporary political and policy debate in Finland. Family policy in Nordic countries has historically focused on children's wellbeing, female labour force participation and gender equality. All countries emphasise the recognition and integration of gender equality in family roles and responsibilities as a general goal in their family support schemes.

One of the main family policy categories in Nordic countries concerns children's rights. It is very often pointed out that the reason for low child poverty rates in the Nordic countries is based on the existing family policy system and patterns of female labour force participation. The multifaceted family policy system helps families to reconcile family life and employment. The situation of children in Finland appears to be comparatively bright from an international perspective. Poverty in families with children is less common in Finland than in many OECD countries. For instance, from a long-term perspective, the level of poverty of Finnish children has fallen from the level of liberal countries to almost nothing. As the income transfer system has developed, the poverty risks for single-parent and two-parent families have

settled at a low level, although the poverty rate among single parents – as explained later in further detail – is clearly higher than the poverty rate among two-parent families.

There are three main factors behind the low child poverty rates in Finland. First, *low child poverty is connected to the early redistributive system*. Services and general income redistribution measures take place at fairly early stages of the redistributive process. Universal child allowances and earnings-related unemployment and parental benefits guarantee a fairly high standard of living, even in situations where the parents' participation in paid work is not possible. Secondly, *all citizens have the basic right to a wide range of services*. Healthcare and daycare services are publicly provided and user fees are relatively low. Thirdly, *the universalistic nature of Finnish social legislation leads to the creation of policies that integrate and include the entire population, rather than target resources towards a particular problem group*. For example, single parents have the same rights and responsibilities as other family types.¹ Despite these favourable factors, it cannot be said that child poverty has totally disappeared from Finnish society.

1.1 The Problem of Single Parenthood and Families with Several Children

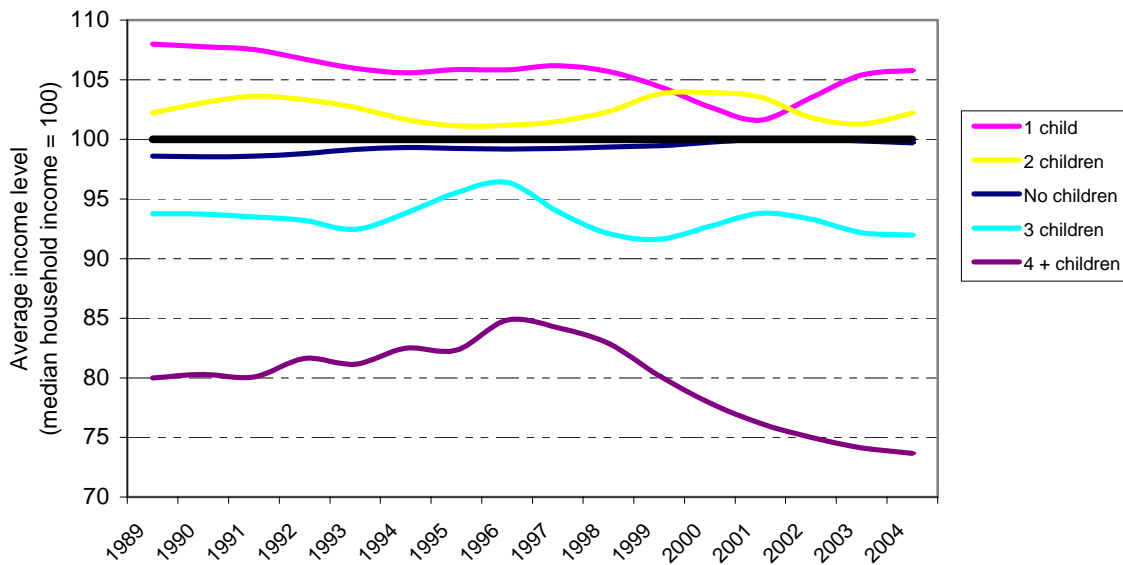
An important theme – directly connected to child poverty in Finland – visible in both the literature and the media is the growth of income inequalities and lack of welfare. In 2006, STAKES published a report on the welfare of Finnish citizens², which found that most Finns have good means of subsistence and live healthily without deficits of welfare. Despite this, the growth of income inequality in recent years is an evident problem. The most important factors behind this negative development are a person's age, their family situation and employment situation. The unemployed have not benefited from the recent tax reduction policy or the growing income level. As a consequence, poverty has increased and the central feature with respect to a lack of welfare can be associated with economic exclusion. Furthermore, the standard of living has increased in families where both parents are working. The risk of poverty is greatest for single-parent families and families with several children. According to popular opinion, the chance of making a decent living now is better than before, yet over 500 000 Finns are living under the EU poverty line. As this STAKES report states, *'the main reasons causing risks of child poverty in Finland concern single-parent families and families with several children. The child poverty of Finland is thus directly related to the structures and financial situations of families.'*

Approximately 2.3 million Finns belong to households with children. It seems that the number of children within a household directly affects its standard of living. During the past fifteen years, income levels of households with 1–2 children have been higher than the median income of all households. However, in households with three or more children, income levels have been remarkably lower than the median income. The situation is worst for families of four or more children (see figure 1).

¹ See for example Forssen, K. (2000) Child Poverty in the Nordic Countries. Department of social policy series B:22/2000. University of Turku.

² Kautto M. (eds.) (2006) Suomalaisten hyvinvointi 2006 (The Welfare of Finnish Citizens in 2006, published only in Finnish). STAKES. Jyväskylä: Gummerus.

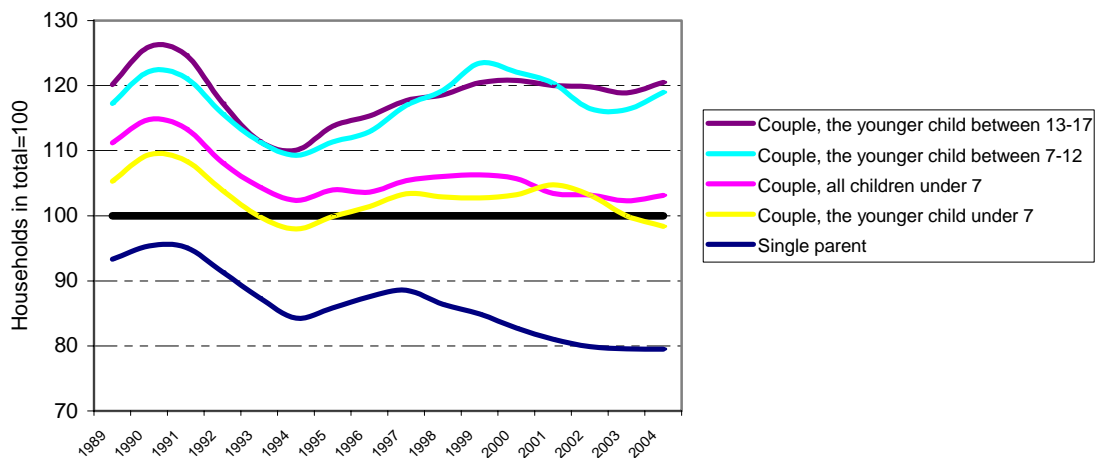
Figure 1. Average income level according to number of children, 1989–2004



Source: Statistics Finland, Income Distribution Statistics

In two-parent households with children aged between 13–17 years, the income level is higher than the median and for couples with children aged less than seven years, the income level follows the median. This can be explained by the fact that parents of older children have typically been working longer and so have higher annual incomes than parents with younger children. Quite often the parents (or at least one of them) of young children are students and thus do not have income, apart from study grants or maternity allowances. However, comparing all households with children, the financial situation of single-parent households is evidently the worst (see figure 2).

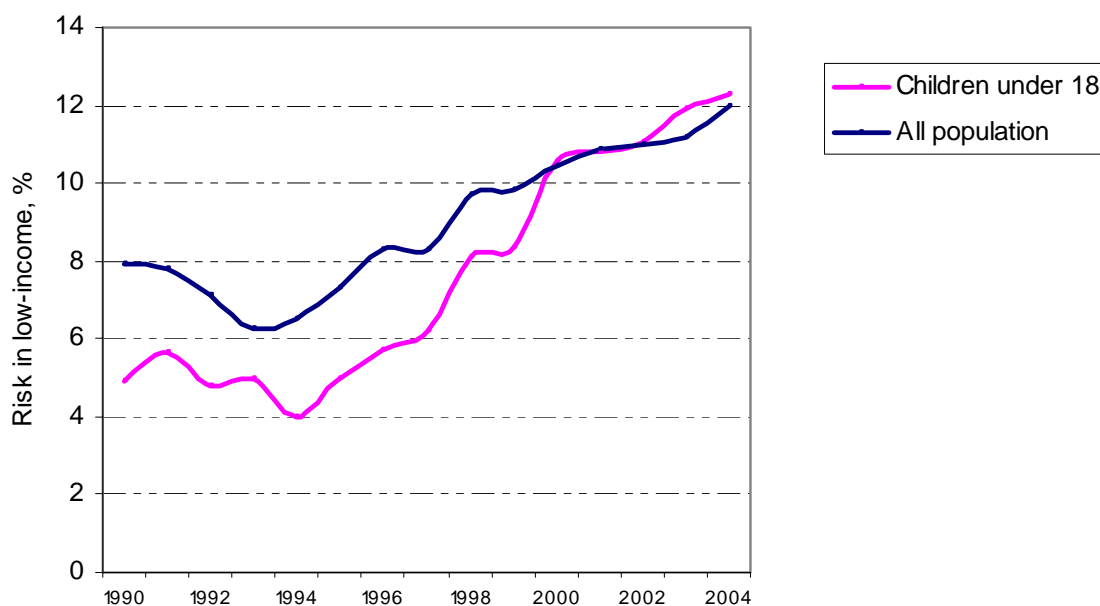
Figure 2. Average income level in selected households with children, 1989–2004



Source: Statistics Finland, Income Distribution Statistics

The data show that the risk of income poverty of families with young children has increased in Finland in recent years. Most notably, the risk of income poverty has increased within the population aged under 18 (see figure 3). This type of negative development can be explained by the fact that the majority of families with children has not significantly benefited from the growing income level. This does not mean that economic difficulties would affect all families with children, but single-parent families and families with several children seem to be most susceptible. However, it should be mentioned that the presence of children does not explain the financial status of families with children in itself; financial status is also affected by the number of parents in the household and their employment situations.³

Figure 3. Risk of income poverty, 1990–2004



Source: Statistics Finland, Income Distribution Statistics

1.2 The Case of Single Mothers and the Tendency of 'New Familism'

According to some studies, child poverty is connected to women's – particularly single mothers' – labour market status. The labour supply of mothers is influenced by labour market conditions and women's preferences, as well as by the utility of family policy packages aimed at helping families to reconcile work and family life. Finnish single mothers face a higher risk of unemployment than mothers in two-parent families. The main question is how the changes in the Finnish family policy system have affected the economic and labour market status of single mothers during the last 15 years. Single mothers were more likely to be affected by changes in parental leave reforms than mothers with partners. Changes in the labour market have had an impact on the situation of mothers with small children. One group of mothers enjoys the full provision of leave, benefits and job security, but an increasing number of mothers have become dependent on only basic benefits. In this respect, inequality among mothers has

³ Ruotsalainen, P. (2006) Lapsiperheissä tulot riittävät tai sitten ei. Hyvinvointikatsaus (The Welfare review) 3/2006. Statistics Finland.

increased, and this has affected the poverty levels and wellbeing of children within families headed by single mothers.⁴

One of the main challenges concerning the employment chances of single mothers is connected to the disconnection between current labour market conditions and the childcare system, which do not 'meet' one another. Usually, single mothers work within the public sector or the patriarchal labour market, wherein working during weekends and evenings is more a rule than an exception. Moreover, many single mothers are forced to take part-time jobs with irregular work schedules. The biggest problem is therefore that the current childcare system cannot adequately compensate for the pressures that single mothers face when trying to access the labour market. If friends or relatives cannot take care of their children, mothers are often forced to leave their jobs.⁵ In addition, it should be remembered that the financial situation of working single mothers is not very good because they usually have low-paying jobs. It is obvious that the structure of the single mothers' labour market affects the poverty of their children.

The number of single mothers has increased since the 1970s. The main reasons behind this are the growing number of divorces and the fact that domestic partnerships have become more common. Sexual attitudes are also more liberal than in the past and women are no longer financially dependent on their husbands. Almost one-fifth of families with children (17 %) are headed by single-mothers. According to recent studies, the unemployment of single mothers affects the family environment, which may weaken the social development of their children. The poverty of children of unemployed or low-paid single mothers is connected to their consumption possibilities. In other words, children are relatively poor if they are unable to afford the same types of things as children of two-parent families.

There has also been a growing critical debate against Finnish family policy. In Finland, family policy is universal; there is no policy that specifically targets single-parent families. In order to strengthen the standards of living for single-parent families, there is a need to develop public transfers targeted only towards single parents. For example, a single-parent supplement could be added to current child benefits.⁶

The large number of single-mother families in Finland has been also noted by UNICEF. According to its latest report on child wellbeing in rich countries, some problems concerning young people's family and peer relationships can be found. At the statistical level, there is evidence to associate children's growing up in single-parent families with greater risks of detriment to their wellbeing – including a greater risk of dropping out of school, of leaving home early, of poorer health, of low skills, and of low pay.⁷ However, not all of these risks concern Finnish single-parent families: child poverty in Finnish single-parent families can be associated with low pay, but not necessarily with poor health or low skill levels.

According to some studies, in recent years the children's home care subsidy (which starts after parental leave benefits end and can be used until the child is three years old) has been used more than before. The increased use of this subsidy is widely considered to be the result of the deterioration of women's labour market status. In other words, use of the children's home care subsidy has been seen as an alternative to part-time work and unemployment. However, this is not the whole truth. Recent studies

⁴ Forssen, K., Haataja, A. & Hakovirta, M. (2005) Policy changes, employment and single parenthood in Finland. Yearbook of Population Research in Finland XLI. The Population Research Institute. Helsinki.

⁵ Hakovirta, M. (2006) Yksinhuoltajaäitien työllisyys, toimeentulo ja työmarkkinavalinnat. Helsinki: Väestöliitto.

⁶ Yksinhuoltajaäidit ahdingossa. Sosiaalivakuutus 1/2007, 25-26.

⁷ UNICEF Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries, Innocenti Report Card No. 7. Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

have found that the growing tendency to use the children's home care subsidy is connected to the idea of 'modern' or 'new familism'. The concept of new familism is based on the belief that children's home care should be subsidised by the state. Moreover, the studies show that mothers and fathers would like to spend more time with their children. Working days should be short enough so that parents are able to focus on raising their children.⁸ New familism does not fit well into the lives of single mothers because they do not have same opportunities as parents in two-earner families. In order to avoid poverty and prevent their children's poverty, single mothers must return to work as soon as possible after childbirth. To avoid poverty, single mothers are forced to work full-time.⁹ One of the most important questions within Finnish family policy is: How can we solve the problem of reconciling the work and family life of single mothers?

1.3 Living Conditions in Families with Children

One of the most important recent studies concerning child poverty in Finland is entitled 'Changing Forms of Living in Families with Children', published by Statistics Finland. This report derives most of its data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), which is based on a survey of living conditions of EU citizens. The study is based on somewhat old data, but many of the results are nonetheless relevant to understanding today's child poverty situation in Finland.

At the end of the 1990s the number of low income earners with children increased from around 4 % to 9 % and among the whole population from around 6 % to 11 %. The growth in child poverty rates was due to the fact that new families with children moved below the poverty line. The average lengths of poverty spells remained more or less the same, so the growth of child poverty cannot be explained by poverty being prolonged in families with children. Family formation or family expansion has a clear connection to people's economic status: an addition to the family reduces the family's income development from one to one-and-a-half income deciles compared to couples in the same stage of life that do not have children. This effect appears to be the same for at least three years following the child's birth. Most of the worsening income distribution after childbirth is explained by the family's income having to be divided among more 'consumers' than before.¹⁰ Following the study, family policy, the household situation and the single-earner model all affect the living conditions of families with children and the state of child poverty in Finland.

In many welfare countries the birth rate is now below the population replacement rate. According to opinion polls, many parents would like to have more children than they actually do. The postponing of having the first child is explained by women's longer education periods, increased labour market participation and difficulties in combining work and family life. Women's socio-economic conditions before the birth of their first child were compared across 12 EU Member States. Clear differences could be seen between the countries. For example, the general idea of problems with reconciliation of work and family life is not true for Finland, but in family policy this reconciliation has worked quite well. The family policy practised by the countries has a major effect on the birth rate. Family policy legislation can influence children's wellbeing, but it also has a wider impact from the viewpoint of population policy and gender equality. Finland (as well as other countries) should place more emphasis on family policy because this would lend support to both families' wellbeing and to the growth of the birth rate. In

⁸ Jallinoja, R. (2006) Perheen vastaisku. Familistista käännettä jäljittämässä. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

⁹ Niemi, R. (2006) "Kuka pelkää kotiäitiä?". In T. Helne & M. Laatu (eds.) Vääryyskirja. Helsinki: Kela, 173-183.

¹⁰ Moisio, P. (2005) "Child poverty increased, the length of poverty spells remained unchanged". In H. Isoniemi and I. Penttilä (eds.) Changing forms of living conditions in families with children". Helsinki: Statistics Finland, 145-158.

particular, young adults should be publicly supported, so that they can ensure better living conditions for their children and thus prevent a lack of wellbeing and an increase of poverty for their children.¹¹

Housing conditions among families with babies were studied by considering four dimensions: the autonomy of housing, the quality of the dwelling and living environment, the financial situation and the relative burdensomeness of housing costs, and the need for social support. The housing conditions of families with babies were first assessed when the baby was born and again five years on from birth. Compared with some other European countries, Finns live in fairly overcrowded dwellings. Overcrowded conditions are particularly felt by families with babies. The results show that the housing conditions of families with babies improved clearly over the period 1996-2001. Investment in housing was connected to young people's life stage: When a family is being formed and life becomes more stable, more will be demanded of housing as well. Easier acquisition of housing loans after several years of recession improved the housing conditions of many families with children. However, when examining all families with children in Finland, households of two children and two adults usually had the best living conditions in the period in question. In contrast, single parents did not improve their housing conditions, which remained unchanged from 1996-2001.¹²

The dual-earner model of Finland and Sweden exhibited both growing dissimilarities and increasing similarities, despite the different policies practised in the two countries when comparing development from 1987 to the present. During a deep economic recession in the early 1990s, the rate of employment fell and unemployment increased in both countries. Moreover, the proportion of dual-earner families and single supporters with earnings declined and the poverty rate increased. The position of single supporters weakened the most. Changes in the status of mothers in dual-carer families and single-supporter families have had more impact in Finland than in Sweden. Changes in the labour market concerned men too. This development also contributed to the deterioration of the dual-earner model in both countries. When examining only families with under school-aged children, earnings of Finnish and Swedish mothers formed an approximately equal share of the household's gross income in 2000. The trends are different, however. Finnish families with small children have moved towards the model of female homemaker, male earner – which means that the dual-earner model has weakened in these families. This may be due to child home care policy and the worsening employment situation. The situation of mothers with small children is better in Sweden: Swedish mothers work longer hours and contribute more to the family's income than Finnish mothers.¹³

The unemployment of parents is the most important factor behind child poverty in Finland. However, the majority of parents of families with small children are working, but often in part-time, low-paying jobs. The number of families with children living below the poverty line has increased consistently. This is a challenge which cannot yet be solved by Finnish family policy. Income differences between families have also increased, the public income transfers of families with children have been cut and their dependence on social security has increased.¹⁴ Single-mother families and families with children seem to live in the most difficult situations.

¹¹ Forssen, K. & Ritakallio, V-M (2005) "Reconciliation of work and family life easier in Nordic countries than elsewhere". *Ibid.*, 31–42.

¹² Penttilä, I. (2005) "Housing level of families with babies improved". *Ibid.*, 43–62.

¹³ Haataja, A. & Nyberg, A. (2005) "The model of male earner – female homemaker more in frequent in families with small children in Finland than in Sweden." *Ibid.*, 123–144.

¹⁴ Bardy, M.; Salmi, M. & Heino, T. (2001) Mikä lapsiamme uhkaa? Suuntaviivoja 2000-luvun lapsipoliittiseen keskusteluun. Stakes. Reports 263. Saarijärvi: Gummerus.

1.4 Adolescents' Own Opinions of Their Wellbeing

The results of the above study underpin other observations which conclude that child poverty is directly linked to single parenthood, families with several children and the unstable labour market for single mothers. However, these results do not tell us much about how children themselves experience poverty and view their wellbeing. The purpose of one interesting study, entitled 'Adolescents' Subjective Wellbeing in their Social Contexts'¹⁵ intended to garner more information about adolescent subjective wellbeing and related factors, and to understand more profoundly the familial contribution to adolescent wellbeing and quality of life.

The study sample included 245 adolescents from the 7th and 9th grades (12–17 years old) and 239 parents. The results showed that the majority of adolescents participating in the study were satisfied with their lives. Nevertheless, one in ten participants experienced no enjoyment of life. A lack of wellbeing was experienced more frequently by girls and 9th graders than by boys and 7th graders. Certain values, such as a strong sense of personal autonomy, equilibrium and particularly safe family relations were associated with adolescents' feelings of overall satisfaction, whereas a weak sense of equilibrium and poor family relations were connected to feeling a lack of wellbeing. Familial stability and mutuality perceived by teenagers were related significantly to life satisfaction, whereas disruption within the family perceived by adolescents was associated with feeling a lack of wellbeing.

The adolescents interviewed experienced both positive and negative elements as natural parts of their daily lives. They were particularly satisfied with the loving atmosphere, supportive familial involvement and open communication in the family. The sense of having a comfortable home, while still having the opportunity for external relations contributed to their satisfaction and enjoyment of life. Familial discord, conflict and parental divorce, illness or death of a family member and excessive dependency on family members contributed toward adolescents' worries and negative feelings within their families. Conflicts in the family stemmed from curfews, the use of money, poor school performance or breaking the rules at home.

The study generated new knowledge of the intense and complex relations between adolescent subjective wellbeing, values, school and family. The findings provide a basis for the assessment of adolescent subjective wellbeing, realised values, and for understanding the diversity of personal, familial and social factors contributing to feelings of wellbeing in adolescence. For the purposes of this report, it is important to note that the wellbeing of Finnish teenagers is concretely connected to their family relations and welfare. The use of money by teenagers could raise conflicts within families; these conflicts are quite often connected to the financial status of the family. Obviously, families below the poverty line cannot give as much money to teenagers as richer families, adding to the feelings of poverty experienced by teenagers in poor families. Moreover, parental divorces and thus single parenthood add to feeling a lack of wellbeing among adolescents.

¹⁵ Joronen, K. (2005) *Adolescents' Subjective Well-being in their Social Contexts*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

1.5 Some Future Challenges Concerning Children's Health and Participation in Different Activities

Finland has one of the world's lowest child mortality rates, but many widespread health problems still remain. The rates of psychosocial health problems, asthma, allergies and diabetes are all increasing. There is a definite risk of adverse changes in children's psychosocial wellbeing, as well as in the living conditions and the lifestyles that may affect their health and lead to their social exclusion in the future. Preventive healthcare for children should therefore be identified as a key priority for health policy development.¹⁶ Finland's internationally unique system of maternity and child health clinics and school healthcare services are under threat of deterioration and are in need of intensive development. To preserve the psychosocial wellbeing and health of children, it is necessary to set up programmes for the prevention of bullying at school. Greater efforts must be made to educate pregnant women about the adverse effects of alcohol, drugs and smoking during pregnancy and child-rearing. The development of a comprehensive treatment programme for children with learning and concentration difficulties is also needed.

One of the main objectives of Finland's EU Presidency in 2006 was the creation of an environment conducive to the development of children and young people. In addition to basic financial security, Finland wanted to ensure that all children and young people could enjoy good health and have equal opportunities to influence and participate in society. Specifically, Finland hoped to encourage a debate on the challenges facing the maternity and child welfare and school healthcare systems. This focus indicates that the school healthcare system is viewed as one of the main elements of children's social inclusion.

In addition, active participation in sporting and cultural activities is viewed as a key weapon in the fight against children's exclusion. Sports clubs are important agents in this regard: they can strengthen children's self-confidence and help children learn the basic rules of team play. Moreover, participation in sporting and other cultural hobbies is a way for children and their parents to spend quality time together.¹⁷ Children's social inclusion within the field of hobbies has been strengthened by different organisations, programmes and campaigns. The main objective of the 'Young Finland Association', for example, is to promote children's and young people's wellbeing and enjoyment through encouraging physical activity. 'Sports Adventure Around the Globe' was a three-week sports campaign aimed at school children aged 6-12 years. The aim of the campaign was to encourage schoolchildren to take more exercise. Drawing attention to children's inactivity is important, since only one-third of Finnish children exercise sufficiently. Alongside daily exercise routines, participants were guided in healthy eating and sleeping habits. All pupils worked together in a class to achieve a common goal, thus making each child's performance valuable in meeting the class objective and preventing comparisons between the children. A total of 181 000 schoolchildren (48 % of all schoolchildren aged 6-12 years) from 9 300 classes took part in the 2005 Sports Adventure.

¹⁶ Koskinen, S; Aromaa, A; Huttunen, J. & Teperi, J. (2006) Health in Finland. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

¹⁷ www.nuorisuomi.fi

2. The Policy Context of Child Poverty and Wellbeing in Finland

By connecting 'poverty risk' and 'purchasing power at the poverty threshold', Bea Cantillon has identified four clusters of countries within the EU.¹⁸ These are:

1. Countries with a below-average poverty risk, where the people at-risk of poverty enjoy above-average purchasing power (Central European and Nordic countries, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Belgium, France, Austria and Netherlands)
2. Countries with poor people, but where 'the poor' have below-average purchasing power (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia)
3. Countries with an above-average poverty risk and an above-average purchasing power (United Kingdom, Italy and Ireland)
4. Countries with a high proportion of poor people who have below-average purchasing power (Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Spain, Malta and Poland).

Upon studying the effects of the welfare state regime on poverty, it has been found that long-term poverty – in other words persistent poverty – is lower in Central European and Nordic countries, Finland among them. Countries with high social spending tend to reduce poverty more effectively than countries with a lower social expenditure ratio. The welfare effort is more closely correlated with the reduction of poverty rates than to reducing the level of poverty. However, there is a large variation in the relationship between input (social expenditure) and output (reduction of poverty rates), and hence, efficiency.¹⁹ Following the ideas outlined above, Finland belongs to the group of countries wherein persistent poverty is at a low level and people have above-average purchasing power. How, then, have the Finnish welfare efforts (political programmes, policy objectives and targets) been targeted to children's wellbeing and the reduction of poverty for families with children?

2.1 The Most Important Political Objectives and Targets for Preventing and Reducing Child Poverty in Finland

In order to secure the wellbeing of children, the programme of the present Government (2003-2007) is committed to ensuring the stability and predictability of family and child policy. The policy activity under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is outlined according to several integrated strategic approaches that are in line with the strategy of the Government:

- The promotion of health and working capacity;
- Increasing work attraction;
- The care and prevention of social exclusion;
- The provision of well-organised and efficient services and adequate income security; and
- The strengthening of gender equality and increasing the welfare of families with children.

¹⁸ Cantillon, B. (2005) Social Europe: Lessons from the Laeken Social Indicators. Paper for the ESPAnet Conference, Fribourg, Switzerland, 22-24 September.

¹⁹ Poverty Policies, Structures and Outcomes in the EU 25. Report for the Fifth European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion 16-17 October 2006, Tampere, Finland. Helsinki: STAKES.

According to the Government's strategy document, faith in the future on the part of families is improved by a long-term policy in which the wellbeing of children, young people and families with children is chosen as a clear social policy objective. The challenges include the ageing of the population, a falling birth rate, the high average age of first-time mothers and the tendency to postpone starting a family. Therefore, the impact goals for the wellbeing of families with children are:

- More equal division of costs due to children;
- Supporting parenthood and family cohesion;
- Providing safe environments for children to grow up and develop in; and
- Promoting reconciliation of work and family life.

These are central goals, because the number of families with children has been steadily declining. At the end of 2004, the number of families with children was 592 800, nearly 20 000 fewer than in 2000. At the same time, changes have taken place in family structures. As noted before, the number of cohabiting families is constantly rising and the number of single-parent families grew rapidly in the 1990s. There are two trends evident in family formation: the number of children in families with children is showing a slight upward trend, but at the same time, an increasing number of women remain childless.²⁰ Let us now summarise the targets and policy activities for the wellbeing of families with children, as well as analyse social expenditures in more detail.

1. *Evening out the costs due to children*

The starting premise of family policy has been to even out the costs to parents caused by children in order to prevent children from causing an undue consumption burden on families. The income transfers aimed at families with children are not index-linked; this has weakened the purchasing power of child allowance and child home care allowance benefits over time. The child allowance for the family's first child and the single-parent child allowance increment were both raised at the beginning of 2004. The increase raised the average child allowance per child by about €6 per month. Single-parent families benefited most from the increase. However, as noted earlier, these activities have not remarkably relieved the financial situation of single-parent families. At the beginning of 2005, the minimum level of parenthood allowance was raised from €11.45 to €15.20 per weekday, or by some €93 per month. The average parenthood allowance for mothers has increased by just 4.8 % since 2004. In 2004, 19.9 % of mothers received minimum parenthood allowance.

A positive employment trend and lighter taxation have improved the economic position of families with children. Income transfers to families with children have also increased. However, the official opinion of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health agrees with the studies overviewed in the first section of this report by noting that 'the development of the economy of families with children lags behind that of the rest of the population; and the economy of single parents in particular has improved more slowly after the recession compared to the rest of the population. The primary reason for this is higher unemployment among single parents... Unemployment is significantly more common among single mothers compared to other women with children in the same age group.'²¹ The Ministry has also acknowledged that poverty has increased, particularly among

²⁰ Trends in Social Protection in Finland 2005-2006. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Publications 2006:17. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

²¹ Ibid., 125.

families with several children, and that the majority of single parents living below the poverty line have young children.

2. *Supporting parenthood*

The aim of the development of the system of family leave has been to support families' possibilities for reconciling work and family life. Family leave is still prevalently used by women, though the proportion of fathers making use of family leave has increased steadily. When developing family leave legislation, the aim has been for both parents to have equal possibilities to take part in caring for their children. A more even distribution of family leave also calls for a change of attitudes and social values. Childcare has traditionally been seen as the responsibility of women. Additionally, social attitudes towards fathers' taking family leave have not always been without problems in the workplace.

There have been a number of negative aspects dealing with the services of municipalities which have affected children's wellbeing and raised new challenges for the public support of parenthood. The task of maternity and child health clinics is to promote the health and wellbeing of expectant mothers and families with children under school age. Because of cutting the resources of the clinics in the 1990s, in 2004, the home of one in three families with a newborn baby is not visited by a healthcare worker. The number of visits by healthcare workers has also decreased in the case of the school healthcare system. Moreover, the possibilities of families with children receiving municipal home care help have diminished considerably. At the same time, the number of clients at child guidance and family counselling clinics has increased. The number of staff at family counselling clinics has been increased in recent years, but these clinics are still too understaffed to meet clients' needs. In the last few years, the number of children receiving child protection services in community care has also increased and there are more and more long-term clients. All the above-mentioned factors affect the wellbeing of families with children and are indirectly related to the poverty of children. There is still a huge need for the development of a preventative model of child healthcare within the municipal sector.

3. *The environment in which children grow and develop*

Creating a safe environment for children to live, grow and develop in has been one of the objectives of Finnish family policy in recent years. From the point of view of the children, sufficient provisions for early childhood education and comprehensive education play a key role. The number of children in day care has decreased in recent years due to the falling birth rate and the pre-school reform. The number of children cared for with public child home care allowance has diminished slightly. The number of children cared for with private childcare allowance has remained fairly constant in recent years.

The committee charting the reform of the social and healthcare payment policy and payment system suggested that the definition of 'family' be altered so that actual family size is taken into account when determining user fees. Changing the definition would considerably lower the user fees of single parents who have more than one child. Two-parent families with several children would also benefit from the reform. Again, it can be said that political stakeholders have analysed the factors causing child poverty, but there is still a need for policy actions that will relieve the difficult situations of single parents and families with several children. There is a need for reorganisation in the structure of the care system for children. If the number of children in day

care has decreased, but some single-mothers are still forced to leave their jobs because of a lack of evening or weekend care, it would be useful to develop optional care systems for children.

4. *Reconciling work and family life*

According to the OECD report, attempts to help Finnish parents reconcile work and family have been in many respects successful. The 66 % employment rate of Finnish women clearly exceeds the corresponding OECD average of 55 %. The OECD paid particular attention to the fact that the majority of women work full time. However, in contrast to other countries, mothers of children under three years of age in Finland work less often. The OECD observed that fixed-term employment contracts are common among young women, which is why attention should be focused on reconciling career and motherhood, a task which many women may find difficult. If women stay outside the workforce for too long, their career opportunities are weakened. There are relatively fewer women in positions of leadership in Finland compared to Canada, for example.

The report points out that in view of the population trend in Finland, it would be extremely important to increase the supply of female labour in the near future. According to the OECD's assessment, this calls for a reform of childcare allowance. In addition, the provision of afternoon care for school children should be expanded and the economic incentives for parents with young children to participate in part-time work should be improved. In Finland, people tend only to work part-time when full-time work is not available, or while they are students. At present, partial child home care allowance is paid to parents with children under three years of age and parents whose children are in grades 1 and 2 in comprehensive schooling. The partial child home care allowance amounts to €70 per month. It is likely that part-time work would become more common among parents with children over three years of age if they were entitled to economic support during that time.²² Reconciling work and family life can thus be seen as a factor which could increase families' welfare and indirectly prevent child poverty.

2.2. Analysis of Finnish Family Policy

Income transfers and changes in taxation and social services are the pillars upon which the preventive approach aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion of children and especially families with children are based. Let us now analyse systematically Finnish family policies through which attempts have been made to secure adequate income and essential services for children and their families.²³

In Finland, municipalities are responsible for providing social and healthcare services. They may provide the services themselves or form joint municipal boards with one or more neighbouring municipalities to do so. The services are funded by taxes levied by the municipalities and by grants paid to them by the central Government. The Government contribution to municipal social welfare and healthcare is determined by the age structure of the population, mortality rate, population density, area and the financial situation of the municipality. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health directs and guides the development of social security and social healthcare services and operating policy. Together with the Government and Parliament, it sets national guidelines for social and healthcare policy and prepares legislation and major reforms of social and healthcare services.

²² Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life. OECD 2005.

²³ Finland's Family Policy. Brochures of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2006:12. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Family benefits cover some of the costs arising from childcare. In 2005, family benefits totalled some €5.2 billion, or about 3 % of GDP. As noted above, families with children mainly receive support in the form of child allowance and daycare services.

Overview of the direct financial support tools for families

- Maternity grant

Every expectant mother resident in Finland whose pregnancy has lasted for at least 154 days is entitled to a government maternity grant. An expectant mother can choose to receive the maternity grant either in the form of a sum of money or as a maternity pack containing clothing and other things needed for the care of a newborn child. In 2006, the maternity grant was €140.

- Child allowance

The child allowance is one of the main means of evening out the expenses of families with children and families without children. It is paid from Government funds for the support of every child resident under 17 of age. The amount of child allowance depends on the number of children in the family (1st child = €100.00/month, 2nd = €110.50, 3rd = €131.00, 4th = €151.50, 5th and each subsequent child = €172.00). Single parents also receive a supplement of €36.60 for each child.

- Maintenance allowance

Maintenance allowance is intended to safeguard the maintenance of a child in a situation where a child under the age of 18 cannot receive sufficient maintenance from both parents. In 2006, the full amount of maintenance allowance was EUR €118.15 per child per month.

- Housing support

Forms of housing support intended for families with children include the housing allowance, state-guaranteed housing loans and other interest-subsidy measures, and tax subsidies on housing loans. On the whole, a review of housing costs and incomes shows that the situation of people living in rented housing and of single-parent families has deteriorated, while the situation has somewhat improved for other households. This strengthens the view that people on small incomes, who are already disadvantaged, are lagging behind in general development, and that increased housing costs further weaken their situations.²⁴

- Social assistance

Social assistance is last-resort financial assistance under social welfare to ensure a family's income and independent coping. A municipality can pay social assistance in situations where a family has no income or where the income is insufficient to cover the essential expenses of everyday life.

²⁴ Kärkkäinen, R.; Reijo, M.; Tanner, K. & Tähtinen T. (2006) Changes in the housing of families with children 1995-2004. Reports of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2006:39. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The family leave system in Finland is quite far-ranging. The underlying premise of the family leave system is to give both parents equal opportunities to participate in caring for their children. On the basis of pregnancy, childbirth and childcare, the mother and father can take maternity leave, paternity leave or parental leave, receiving maternity allowance, paternity allowance or parental allowance, respectively. The maternity allowance and parental allowance are paid for a total of 263 working days. The father is further eligible for paternity allowance. The parental allowance period allows the family to choose whether the mother or the father shall stay at home to care for the child.

There are various care options available for families with children, among which they are free to choose. The active participation of women in the workforce has promoted the development of legislation on the care of small children and the job security of parents. After the parental leave period, families have three publicly subsidised options for providing childcare before schooling begins, usually at the age of seven: municipal daycare; private care using the private childcare allowance; or home care of the child using care leave and the child home care allowance. There are some 400 000 children under school age in Finland; about half use municipal daycare services. Of all children in daycare, 77 % are in full-day care. About 3.5 % of all children participating in daycare are in private daycare. Every child under school age has the right to municipal daycare once the parental allowance period of the mother or father ends, regardless of the income level of the parents or whether the parents are employed. In Finland, daycare combines care and education; this is not the case in many other European countries. Known as the 'educare' model, this approach always incorporates educational features into care and, correspondingly, elements of care in teaching. Most of the children in daycare are in full-day care, but part-time care is also provided. Municipal authorities also operate 24-hour care programmes for the children of parents who do shift work. Children in daycare are given adequate and healthy meals during the day. Municipalities charge a fee for daycare on a percentage basis, according to the size and income of the family. The maximum fees are €200 per month for the first child, €180 per month for the second child and €40 per month for each subsequent child. The lowest-income families are wholly exempt from these fees. Moreover, families are entitled to free pre-school education for one year before their children start regular schooling.

School meals were introduced in Finland over six decades ago. In comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools and vocational education institutions, pupils and students are given a meal every day free of charge. It is recommended that school meals complement the nutrition given at home and, as such, should provide one third of the child's daily nutritional requirements.

Child guidance and family counselling include expert assistance in child guidance and family matters and also social, psychological and medical examinations and treatment to promote the positive development of children. The aim of this service is to create a foundation for safe and secure conditions for children to grow up in and to contribute to the functional capacity and psychosocial wellbeing of families and individual family members. Providing child guidance and family counselling services is the responsibility of municipal authorities. Families seeking child guidance and family counselling services usually do so because their child is having problems. Other reasons include problems in family relationships, family conciliation and specific referrals for opinion. The services are provided to families free of charge.

The Government provides services and financial support for families to help them raise their children. Prenatal clinics, child health clinics, daycare, psychosocial pupil services in schools, school healthcare and youth programmes contribute to preventing the need for intervention by child welfare authorities. Most importantly, municipal health centres, whose function is to provide primary healthcare for the entire population, are also in charge of children's medical care. Children under the age of 18 are entitled to free appointments with health centre general practitioners. Hospital in patient care over seven days is also free for children under 18, although a fee is charged for the first seven days of care.

Children with disabilities and their families are entitled to the same services and benefits as all other children and families. They are further entitled to special services and support measures, the nature of which depends on the child's disability. Children with severe disabilities are entitled to medical rehabilitation arranged by the Social Insurance Institution. The families of disabled children have the same daycare options as any other family. In municipal daycare, children with disabilities are preferably placed in the same groups as other children. If necessary, daycare in a special group can also be arranged. Moreover, the parents of sick or disabled children are eligible for various financial benefits from the Social Insurance Institution.

If there are financial difficulties or housing problems, the municipality must provide the family with sufficient financial support and rectify any shortcomings in housing. The municipal social authorities provide non-residential support for families and for children and adolescents if it is apparent that their home environment is detrimental to their health and development or their behaviour seriously endangers or threatens to endanger their wellbeing. Moreover, a family can be provided with a support person or a support family if they so wish. A child can be placed in a foster family or an institution for a short period of time without being formally taken into care, if it is believed that a short-term separation can improve the situation. Taking children into institutional or foster care occurs only if the circumstances in the home or the child's own behaviour seriously endanger their health or development and if non-residential services are insufficient. It must also be established that taking the child into care is the solution in the best interests of the child.

Although it seems that Finnish childcare politics is mainstreamed and well-coordinated, it must be noted that a great number of municipalities have major financial problems which affect their abilities to deliver the legally specified public services for children and families with children. As a result, not all Finnish municipalities offer equal services for children. During the first half of 2005, the Ministry of the Interior set up a special committee which is expected to come up with solutions for improving service structures at regional and local levels. In practice, this will result in the amalgamation of municipalities so that in the near future the municipalities will be fewer in number and easier to manage. It is hoped that this type of development will strengthen the quality of public services targeted at preventing the social exclusion of children. Moreover, the larger municipalities will have more resources to develop their education systems. This type of a development could increase equality among children in all regions across Finland. There has been a growing discussion concerning the need for a family-centred system model, wherein all family services would be located 'under the same roof'. If cooperation between different services such as child protection services, family counselling, alcohol and drug therapy, etc. is strengthened and all services are available in the same place, problems relating to bureaucracy will be reduced and real help will be more accessible to citizens. This would also strengthen the social inclusion of children and their families, and, in the long run, decrease the incidence of child poverty.

2.3 National Programmes and Groups Promoting Children's Wellbeing

It can thus be said that the public activities aimed at alleviating and preventing problems of families with children are quite extensive. Multiple daycare, municipal healthcare and financial support systems are the backbone of the wellbeing of families with children in Finland, where the welfare system prevents children from falling into extreme poverty. However, the welfare system is not perfect; there are several weaknesses which cause problems for single-parent families and families with several children. Increasing income transfers is not always the only solution for the problems of poverty and social exclusion. The severe financial pressures faced by Finnish municipalities have contributed to the decline in the quality of public services such as daycare and healthcare. Because of these problems, the Finnish welfare system has been restructured and redistributed through different measures, projects and programmes. The central development programmes of recent years have been the National Project

to Secure the Future of Healthcare, known as the 'National Healthcare Project', the 'Development Project for Social Services', the 'Alcohol Programme', the 'Health for All 2015' public health programme, various exclusion and equality projects and the VETO work attraction programme.

The Development Project for Social Services is part of a comprehensive nationwide reform of social services. The project supports municipalities in reforming social services and seeks permanent forms of service organisation. It is comprised of four main projects and 23 sub-projects. Together the municipalities have over 400 regional projects linked to the programme.²⁵ One of the most important results of this project has been the launching of a development programme for child welfare. Expenses related to raising children are levelled out so that families with children are not forced into unequal financial positions in relation to one another or to those without children. Emphasis is placed on strengthening children's living and developmental environments and easing the reconciliation of work and family life.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has set up a coordination group to direct a study on changes in the income of families with children. The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health examined the development of the income of families with children under the supervision of the coordination group. Meanwhile, the Ministry of the Environment and Statistics Finland produced a report on changes in the housing situations of families with children. On the basis of these studies, the coordination group assesses the changes in the income of families with children and proposes measures to improve their income. The income development of families with children has on average been poorer than that of other households in the 1990s and in the early 2000s. The relative income development of families with children has become polarised. The development has been poorest in single-parent households, in families with children aged less than 3 years, and in families with several children. The problems include the decrease in the real value of income transfers to families, as well as the poor development of the support systems regarding reconciliation of work and family. However, the development of public service systems for families with children, in particular child daycare, has been allocated more support so that the total support received by families with children is nearly at the same level as in the early 1990s. In the future, it is important to ensure the functioning of social instruments positively affecting the income of families with children. These include securing the labour market position of the parents, retaining the real value of income transfers to families through index-linking, and safeguarding the functioning of the public service systems for families with children.

More support has been allocated to families since 2003. However, the coordination group feels that the additional support has not been adequate to rectify the existing distortion. The coordination group proposes that measures to improve the income of families with children should be adopted in the different sections of family policy. The proposals concern the development of the housing, maintenance, child and daily allowances, economic support regarding childcare leave, the daycare fee system, and parental leave.

'Finland Fit for Children' is the National Plan of Action that is based on the final document, 'A World Fit for Children', adopted at the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly in May 2002. The Plan of Action was prepared by the Finnish National Committee on the Rights of the Child set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Spring 2003. In it, the National Committee highlights issues of topical interest regarding the living conditions of children and families with children in Finland.

The Committee emphasises that child upbringing and providing for children's wellbeing are the foremost responsibilities of parents. Society must, through its decisions and actions, clearly signal that it supports families in this task. Parents need the support of primary services for parenting and for their mutual

²⁵ National development project for social services in Finland. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Brochures 2004:7. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

relationships, in particular the community support provided by parents' peer groups. It is also important to provide families with better opportunities for reconciling family and work life. In its recommendations, the Committee further suggests that children's opportunities for participation in society should be improved, the responsibility of the media regarding children's safety should be increased, children's wellbeing should be monitored more effectively, the awareness of the rights of the child should be promoted, and children's points of view should be taken into account in the development of policy initiatives.²⁶

Children's interests were further advanced with the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, which began its work in September 2005. The Ombudsman (in connection with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) ensures that the situation and rights of children are taken into account in the creation of legislation and in societal decision-making. It is the duty of the Ombudsman, in cooperation with other authorities as well as relevant organisations in the field of activity, to promote and assess the implementation of policies and programmes concerning the interests and rights of children; to develop initiatives, advice and guidance on matters relating to children in societal decision-making; to promote the awareness and taking into account of children's interests in society; to develop forms of cooperation between different actors; and to convey information concerning children to children themselves, those working with children, authorities and other sections of the population.

3. Child Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Finland

Official monitoring and evaluation is mainly conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The evaluation is based on data, statistics and information provided especially by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) and Statistics Finland and to a lesser extent, the Ministry of Education. The data is usually analysed at the national level, but there has been recent emphasis on doing it at the regional level as well.

The official evaluation system is complemented by private evaluation and research companies as well as universities. One of the key principles of both the public and private evaluation is future orientation. In other words, in addition to specialised ex-ante evaluations, the majority of intermediate and ex-post evaluations have themselves ex-ante oriented elements.

Moreover, there are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area of social services and healthcare which complement public services and have their own monitoring and evaluation systems. Organisations involved in family policy and promoting children's welfare defend the rights of families with children when legislative issues arise which may affect the status of families. They offer families with children a variety of services, including childcare and domestic help, care for sick children, various types of clubs, and maintain telephone help lines for children and adolescents.

²⁶ A Finland Fit for Children. The National Finnish Plan of Action Called by the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Publications 2005:7. Helsinki: The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

3.1 The Model for the Assessment of Child-Related Consequences

The main assessment tools within the sectors of poverty and wellbeing are yearly reports given by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Government, the *Annual Report of Implementing the Strategy of the Government*, the *Annual Report of the Ministry* and the *Annual Report of Financial Statement of the Government*. The reports and indicators are based on regular data collected and surveys conducted by STAKES and Statistics Finland. All the reports, statistics and results of surveys are also published on the Internet. STAKES and Statistics Finland have user-friendly and wide-ranging databases that enable to some extent the monitoring of children's wellbeing and poverty at the regional level.

In addition, a Social and Health Report is published every four years. It is submitted to the Parliament as an Appendix to the Government's Annual Report. The report is a summary of the current state of health and welfare in Finland and a review of the measures taken to retain and enhance them. However, the above-mentioned official monitoring reports do not specifically address child poverty and social exclusion, or at least they have not paid enough attention to these areas previously. Therefore, the Ombudsman for Children must also submit an annual activity report to the Government and must prepare a plan of action. According to the Ombudsman, Maria-Kaisa Aula: "The main tasks in order to get the structures working is an evaluation of children's living conditions, to look at what information has been gathered, what is needed and what kind of indicators are used. This is to develop the basis of the reporting that, according to the law, I will make annually to the Government. This evaluative reporting is one of the main processes of this work."²⁷ The monitoring reports written by the Ombudsman for Children have strengthened Finland's official monitoring system within the fields of family policy and child poverty.

However, despite the existence of a regular monitoring system of family policy and child poverty, the Finnish National Committee on the Rights of the Child is of the opinion that Finland needs a comprehensive and jointly approved national child and family policy strategy for developing and monitoring the wellbeing of children and families with children. Issues that should be addressed within the strategy are meeting the best interests and needs of children and securing adequate services and economic resources for families. The National Committee stresses that children's best interests shall be taken into account in all measures of societal and policy decisions affecting them. Therefore policies and legislation should be assessed from the point of view of children's best interests. The Committee has drawn up a model for the assessment of child-related consequences of society's actions and decisions, and recommends that it should be tested and further developed.²⁸ Next we shall present the logic of the model.²⁹

In terms of content, the model should be applicable to various types of issues at different social levels and assess the interests of a particular group of children or children in general. The analysis model comprises three sections: preconditions, the assessment process (process evaluation) and impact.

²⁷ "Ombudsman for Children: High Visibility Creates Authority". *Socius*, Journal of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2/2005, 12-14.

²⁸ A Finland Fit for Children. The National Finnish Plan of Action Called by the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Publications 2005:7. Helsinki: The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

²⁹ See more Taskinen, S. (2006) *Lapsiin kohdistuvien vaikutusten arvioiminen (The Assessment of Child-Related Consequences of the Decisions)*. Helsinki: STAKES.

a) Preconditions for analysis

Analysis presupposes the availability of comprehensive information on the legislation related to the decision or plan, the rights of the child and the development and living circumstances of the child. Important questions are:

- On which statutory documents and/or instructions is the matter based?
- Do these take into account articles on the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- Are the decisions based on scientific and/or expert information?

b) The assessment process

The process includes charting and describing the situation, analysing the data, testing recommendations and possibilities, and reporting, monitoring and assessing the decisions. In the working process, it is very important to identify the various parties involved in formulating the proposed decision and gain their commitment. In particular, this means listening to the views of the children. Sufficient time must be allowed for preparation and monitoring. Agreement must be reached on the indicators to be used in monitoring. Important questions within this section are:

- How have children's views been taken into account in the preparation work and how were they obtained?
- Where and when are the decisions being made?
- Who are the responsible actors in the various phases of the process?
- How will impact be monitored, and which indicators will be used?
- According to what schedule will the impact of the decision or plan be studied?

It is important for the actual impact of decisions to be assessed after the fact, and the results compared with the ex-ante analysis. The aim here is to see whether the impact is in fact what was assessed in advance, and to establish whether any follow-up action is needed. The views of the children affected by the decision must also be heard in the monitoring process.

c) Impact assessment

The direct impact on children is the main component of the analysis. Here, the effects of the particular decision on children's health, living conditions and movement, participation and equality are all assessed. The details of the assessment will vary depending on the content of the plan or decision concerned. The following is a list of impact component factors from a general viewpoint. Assessment will examine the amount, trend and quality of change.

Factors that have an impact on health

- risks of accident
- air impurities (dust, smell, gases)
- noise
- quality of household water
- composition of children's food and their eating habits

- exposure to radiation

Factors that have an impact on living conditions and movement

- unimpeded movement within the child's neighborhood and on the way to and from school and recreational activities
- amenability and health of housing and the housing area
- effects of traffic arrangements on the functional structure of the housing area
- children's playtime and recreation areas
- sense of community within the neighborhood
- nearby places for physical recreation

Factors that have an impact on children's involvement and participation

- opportunities for children to participate in decision-making
- risks of social exclusion of the child

Factors that have an impact on equality

- regional equality of children
- social equality of children
- equality between girls and boys

Decisions made by society always have wide-ranging indirect effects that are often extremely difficult to assess because in any society 'everything affects everything else'. The indirect effects that are important and obvious in terms of children's wellbeing are factors affecting family and children's services.

Factors that have an impact on the family's finances and on services

- families' employment situation
- families' living costs
- public and private services such as health services, housing and recreational services, education, transport and movement, and commerce
- supply, quality and availability of services, especially children's clinics, daycare and school services

Factors that have an impact on the community and the area

- values, norms and behaviour
- quality of life and/or lifestyle
- security
- social relations and status of population groups
- relationships between different interest groups
- local people's sense of solidarity and local identity
- stimulus and opportunities for recreation
- aesthetic quality of the area

In Finland, decisions made by ministries, Parliament, municipalities, etc. are not assessed from the viewpoint of children. Opinions from various quarters concerning drafting of legislation and committee work do include some degree of child impact assessment, but generally speaking the period for formulating and gathering such opinions is so short that no comprehensive assessment is possible. The views of children are practically never heard as part of the legislative process. If we are to respond to the challenge laid down by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning child impact assessments, the model outlined above must be applied experimentally to some concrete social decision, and on that basis developed for wider application.³⁰ This model would also be very useful in the fight against child poverty. How likely, then, is it that the model suggested above will be adopted and implemented? The model has been drawn up by an official committee and developed further by STAKES, which is a key evaluator in the fields of social and family policy. Since STAKES is a recognised mediator of “good practices”, the model has already been adopted in many municipalities. However, it is too early to say how it has affected child and family policy on the national and regional levels or whether it has increased children’s social inclusion.

3.2 NGO’s and Monitoring Child Poverty

One of the most important NGO’s operating within the area of preventing child poverty and enhancing the wellbeing of children with families in Finland is the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. The Mannerheim League is the largest child welfare organisation in Finland, with more than 90 000 members and 565 local associations throughout the country. The work of these local associations is supported by the League’s 13 district organisations. The Mannerheim League relies on partnerships, working with numerous organisations, businesses and networks in Finland and abroad. The League’s Central Office in Helsinki cooperates closely with ministries, officials and other organisations while the district organisations and local associations operate at the regional level.

The Mannerheim League supports parenting and fostering links between generations and works to promote children’s health and preserve good environments for children. Moreover, it provides diverse services. Home help provides families with short-term childcare services and longer-term special services such as home care for disabled and chronically ill children. Telephone counselling provides children, young people and parents with assistance and advice. Rehabilitation and child welfare services support families in which there are sick or disabled children or have mental and social problems. Problems with children’s wellbeing at the local level have been noted by the League. Local associations keep the needs of children and families a high priority and seek to influence local decisions affecting families.

Affection, care and wellbeing are the backbones of a good childhood. The Mannerheim League particularly concentrates on addressing the following challenges:

- guaranteeing the rights of children to a childhood
- promoting responsible parenting
- increasing interest in volunteer work
- developing partnerships across traditional boundaries to cooperation, advancing a global approach to solving problems affecting children and families with children.

³⁰ A Finland Fit for Children. The National Finnish Plan of Action Called by the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Publications 2005:7. Helsinki: The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The Mannerheim League develops its work through projects. The main focus of the projects is to develop new models and ways to work to be used by the local associations and district organisations. Some nationwide services have also been developed by the projects. The League also constantly monitors and evaluates its projects and the wellbeing of children in Finland in cooperation with ministries and other partners. Moreover, the cooperation between the Ombudsman and NGO's is also intensive. 'We'll be cooperating closely with all the organisations that work with children's issues,' said Ombudsman Aula over a year ago. She continued that 'these make up a large resource base because the NGO field in Finland is very broad. We have very well-established and effective organizations here, such as the Mannerheim League, Save the Children Finland, the Red Cross, the churches, many children's cultural and activity organizations, the municipalities and so on.'³¹

Save the Children Finland fights for children's rights. It is one of the most important NGO's within the field of child wellbeing, as has been noted by the Ombudsman, whose office has actively collaborated with the organisation. Save the Children Finland delivers immediate and lasting improvements to the lives of children in Finland and worldwide. It is a leading organisation for family care in Finland and organises children's therapy and provides individual consultative help on matters related to children, families with children, parenthood and child welfare.

Local associations develop plans for community action within the field of children's wellbeing. For example, a project run by the Hamina branch of Save the Children covered hundreds of families. Young mothers taking part in the toddlers' circle share child-rearing advice with each other. The project also covers primary school students. A welfare survey of 5th graders revealed that children are attached to their neighborhoods, have plenty of hobbies and enjoy being at home on weekends. The Vihti Save the Children's Rescue Network project had the challenging goal of increasing children's safety after school. The national organisation also cooperates intensively with ministries and monitors children's wellbeing in Finland.

The third important NGO working within the area of children's wellbeing is the Red Cross, which monitors the wellbeing of children and their parents at a grassroots level. Monitoring work in the context of the Red Cross is quite people-oriented. Red Cross Emergency Youth Shelters work with a young person, his family, and the wider network of people around him to achieve goals that they have set jointly. Through deliberation with members of the youth's family and social network, shelter staff help families find appropriate support systems and define the areas of responsibility for each party. Emergency Youth Shelters provide a safe environment in which young people at risk can stay overnight and can go to during weekend days. Emergency Youth Shelters offer support to young people who need help in becoming independent and living on their own or taking care of their health and/or studies, and supports those who have tried living on their own but have not yet succeeded.

The fourth NGO which should be mentioned here is the Central Union for Child Welfare in Finland, an umbrella organisation founded in 1937. Its members include 86 NGOs and 35 municipalities. The Central Union speaks in the best interests of the child, influences child policy, brings together different actors and organisations in the field of child welfare and shows responsibility in the development of the field of child welfare. Its main activities are information services, training, research and lobbying. The Union has specialised on the following areas of expertise: extra-familial care, early childhood education, child sexual abuse and family violence, and multicultural issues in child welfare.

To conclude, it can be said that the official monitoring and evaluation work in Finland is well-equipped with knowledge and an array of different methods. Official evaluation focuses on several problems concerning child poverty and the wellbeing of families with children. Alongside the official evaluation

³¹ "Ombudsman for Children: High Visibility Creates Authority". *Socius*, Journal of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2/2005, 12-14.

system, other monitoring systems have been developed which complement and enhance the official evaluation results. Private evaluation companies and universities have made several evaluations for ministries, the results of which have been widely acknowledged by officials and have thus affected official family policy. Moreover, NGO's also provide many resources in the way of preventing child poverty in Finland. In the future, the office of the Ombudsman will play a key role within the evaluation field. It is largely the duty of the office to collect the results of different evaluations and direct the national monitoring system within the areas of child poverty and wellbeing. There is a lot of pressure to collect children's own views about their situation and living conditions with the aim of improving their participation and social inclusion. Children's own voices must also be heard by the current monitoring and evaluation systems.

Appendix 1. Key Documents Concerning Child Poverty and Wellbeing in Finland

Official documents and programmes

Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's Government Programme 2003-2007

Strategy for Family Policy

Trends in Social Protection in Finland 2005-2006

Changes in the Housing of Families with Children 1995-2004

A Finland Fit for Children: The National Finnish Plan of Action Called by the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly.

The National Development Project for Social Services in Finland

The National Project to Secure the Future of Healthcare

The Alcohol Programme

The Health for All 2015 public health programmes

VETO work attraction programme

Key bodies involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the documents and programmes

The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES)

Statistics Finland

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Employment

The Social Insurance Institution in Finland

The Office of the Ombudsman of Finland

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Save the Children Finland

The Red Cross

Private evaluation and research companies

The Department of Social Policy, University of Turku

Some important studies

Bardy, M.; Salmi, M. & Heino, T. (2001) Mikä lapsiamme uhkaa? Suuntaviivoja 2000-luvun lapsipoliittiseen keskusteluun (Current Trends in the Child and Family Policy Discussions). Stakes. Reports 263. Saarijärvi: Gummerus.

Forssten, K. (2000) Child Poverty in the Nordic Countries. Department of social policy series B:22/2000. University of Turku.

Forssten, K., Haataja, A. & Hakovirta, M. (2005) Policy changes, employment and single parenthood in Finland. Yearbook of Population Research in Finland XLI. The Population Research Institute. Helsinki.
Hakovirta, M. (2006) Yksinhuoltajaäitien työllisyys, toimeentulo ja työmarkkinavalinnat (Labour Market Position, Income and Labour Choices of Single Mothers). Helsinki: Väestöliitto.

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Joronen, K. (2005) Adolescents' Subjective Well-being in their Social Contexts. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

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Taskinen, S. (2006) Lapsiin kohdistuvien vaikutusten arvioiminen (The Assessment of Child-Related Policy Impacts). Helsinki: STAKES.