



Ministry of
Education
and Culture



MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

CHILD
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Child's Time – Towards the National Strategy for Children 2040

The National Strategy for Children will cover several government terms. The groundwork and preparation for the Strategy are based on a decision issued by the Government in its discussion on spending limits on 11 April 2018. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health jointly appointed a steering group on 5 June 2018 and commissioned the preparatory work which was then carried out between 1 August 2018 and 28 February 2019.

The brief for the preparatory work required a new kind of working method to identify and implement a vision, forecasts, aims and recommendations that would cover several government terms. The themes guiding the horizontal work—carried out by the ministries, civil society organisations, and public and private sector—were transparency, future orientation, identifying opportunities, and interaction based on dialogue.

The vision, scenarios and recommendations of the Child's Time report, along with the areas of wellbeing brought up in the analysis, were identified with the help of both research and experience-based expertise. Their starting points were future wellbeing, learning, inclusion, security, relationships and health of children, young people and families.

From the outset, the working groups followed the principles of strategic communication and transparency. Throughout the preparatory work for the Strategy for Children, it was possible to follow how the content, discussion and opinions were formed via the open websites of two ministries. Dialogue between stakeholders, citizens and experts was facilitated at three Child Forums and at stakeholder meetings.

Economic and business actors were also involved in the report's cross-sectoral preparation work, which, along with the steering group, was supported by a research group. The preparation work included a wide range of stakeholder events that attracted nearly a thousand people, including two hundred children and young people.

The preparation work was based on the international human rights conventions. The principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which particularly informed the development of the Strategy were non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the right to life, and respect for the views of the child.

The steering group monitored the preparations and formed a shared vision entitled "Child's Time – Towards a National Strategy for Children 2040". Using blogs and other channels, the

group members highlighted important themes regarding the basis and the premise of reforming a child- and family-friendly society.

In defining the vision, scenarios describing three possible worlds were drawn up (Linear scenario, Childhood in Crisis and a Child's Time scenario). The desired state (i.e. vision) defined in the scenario work is called the Child's Time vision. The report describes the recommended Child's Time scenario: in about 20 years we will have achieved a child-, young person- and family-friendly Finland at various levels.

The vision is made tangible in seven aims that concern the child's relationships (parents, adults close to the child, friends), inclusion of the child and the family in the community in which the children are raised and in the local community, family time, enabling an individual growth and learning pathway for every child and young person, reducing child poverty, and enabling people to have as many or as few children as they wish.

Based on research findings, the areas of children's wellbeing were defined as relationships, learning, inclusion, security and health. In addition, birth rate can determine how favorably society treats children and families.

For the implementation of the vision, the key leadership tools include administration and decision-making based on the child's rights, and a child- and family-led culture. Beginning from the Government and Parliament, achieving the vision requires broad commitment to the objectives and guidelines determined in the Child's Time report during each parliamentary term and across all levels of society.

The Strategy for Children promotes the realisation of the rights of the child and seeks to reduce inequality among children and young people. It supports the reform of public leadership towards a more systemic and people-oriented direction. A comprehensive strategy that extends across administrative branches and levels will promote effective and efficient use of public resources.

The report proposes that the work concerning the Strategy for Children be included in the commitments of the next Government Programme and that the Strategy be completed by the end of 2019. The next steps include deepening the aims presented in the report, defining indicators for the objectives, and presenting in concrete terms the progress made in achieving the priorities and the necessary resources. The leadership, reporting and evaluation responsibilities supporting the journey towards the vision must be assigned. Finally, a procedure must be created through which ministries, regional actors and Parliament can commit to a long-term strategy promoting equality and non-discrimination in the wellbeing and learning of children and young people.

Although in many ways Finnish children and young people fare, on average, better than ever before, inequality has increased and some families have multiple problems. Fragmented services and the challenges of service and benefit compatibility also increase inequality. A rapid decline in the birth rate and the consequent risks to sustainability of central government finances have demonstrated how much we need a society and working life that are kind to children and families.

The Strategy for Children can provide a way forward for reforming public leadership. In a world that is changing fast and becoming more complex, public authorities may need more effective methods of working. Aspects of new leadership skills include networking and systemic thinking that are based on shared values and a shared view of human beings, understanding of the big picture and partnerships.

The Strategy for Children seeks to solve the problems of sectoral administration through means that will also benefit other population groups and reinforce people-oriented leadership.

Even in a changing world, the basic needs of children's growth and learning remain constant. Scientific studies continue to generate more up-to-date data. For example, we keep finding out more about the importance of having close relationships and the significance of a person's early years and childhood in laying the foundation for their lifelong wellbeing. The Strategy must be based on the best possible information and research on the state of children's wellbeing and the factors that can reinforce it.

The report's message is that a child- and family-friendly society should put children, young people and families at the heart of its value-decisions and policies. Preventive support is a productive investment in society's future. It should be offered to children and young people, particularly to those who are vulnerable and to families who need help, in order to achieve equal and non-discriminatory wellbeing and learning.

The report's **introduction** describes the reasons for a strategy for children, the Child's Time vision and, based on that, the aims that will help us achieve a child- and family-friendly society by 2040. The introduction also presents methods for achieving the vision: administration and decision-making based on the child's rights and knowledge, child- and family-led culture, and high standards of interaction.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the kind of Finland in which children and young people live in 2019 and introduces areas of wellbeing that were brought up in the studies. To chart these areas in more detail, Professor Jouni Välijärvi has edited a separate report entitled "Enabling Growth, Learning and Inclusion for All: Research Findings and Recommendations for Promoting Children's and Young People's Opportunities for Balanced Growth, Health and Influence". Drawing from research findings, Chapter 2 also describes what is a secure life for children, and discusses birth rate and the kind of resources society allocates to children and families. Chapter 2 sheds light on the state of wellbeing and services, and the direction for the reforms instigated by the Government's key projects for 2015–2019.

Chapter 3 describes in what kind of Finland children and young people could live in 2040. It illustrates how the world is changing for children and young people and asks whether the needs of children will change in terms of their wellbeing. The chapter presents the three possible future directions that arose from the work: 1) A positive Child's Time scenario, 2) Linear development where the rise in inequality will continue unchanged, and 3) Childhood in Crisis where negative changes become amplified.

Chapter 4 outlines guidelines on how we could achieve a child- and family-friendly society and how to proceed with the next steps for the Strategy for Children. The chapter presents seven aims for the vision for a child- and family-friendly society, the tools to achieve them, and more specific recommendations. The chapter then introduces guidelines for the next steps of the Strategy preparations and provides an overview of the Child's Time roadmap towards the National Strategy for Children. Finally, it makes proposals regarding the timetable and administration of future tasks.

Chapter 5 outlines the research findings and information collected during the preparatory work concerning international and Nordic good practices. It also discusses research as a tool for steering and leadership. Chapter 5 brings together the information collected from Child Forums and the broad debate with stakeholders and citizens.

Chapter 6 presents the assignment from the Government, advice issued by Parliament on the preparatory work, coordination of the work, and the working groups.

Chapter 7 is an epilogue that outlines the commitments that the steering group's members have made to promoting child- and family-friendly society.

Chapters 8 and 9 provide the sources and annexes.

Material available on the ministries' Strategy for Children website:

1. "Child's Time" report
2. "Enabling Growth, Learning and Inclusion for All: Research Findings and Recommendations for Promoting Children's and Young People's Opportunities for Balanced Growth, Health and Influence" report. Edited by Jouni Välijärvi.
3. Five areas of wellbeing identified by the researchers and the corresponding "knowledge crystals".
4. Images illustrating the Child's time vision, administration and progress.
5. Annexes. Background data provided by researchers.
6. Annexes. Opinions issued by stakeholders.

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