

Finland

Each year, the ESN European Semester Group follows the European Commission's cycle of policy coordination with EU Member States known as the European Semester and produces a report based on a questionnaire completed by public social services authorities on the social situation in European countries with a particular focus on social services. This country profile identifies the most important common challenges facing social services as reported by ESN members in Austria, related to three principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and makes recommendations for the 2023 European Semester. The full report, with cross-country analysis of all the participating countries is available [here](#).

1. Children's services

1.1 Key issues

In Finland, the number of children under the age of 6 covered by formal childcare is increasing. While this is a positive development, other figures are cause for concern. The number of children placed in alternative care due to child protection concerns has been steadily growing for 30 years. In 2020, 1.6% of children aged 0-17 were placed in alternative care - this represents 19,000 children and young people. Of all children in care, around 39% were placed in foster care, 36% in residential care and 7% in family type homes. One reason for this development is the lack of adequate services for children and young people, which would also include support for families. This is particularly true for children with mental health problems, substance misuse and neurodiverse children, including autism. Overall, there is a shortage of appropriate services and expertise both in community-based services and specialist services including alternative care.

In recent years, many minor reforms have been made to the Child Welfare Act, for instance the availability of services for young people leaving care has improved (the age limit for support was raised from 21 to 25). The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has now decided to reform the entire Child Welfare Act to clarify its provisions and outline a more specific vision of child protection. However, these changes focus primarily on the organisation of social services and the legal conditions for their operation, while the situation of children with special needs has not been addressed.

1.2 Recommendation

Legal reforms alone are not enough to support children. The same focus should be placed on translating regulations into effective services on the ground to meet the needs of children, particularly children with mental health problems, substance misuse and children with learning disabilities. This requires close cooperation between professionals from different sectors, including welfare, education and health.

2. Long-term care

2.1 Key issues

In 2020, according to the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare, approximately 96% of people aged 65 and over in Finland lived at home. The remaining 4% lived in assisted living housing (45,539 persons) or residential homes (4,004 persons). The lack of qualified staff is the most fundamental and serious problem in long-term care. Currently, attempts are being made to address these shortcomings through regulation with the establishment of provisions on minimum staffing levels in assisted living and residential homes-with each unit will have to employ at least 0.7 care staff per person after a transitional period.

However, the law has been criticised for setting unrealistic targets without providing the resources to deliver them. In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities issued quality recommendations for developing services for older people promoting the functional capacity of older people; increasing voluntary work; utilising digitalisation and technologies; developing housing and residential environments; organising and providing services; arranging guidance and service coordination for clients; ensuring skilled personnel who thrive in their work; and ensuring the quality of services. Particular attention has been paid to best practice of civil society organisations and evidence-based practice.

2.2. Recommendations

Ensuring that enough qualified staff are available is key to achieving the right quality of long-term care in Finland. This means securing funding for adequate employee remuneration, implementing appropriate work-life balance policies, ensuring the psychological wellbeing of care workers and providing them with tailored training to respond to the complex needs of service users.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

The number of homeless people in Finland is slowly declining. Despite temporary problems in reaching all those in need during the Covid-19 pandemic, services have now returned to the field and regained contact with people using them. In addition, earlier programmes adopted by the government continue, including Housing First and building of affordable housing. Social services are also being reformed to provide long-term support to homeless people rather than just responding to crisis situations. However, insufficient knowledge of the extent of homelessness across the country remains a problem. While the available data is reliable in large cities, little is known about the number and situation of homeless people in small towns and rural areas.

3.2. Recommendations

A reliable mapping of homelessness should be undertaken as well as rethinking how social services operate outside cities to ensure equal access to housing programmes and relevant social services for all Finnish residents facing homelessness.



[Read the report online](#)

Putting People First
Investing in Social
Services. Promoting
Social Inclusion.