



Action plan of the Ombudsman for Children in Finland for 2025

Equity in education and the rights of the child





Tasks of the Ombudsman for Children in Finland

The Ombudsman for Children ensures that the status and rights of children are taken into account in legislation and societal decision-making. The Ombudsman assesses, monitors and promotes the realisation of the rights of the child in Finland and brings the perspective of children's rights to decision-making and societal discussions. The Ombudsman for Children is building a good and fair society for children together with other operators. The work is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Finnish Treaty Series 59–60/1991).

The Ombudsman for Children is an independent and unbiased government authority governed by the Act on the Ombudsman for Children (1221/2004) and the Government Decree on the Ombudsman for Children (274/2005). The Ombudsman operates in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Justice. At the time of the preparation of this action plan, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children employs, in addition to the Ombudsman for Children, an administrative assistant, a senior researcher, two lawyers, a senior officer and a communications specialist in employment relationships valid until further notice. All employees of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children play an important role in promoting the rights of the child.

The Ombudsman for Children prepares an annual action plan and provides it to the Government for information (section 3 of the Act on the Ombudsman for Children and section 4 of the Decree on the Ombudsman for Children). This action plan first describes the priorities for 2025, which was prepared by utilising the results¹ of Sitra's Futures Barometer and particularly the responses of young people² and the results of the work on megatrends, the National Child Strategy³ and the Child's Time report⁴ that served as the basis for the report, the Permanent Secretaries' Opportunities for Finland 2023 report⁵, the operating environment analysis of the administrative branch of the Ministry of Justice, and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children over the years⁶.

¹ https://www.sitra.fi/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/sitra_tulevaisuusbarometri-2023_alt_v2.pdf

² https://www.sitra.fi/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/sitra-tulevaisuusbarometri-2023_erillisraportti_nuoret.pdf

³ National Child Strategy: Committee report. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-777-5>

⁴ Child's Time: Towards a National Strategy for Children 2040. Government publications 4/2019. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-287-698-0>

⁵ Damski, J., et al. (2023). Opportunities for Finland: Messages from the Permanent Secretaries to support the change of government. Government publications 2023:4. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/mahdollisuudet-suomelle-2023/#/>

⁶ <https://lapsiasia.fi/vuosikertomukset>





In this action plan, the work of the Ombudsman for Children is divided into three entities. The Ombudsman for Children

1. assess the realisation of the rights of the child
2. monitors, produces and communicates information about the rights of the child
3. builds networks and connections between various stakeholders.

The operating environment in 2025

The transition to 2025 will take place at a time of unrest in global politics. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has continued intensely, still forcing people into exile. In September 2024, there were approximately 46,000 Ukrainians receiving temporary protection in Finland. In 2024, tensions further escalated in the Middle East, and there was fear of further expansion of the conflicts in the region at the end of the year. The difficult geopolitical situation affects not only the wellbeing of children in conflict-affected areas but also the everyday lives of Finnish children.

Although the direct impacts of Russia's war of aggression on the Finnish economy are declining as the strong inflation has settled down and key interest rates and energy prices have fallen, many feel that their financial situation is unpredictable. The stabilisation of central government finances in accordance with Prime Minister Orpo's Government Programme has affected the social security of families with children, and the impacts have accumulated especially in single-parent households. This financial uncertainty is reflected in the wellbeing of families with children in many ways.

As we move on to 2025, there is also major concern about the wellbeing of children and young people. In particular, mental health symptoms and disorders as well as various neurodivergent characteristics have raised concerns and a need for services. At the same time, the organisation of wellbeing services counties and related pressures to make savings have caused a service backlog and led to experiences of inadequacy of the services. Cooperation between municipalities and welfare states is also still taking shape.

The wellbeing of children and young people is also strongly linked to perceived safety. Unfortunately, violent crime by minors has been increasing and causing fear among children. People have been slow to realise that the situation has become worse and the work against violence and offences by minors is still awaiting broad implementation. The Ombudsman for Children will continue to cooperate with various authorities to remedy the situation.

Unpredictability and unrest in the operating environment affect the work of the Ombudsman for Children in many ways. The Ombudsman for Children will start the year





within the framework of a new five-year strategy. The vision of the strategy is a valued and sustainable childhood. This means that Finnish society values childhood as an important stage of life and takes care of its declining child population. The Ombudsman for Children considers it important that societal decision-making is based on international human rights conventions and research knowledge. The coming strategy period will involve advancing the utilisation of research knowledge and the views of children in the work of the office and disseminating these in society.

The Ombudsman for Children has strengthened international cooperation and maintained close contact with the Ombudsman for Children in Europe and the Nordic countries. The Ombudsman for Children in Finland will chair the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) in the period 2024–2025, which opens up opportunities for relying on international experiences and sharing competence across borders.

The difficult global political situation also affects the planning of the activities of the Ombudsman for Children. Human rights professionals need to improve their capacity to respond to future crises, and this has been taken seriously by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. The systematic work of the Office has been strengthened with a five-year strategy, and the implementation of previously completed renewals will continue at the same time. Efforts will be made to increase the agency's capacity to respond to various questions arising from disruptions, such as power cuts, information influencing, food shortages, nuclear radiation or war of aggression. Within the office, readiness has also been strengthened through safety walks, first aid training and work supervision. The work of the new Agency for the Special Authorities within Judicial Administration will provide broader support for administrative and practical work.

At the same time, several simultaneous national development projects are underway in matters related to the rights of the child. The National Child Strategy work aimed at promoting the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important cooperation structure of the Ombudsman for Children. The implementation of the national communication strategy on the rights of the child will continue. The most important stakeholder structure of the Ombudsman's activities, i.e. the Child Advisory Board, is set to start its work with renewed strength. The conclusions of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child will significantly guide the Ombudsman's future work.

The theme for 2025: Equity in education and the rights of the child

In 2024, the focus of the activities of the Ombudsman for Children was on education and the rights of the child. During the year, it was observed that equity in education was a highly topical and significant issue. For long, it has been known that the socio-economic background of children is linked to their learning outcomes. Until now, Finnish basic education has been an international success story that has managed to even out inequalities





caused by parents' different educational and income levels. Competence measurements have shown that the children of the least educated parents have particularly benefited from basic education and basic education has strongly reduced the dependence of boys' income on their fathers' income.⁷ However, cracks have begun to emerge in the success story. The latest PISA study found that parents' education, profession and household net worth were also more closely linked to pupils' competence in Finland than before. In Finland, the scores of pupils with the highest socio-economic background were significantly higher compared to those of the lowest quadrant, and this gap had increased compared to the previous measurements. The increase is due to the fact that the learning outcomes of pupils with the lowest socio-economic background had declined more than those with the highest socio-economic background.⁸ The latest longitudinal assessment of competence by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre FINEEC draws attention to the fact that differences in competence between comprehensive schools are already increasing at the beginning of basic education. Gaps were already observed between children's skills and their backgrounds in the baseline measurements carried out in the two-year pre-primary education. Significant gaps were observed in all the examined skills and capabilities based on the parents' education, income and country of birth as well as the children's month of birth and mother tongue.⁹

The fact that the child's socio-economic background has such a strong impact on the child's learning outcomes is a major problem for the realisation of the rights of the child. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives every child the right to development without discrimination. Under the Convention, governments are obliged to provide every child with free basic education and to support the child in secondary and higher education. In addition, education must respect the dignity of the child and its contents must promote not only the development of the child's individual characteristics but also the shared values of society. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stressed that education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. Meanwhile, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasises that education must be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering. Governments must ensure that every child's right to learn is realised.

In 2025, the Ombudsman for Children will strengthen the work on equity issues in education. A number of basic improvements concerning education have been recorded in the Government Programme. During the year, the Ombudsman for Children will consult children about equity issues in education and publish a Child Barometer on education, in which children aged 6–7 share their views on pre-primary education. The Office will intensify its cooperation with education professionals and experts that got off to a good start. The Ombudsman for Children strives to increase the perspective of the rights of the

⁷ Pekkarinen, T. & Uusitalo, R. (2012). Peruskoulu-uudistuksen vaikutukset. Kansantaloudellinen aikakauskirja 108(2), 128–139.

⁸ <https://www.jyu.fi/fi/uutinen/pisa-2022-osaaminen-heikentynyt-suomessa-ja-lahe-kaikissa-muissa-oecd-maissa>

⁹ <https://okm.fi/-/kaksivuotisen-esiopetuksen-kokeilun-valiraportti-on-julkaistu>





child and the views of children and young people on education in educational policy discussions and decision-making.

20th anniversary of the Ombudsman for Children

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children was established in 2005, marking 20 years in 2025. To celebrate the anniversary, the Ombudsman for Children is updating its visual identity. In August 2025, a celebratory seminar will be organised in cooperation with the University of Jyväskylä's School of Resource Wisdom, JYU.Wisdom, which promotes planetary wellbeing in society. During the anniversary year, the aim is to pay particular attention to children and young people in communications and activities.





The Ombudsman for Children assesses the realisation of the rights of the child

“The Ombudsman for Children has the duty to assess the realisation of the rights and best interests of children, follow legislation and social decision-making as well as assess their impact on the wellbeing of children. Through initiatives, guidance and advice, the Ombudsman for Children must improve social decision-making in matters concerning children and promote the best interests of children in society.” (Section 2 of the Act on the Ombudsman for Children)

Statements

Preparing statements on key government proposals and memoranda and reports by the authorities is an essential part of the Ombudsman’s assessment task. The office monitors the Government’s legislative drafting and, if necessary, also issues statements on government proposals on which it has not been requested to provide a statement. The Ombudsman monitors the number of statements requested and issued and invests in the quality and research basis of the statements. The effectiveness of the statements will be assessed by monitoring their impact on government proposals, committee reports and parliamentary decisions.

Initiatives and opinions

The Ombudsman for Children monitors decision-making, societal debate and phenomena arising from civil society related to children. The Ombudsman plays an important role in detecting and highlighting shortcomings concerning the rights of the child. If necessary, the Ombudsman for Children submits initiatives to various parties to draw the attention of stakeholders to shortcomings related to the rights of the child or to promote change. The Ombudsman for Children draws up opinions on topical issues related to children’s wellbeing and rights - if necessary in cooperation with other parties. The effectiveness of the initiatives and opinions is assessed by monitoring the societal discussion on the topic through media monitoring and analysis as well as by assessing the actual change in the presented issues.

Annual report and action plan

The Ombudsman for Children submits an annual report to the Government on the area of responsibility. The annual report contains an assessment of the realisation of the rights of the child, the development of the wellbeing and living conditions of children and the shortcomings observed in legislation. The annual report will be submitted to the Government by the end of March. The annual action plan (this document) describes the strategic priorities for each year and their integration into the activities of different administrative branches. The action plan will be submitted to the Government.





Report to Parliament

Once every four years, the Ombudsman for Children submits a report to Parliament on its field of responsibility. The report has been previously published in 2018 and 2022. The next report will be prepared in 2025 and published at the beginning of 2026.

Conclusions of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

In June 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued its conclusions to the state of Finland. The shortcomings highlighted by the Ombudsman for Children in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have been thoroughly considered in the conclusions. In 2025, the Ombudsman for Children will promote awareness of the conclusions by providing information about them actively and making use of them in statements, initiatives and opinions. The Ombudsman for Children monitors and evaluates the implementation of the Committee's recommendations, especially in the annual report. County and municipal elections will be held in April 2025, and the Ombudsman for Children will bring the conclusions to the attention of political parties, candidates and new decision-makers.





The Ombudsman for Children monitors, produces and communicates information about the rights of the child

“The duty of the Ombudsman for Children includes monitoring the living conditions of children and young people. Through initiatives, guidance and advice, the Ombudsman for Children must improve social decision-making in matters concerning children and promote the best interests of children in society. The Ombudsman has the duty to keep in touch with children and young people and relay the obtained information to decision-makers as well as to convey information concerning children to children, adults working with children, authorities and the rest of the population.” (Section 2 of the Act on the Ombudsman for Children)

Monitoring and participating in societal debate

The Ombudsman for Children monitors the societal debate and phenomena arising from civil society related to children. The monitoring duty involves making versatile use of the media, stakeholder cooperation, citizens' contacts and discussions with children and young people. The Ombudsman for Children has the right to obtain from other authorities, free of charge, information necessary for the performance of duties unless restricted by confidentiality provisions. The Ombudsman for Children also uses media monitoring and reputation surveys to follow the societal debate on the Ombudsman's own activities and awareness of the work of the Ombudsman.

Communication in the activities of the Ombudsman for Children

Communication plays a strong role in the success of the statutory duties of the Ombudsman for Children. The task of the communications specialist is to plan, implement and evaluate communications in the short and long term, to promote communications on the rights of the child and to strengthen the communication competence of the Office. The communications specialist maintains networks with separate ombudsmen, legal administration, professionals in the rights of the child, Nordic and European ombudsmen for children and other stakeholders.

During 2025, a national communication strategy on the rights of the child will be promoted, bringing together dozens of stakeholders working on the rights of the child in the central government and the third sector. The communication strategy of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, which was prepared in connection with the Office's strategy work in 2024, will be implemented in practice. The national communications network on the rights of the child is guided by the Ombudsman for Children and coordinated by the Central Union for Child Welfare. National communications are also taken into account as a part of the implementation of the National Child Strategy. The Ombudsman for Children is an active participant in the campaign, events and sessions of the Children's Rights Week.





Child Barometer

The Child Barometer is a key tool for the Ombudsman for Children to survey the experiences of young children. It is based on an interview study of children aged six and seven and is one of its kind also at the global level. The Child Barometer, which has been used to collect data four times, has examined children's experiences of trust (2016), explored leisure time and simultaneously tested two methods – telephone and in-person interviews (2018), and investigated children's perceptions of a good life (2020) and children's views on safety (2022). In 2025, the Child Barometer will be published to examine children's views on pre-primary education and learning.

Young Advisers

The task of the Ombudsman for Children is to keep in touch with children and young people and to relay their thoughts to decision-makers and those working with children, for example. The Ombudsman for Children performs this duty through the Young Advisers activities. The contents of the Young Advisers activities are used in the publications, statements, opinions, initiatives and reports of the Office. The Young Advisers operate on three levels. Themed Young Advisers meetings are individual meetings with groups of children, usually designed around a specific theme. These themes are primarily related to the Ombudsman for Children's strategic focus for the year. Young Advisers teams are groups of children whom the Ombudsman meets several times to discuss issues proposed by the children themselves. The regularly met Young Advisers teams particularly consist of vulnerable children or children in a special position compared to their peers. Young Advisers visits are individual meetings with groups of children where issues that the children find pressing are discussed.

Themed meetings for children and young people will be organised in winter 2024–2025 on the topic of equity in education. If necessary, meetings can also be organised on individual current or otherwise important topics. The Young Advisers team of 2025 will be implemented with a group of children to be determined later. The assessment of the operating model will be published as part of the report to parliament in 2026.

Studies and reports

The Ombudsman for Children publishes research-driven reports on the year's theme and other relevant topics. The reports compile research knowledge on children related to certain themes, produce new information from the children's perspective and thus serve as a monitoring tool for children's wellbeing. The reports can provide more in-depth information on a phenomenon or a shortcoming in the lives of children or young people. It is key to highlight the experiences or opinions of children and young people on a matter or phenomenon on which there is not enough previous research. At the same time, the report may serve as an impetus for carrying out a more extensive study, if this is deemed





necessary. The reports are prepared independently and in cooperation with stakeholders and researchers.

General comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

The Ombudsman for Children has translated the general comments of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child into Finnish. The general comments examine and expand the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and issue implementation instructions. Information on the contents of the general comments is provided to stakeholders and the general public. The effectiveness of the translation activities is promoted by referring to the existence and content of the general comments in statements, initiatives, opinions and various events, by monitoring their prevalence in decision-making and societal debate, and by providing information about the general comments in the communications channels of the Ombudsman for Children.

Presentations and lectures

Through guidance and advice, the Ombudsman for Children has the statutory duty to develop social decision-making and promote the implementation of the rights of the child in society." The Ombudsman for Children is often asked to speak at various events. The significance of the events is carefully considered, and an educational perspective is fostered in connection with the speeches held at the events. Whenever speaking at events, the Ombudsman will provide information on the rights of the child, the views of the children, the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and, for example, the content of the general comments, the state of children's wellbeing and ideas for rectifying the situation. Written speeches and/or slides are prepared for presentations and saved for further use. The Ombudsman for Children has also been active in the planning of online training on the rights of the child, which the National Child Strategy implements as part of its basic tasks. The impacts of the presentations and lectures will be assessed based on the feedback received.

National children's welfare indicators

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children has previously been actively involved in developing the national children's welfare indicators, which have been collected in the Sotkanet Statistics and Indicator Bank maintained by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. Various indicators are also available at Statistics Finland and on the websites of separate agencies. The indicators are used in the work, statements, opinions, initiatives, presentations, training and reports of the Office. In addition, research knowledge on children and young people and where research data can be obtained are presented at various training events and visits. The Office actively monitors current research on children and young people. The Ombudsman for Children will continue to develop the indicators together with the National Child Strategy and Statistics Finland.





Citizen inquiries

Every year, the Ombudsman for Children receives 400–700 inquiries from citizens and professionals working with children on various matters concerning children. Under the law, the Ombudsman for Children does not have the power to comment on the matters of individual children and families or to intervene in the activities of other authorities in individual matters. In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children will, if necessary, refer the inquirers to the correct authority.

Citizen inquiries are utilised in advocacy, as information on current phenomena in the world of children and young people is valuable for the Ombudsman for Children. The office compiles statistics on citizen inquiries at a general level and utilises the perspectives gained from them in its own work and in cooperation between authorities. In 2025, telephone hours will be extended and sections for citizens and stakeholders on the Office's website will be developed further.





The Ombudsman for Children builds networks and connections between various stakeholders

“The Ombudsman for Children has the duty to develop new forms of cooperation between various stakeholders.” (Section 2 of the Act on the Ombudsman for Children)

Child Advisory Board

Provisions on the Child Advisory Board are laid down in the Act on the Ombudsman for Children (1221/2014) and the related Government Decree on the Ombudsman for Children (274/2005). Under section 4 of the Act, the task of the Advisory Board is to assist the Ombudsman for Children in promoting the position and rights of children and the cooperation between authorities related to them. According to section 5 of the Decree, the Government appoints an advisory board on a proposal from the Ombudsman for Children for a maximum of five years at a time. The Advisory Board has a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a maximum of 14 other members, each of whom has been assigned a personal deputy.

In 2025, the new Child Advisory Board will launch its activities, whose letters of appointment had been sent to various ministries, agencies, organisations, research institutes and expert members at the time of preparing this plan. The composition of the Advisory Board will be changed so that in the future a representative of the National Child Strategy has been asked to serve as the vice-chairperson. The Advisory Board usually assembles four times a year. In 2025, new working groups will also be set up in connection with the Child Advisory Board and they can also be added as necessary.

Work with stakeholders

The stakeholders of the Ombudsman for Children include other authorities, municipalities, wellbeing services counties, researchers, organisations, religious communities, companies and other parties involved in child policy and experts in the field. The Ombudsman for Children cooperates with stakeholders by meeting them and participating in various events. Long-term participation in various strategically important committees, working groups and steering groups is also an important part of the work of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. In 2025, cooperation will be further strengthened, particularly with national stakeholders such as separate ombudsmen, the National Child Strategy and Itla.





International connections

The Ombudsman for Children engages in international cooperation to promote the rights of the child. In 2025, the Ombudsman for Children will chair the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). The Network's conference and the annual meeting will be organised by Moldova in September 2025. The theme of the activities of 2025 is physical health and the rights of the child.

In 2025, Nordic cooperation will continue with the Ombudsmen for Children of Åland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

In 2025, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children will monitor the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, translate its general comments into Finnish and participate in the days of current topics organised by the Committee. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children also monitors the work of the European Commission on the European Child Guarantee.

Children's Rights Week

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was approved by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and this time has become recognised as a theme week, featuring events that highlight children's rights, alongside a national flag-flying day. The Ombudsman for Children participates in the events held during the week in cooperation with various stakeholders and is involved in communicating about the Children's Rights Week together with the national communications network on the rights of the child.

Visits

Based on invitations, the Ombudsman for Children visits municipalities, wellbeing services counties, schools, early childhood education and care units, educational institutions and other organisations to meet professionals and, where possible, children and young people in their everyday environments. During the visits, the Ombudsman provides information about the rights of the child, collects information on children's experiences and opinions, and makes observations on the views of professionals or parents, which can be utilised in the statutory duties of the Office, such as statements, initiatives, opinions and reports. Visits by the Ombudsman for Children are not inspections or control visits.





The Ombudsman for Children ensures the welfare of personnel

Personnel

In addition to the Ombudsman for Children, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children also employs a senior researcher, an administrative assistant, two lawyers, a communications specialist and a senior officer, i.e. a total of seven person-years. Annually, the Office aims to offer an internship for 1–2 university interns.

Welfare of personnel

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children has a valid occupational safety and health programme and has appointed an occupational safety and health representative. The Office has also prepared guidelines on harassment and inappropriate behaviour, an equality and non-discrimination plan and a crisis communication plan. In 2025, a contingency plan will be prepared for the Office.

The objective of the five-year strategy is that the Office of the Ombudsman for Children will continuously develop competence, has work tasks that are clear and motivating and management that encourages and supports employees, invests in wellbeing at work, and has a safe and encouraging work community.

To achieve these goals, work supervision will continue, a stronger sense of community and mutual trust will be fostered, and collaborative efforts will be made to create opportunities for recreation and enhance community bonds. Every employee is given an opportunity to affect the content of their work and joint issues. The Office promotes a flexible approach to balancing work and family life. Employees' competence is strengthened by sharing know-how internally and with external partners. In addition, the Office supports continuous learning and encourages additional training through separate compensation. Staff wellbeing and management success are monitored through the CAF and VMBaro surveys and continuous dialogue with the supervisor is encouraged. The Office utilises occupational health care services. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children is located in Jyväskylä at Vapaudenkatu 58 A and in Helsinki at Ratapihantie 9.





Finances

Salaries, i.e. personnel costs + social security expenditure	EUR 565,000
Other operating expenses	EUR 147,000
Rents	EUR 53,000
Total	EUR 765,000

In Jyväskylä on December the 10th, 2024

Elina Pekkarinen
Ombudsman for Children

Mari Laitinen
Administrative Assistant

