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# Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland

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for the OECD Thematic Review  
of Early Childhood Education  
and Care Policy

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. General information on Finland

FINLAND is located in Northern Europe and has borders with Sweden, Norway and Russia. Finland's surface area covers 338 000 km<sup>2</sup> and there are 5.2 million inhabitants. Finland is thus a sparsely populated country: there are 17 inhabitants per square kilometre. Finland is a republic, the authority of which is vested in the democratically elected Parliament. There are 200 members of Parliament. The Government elected in the spring of 1999 is known as the 'Rainbow Government' because it has representatives from 5 parties: the Social Democratic Party, the National Coalition Party, the Swedish People's Party in Finland, the Left Wing Alliance and the Finnish Green League. Since the division of the provinces was reformed in 1997, Finland has been divided into 6 provinces (one of which is the autonomous Province of Åland), instead of the former 12. There are 452 municipalities, which enjoy extensive autonomy. The size of municipalities varies from 130 inhabitants to half a million.

At the end of 1998, there were about 1.4 million families in Finland, 635 000 of which had children. Of those families with children, 18% were single-parent families. The average number of children in one family was 1.8, and a total of 57 200 children were born during the year.

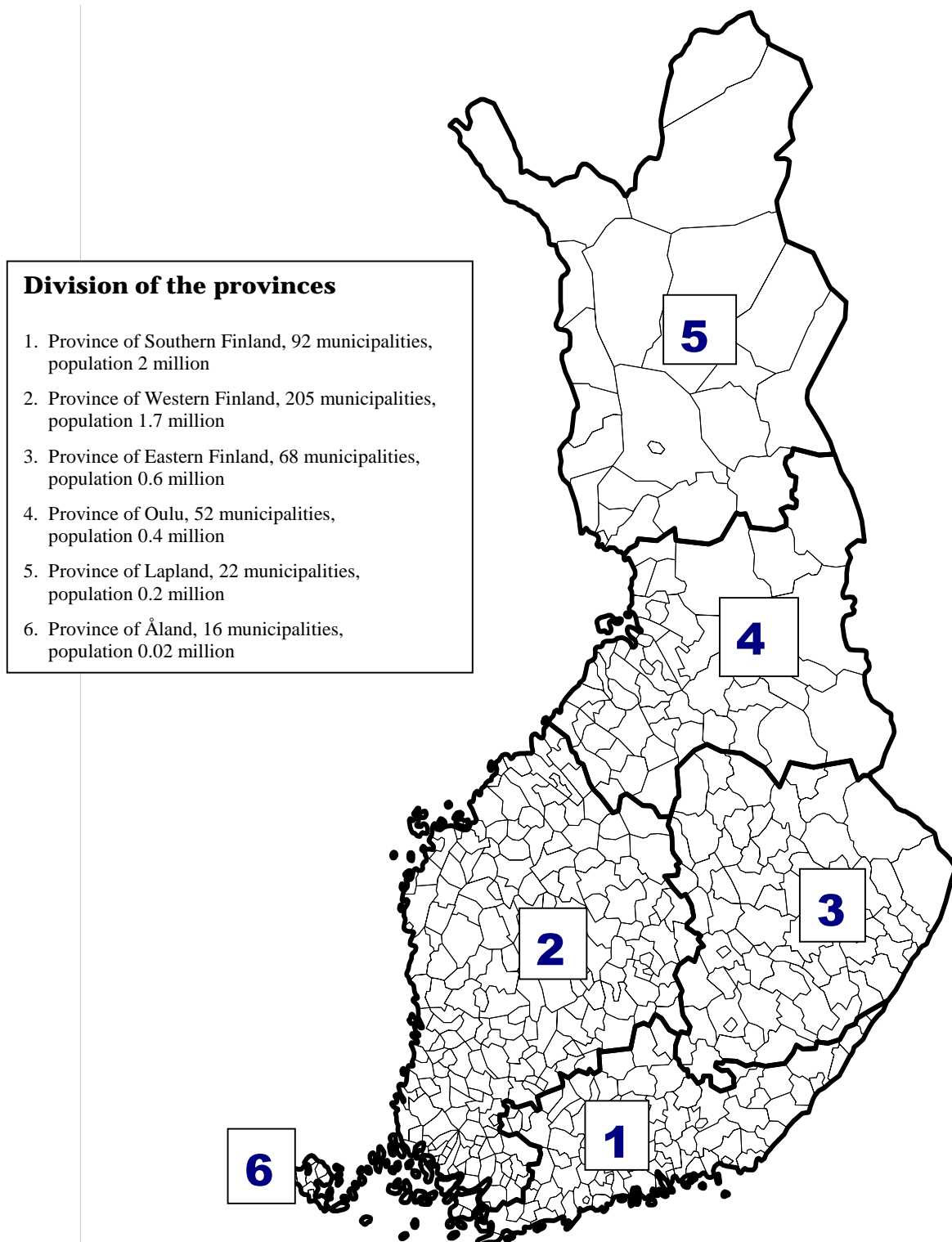
Finland is a bilingual country, its national languages being Finnish and Swedish. Swedish-speaking people account for about 5% of the population, amounting to 300 000. In addition, the Sámi (Lappish) language is spoken in the Sámi domicile area in Lapland. There are approximately 6 800 people who speak Sámi, 1 700 of them living in Finland. Other minorities include the Romany, of whom there are about 10,000. Immigrants represent 150 different nationalities in Finland.

The Finnish currency is the mark or *markka* (FIM). € 1 = FIM 5,945.

In 1998, Finnish wage and salary earners' average (gross) earnings for regular working hours were € 1 899 per month (FIM 11 300/month). The disposable income of households in 1998 amounted to € 11 412 per capita (FIM 67 900).

In the beginning of the 1990's, Finland suffered the deepest economic recession since the Second World War. The effects of the recession have shown themselves in the form of mass unemployment, for example. As tax revenues diminished, the State and the local authorities also reduced their services.

**Figure 1. Division of the provinces since 1997**



## 1.2. Government policy

THE FINNISH Government Programme adopted in the spring of 1999 contains several objectives and policy definitions, which are important from the perspective of early childhood education and care and pre-school education. The general objective is for Finland to be an equitable and motivating, socially sound and undivided state. The future of Finland and of Finns is strongly linked to knowledge and expertise as well as the ability to utilise this know-how and expertise and to create new innovations. Raising the level of expertise of the whole population will *support Finland's development as a civilised nation*.

According to the Government Programme, Finland will be developed into an *information society*, in which knowledge and expertise will be part of the culture and the key factor in production. Finland is seeking to play a pioneering role in implementing a humane and sustainable information society. This implies, for example, the development of electronic services, as well as of cultural and information content that is easy-to-use, safe and available to everyone because of microcomputers, digital television and mobile phones. The strategic development of the Finnish information society will emphasise co-operation between different sectors and administrative branches and also co-operation on an international level.

According to its Programme, in terms of family policy, the Government will, among other things,

- promote such conditions and co-operation between various quarters that support responsible parenthood, a secure growth environment and progress towards balanced adult maturity;
- develop morning and afternoon care for small schoolchildren;
- safeguard varied alternatives in the organisation of child care;
- endeavour to increase the flexibility of day care so that it will better correspond to the needs of early childhood education and care and the changed labour market;
- investigate the possibilities to create a system that would guarantee fathers the right to a month of parental leave; and
- advance equality in working life and the implementation of good practices in equality issues in working communities.

As explained in more detail below, the Government will introduce pre-school education free of charge for six-year-olds in 2000–2001. The reform of pre-school education will be incorporated into the concept of *lifelong learning*. According to the Government Programme, Finland will also investigate the feasibility of lowering the age of starting compulsory education in the 9-year basic education from the year 2003.

## 1.3. Provision of social and health care services in Finland

IN FINLAND, the local (municipal) authorities are responsible for providing social and health care services. The local authorities may provide the services themselves or they may form federations of municipalities together with one or more neighbouring municipalities for the provision of such services. The local authorities may also purchase the services externally from another local authority or from a private service provider, for example. Le-

gislation does not contain detailed provisions on the extent, content or arrangement of services, which means that social and health care services may vary between municipalities. However, legislation does specify the essential basic services, which the local authorities will have to provide.

The services are funded with local taxes levied by the local authorities and through state subsidies allocated by the State to the municipalities. In addition, various fees are collected from clients. The proportion of the municipal social and health care expenditure paid by the State is determined according to the age distribution, morbidity rate, population density, surface area and the financial situation of the individual municipalities.

The municipalities form six regional administrative units, or provinces, which are administered by the Provincial State Offices. They direct and supervise social and health care services within their respective areas.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health leads and steers the national development and operating policies of social security and social and health care services. Together with the Government and Parliament, it lays down the national guidelines for social and health policy, prepares social and health care legislation and major reforms and steers their implementation and maintains contacts with the political decision-making level. There is a public expert centre, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (Stakes), operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The tasks of Stakes include acting as a unit conducting research and development and acting as a statistical authority.

### **Overview of Finnish family policy**

The objective of Finnish family policy is to create a safe growth environment for children and to guarantee parents the material and psychological resources to bear and raise children. Society uses various forms of financial support and child-care arrangements to level out the expenses that children bring.

Finland started to construct its family policy support system in 1948, when the *child benefit system* was introduced. In those days, child benefit had a considerable bearing on the subsistence of families with children, and its significance was also evident in society as a whole. In 1950, when child benefit was the only significant family policy benefit, aid for family expenses accounted for almost 4% of the gross domestic product.

After the introduction of child benefit, the development of family policy remained in the background for a few decades, when the focus was on the creation of the health insurance and pension security systems. The situation changed again in the mid-1970's, when family policy issues began to attract increasing attention. As the real value of child benefit had declined, the amount was gradually increased so that, by the beginning of the 1990's, its real value had approximately tripled compared with the early 1970's.

However, a factor even more significant than the increased child benefit was investment in the development of child-care systems for small children, which started in the first half of



the 1970's. In the majority of Finnish families with children under school age, both parents are gainfully employed. As distinct from many other countries, mothers of small children also generally work full-time. In this situation, a reliable, safe and reasonably priced day-care system is of vital importance.

The Act on Children's Day Care came into force more than a quarter of a century ago, in 1973. According to the Act, the obligation to organise day care for children under school age rests with the local authorities. The local authorities may provide day care either in day-care centres or in the form of family day care. Since 1990, parents have enjoyed an *unconditional right to day care for children under three years of age* either in municipal day care or by receiving *child home care allowance* in order to care for their children at home. As from 1996, *the parents of all children under school age* have enjoyed the *right to a day-care place* provided by their local authority. Since August 1997, it has been possible for families to receive private child-care allowance for providing their children with private care.

#### **1.4. Provision of educational services in Finland**

IN FINLAND, each local authority is obligated to provide basic education for children and young people of compulsory school age (7–16) residing in the municipality. A local authority may organise education independently or jointly with other local authorities, or by purchasing it from an association or foundation, which has been granted a licence to organise such education by the Government. Moreover, municipalities with hospitals are also obligated to provide instruction for pupils who are currently patients at such hospitals in so far as it is possible bearing in mind the pupil's health and other circumstances. A municipality with both Finnish- and Swedish-speaking inhabitants is obligated to provide basic education separately for both language groups. The language of instruction may also be the Sámi or Romany language or sign language.

Instruction and the necessary schoolbooks and other learning materials, as well as work equipment and materials are provided to pupils free of charge. Those attending instruction must be provided with a properly organised and supervised balanced meal free of charge every school day.

If the journey to school of a pupil in basic education exceeds five kilometres or if it is difficult, taxing or dangerous for the pupil in other ways, then the pupil has the right to free transportation or suitable assistance.

There is a development and evaluation centre, the National Board of Education, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

#### **Overview of Finnish education policy**

The objective of basic education is to support pupils' growth towards humanity and ethically responsible membership of society, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary in life. The objective of pre-school education, as part of early childhood educa-

tion and care, is to improve children's learning conditions. The education must also promote civilisation and equality in society and pupils' opportunities to participate in education and to develop themselves during their lives. A further objective is to safeguard a sufficient level of equal opportunities for education throughout the country.

The objective of general upper secondary education is to promote the development of students into good, balanced and civilised individuals and members of society and to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary in further studies, working life, their personal interests and the versatile development of their personality. Moreover, the education must support the students' opportunities for lifelong learning and self-development during their lives.

### 1.5. The Finnish ECEC system

THE FINNISH system of early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy may be described with the concept of EduCare. It fulfils both the day-care needs of small children and the educational and instructional perspective.

The concept of EduCare has been used internationally to describe more extensively the ECEC model of a Nordic welfare state, where care, education and instruction have been combined to form an integrated whole and where play is a central tool of pedagogical activities. Children's day care and other systems supporting care for small children are thus part of early childhood education and care.

Alongside the day-care system, the opportunity for parents to stay at home to care for their new-born and small children has been promoted in Finland since the 1970's. For this purpose, maternity, paternity and parental leaves and allowances are available. In addition, since the mid-1980's, parents have also been able to arrange their children's care by means of child home care allowance, which is an exceptional system even in international terms. The child home care allowance has enabled parents either to care for their children themselves or to choose a place in private day care. As from August 1997, however, the child home care allowance is being granted mainly to parents and there are separate provisions on private child-care allowance.

The reform of pre-school education for six-year-olds is being implemented in Finland as a 'mixed model', in which the local authorities may decide whether to provide pre-school education within day care or school system. Despite of where pre-school education is provided it has to be organised according to the Act of education and the core curricula for pre-school education. Children attending pre-school education still have a subjective right to day care as a complement to the pre-school education. Among other things, the EduCare tradition is reflected in Finland in the strong opinion that demand for day care must be taken into account in decisions on pre-school education. In 1998, 53% of six-year-olds were in full-time day-care.

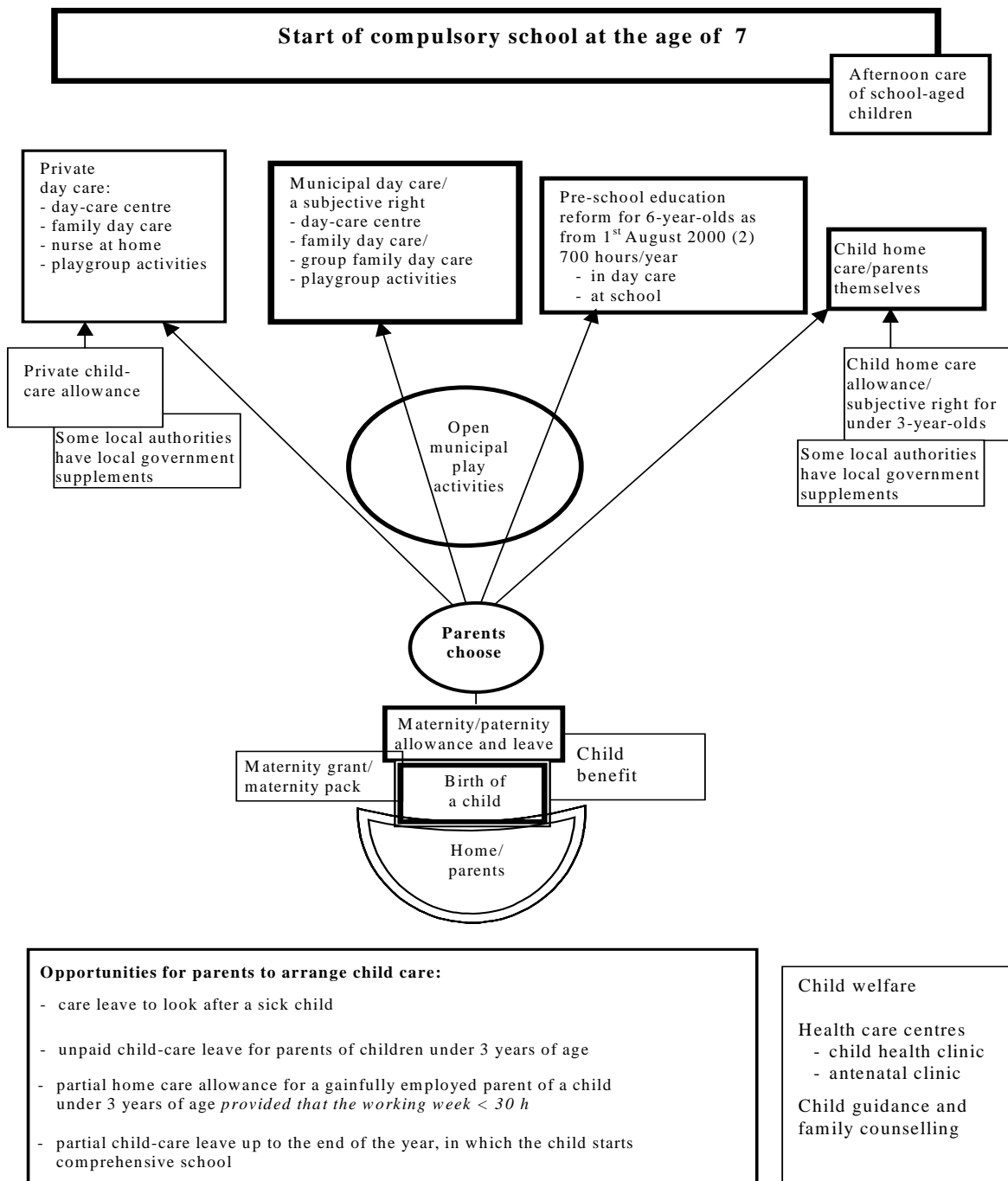
In addition to the above-mentioned mixed model, there is also good reason to call the pre-school reform a co-operative model. Implementation of the reform of pre-school education for six-year-olds requires close co-operation between the social and educational sectors at

all levels, whether nationally, regionally or locally. Pre-school reform is also developing the EduCare system in administrative terms.

The Finnish ECEC system and the concepts it covers are illustrated in Figure 2. The concepts shown in the figure will be explained in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Pre-school reform will be described separately in Chapter 12.

Figure 2. The ECEC system for children aged 0–6 in Finland



- 1) In the Finnish system, a child and the child's parents or other guardians are essentially provided with equal rights irrespective of the child's place of birth and care (e.g. in cases of foster care and adoption).
- 2) Pre-school reform is being implemented between 2000–2001. The local authorities will be obligated to provide pre-school education as from 1st August 2001.

## SECTION I: DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXTS

### 2. STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN SOCIETY

#### 2.1. Changes in families

ACCORDING TO the current definition of the Statistics Finland, a *family* in Finland is defined as only being composed of people who live together. A family is made up of

- married or cohabiting parents and their unmarried child or children, or one of the parents with his or her unmarried child or children; and
- married or cohabiting partners, who have no children permanently living with them.

In terms of both married and cohabiting couples, the family types are divided into those with and those without children. In addition, there are family types where only the father or the mother lives with the children.

In addition to unmarried biological or adopted children, irrespective of age, one partner's unmarried children are also considered as being the children of the family, with the exception of foster children. Consequently, the statistical division of children by birth is as follows: parents' biological children – i.e. either the parents' common children or those of the father or the mother only – and adopted children.

The definition of family as interpreted by statistics and administration reflects the impact of social change, but the reaction comes with some delay. The concept of *mother of the family* was still applied in the census of 1960. A woman was defined as being the mother of the family in families both with and without children. Since the census of 1970, the concept in use has been *partner*.

The change in the definition of family can also be seen in the concept of *single-parent family*. The term used as recently as the early 1970's would translate as *incomplete family*. The previous definitions of single- or two-parent families have been entirely excluded from statistics based on the census of 1990. They now only refer to a married or cohabiting couple with children, or to a mother with children and a father with children.

*Cohabiting families* with children have been included in the Family Statistics since 1980, and they have been equated with families, in which the partners are married. In the census of 1990, cohabiting couples without children were also defined as being families for the first time. The criterion for this definition was cohabitation of a man and a woman, provided that they were not siblings and that their age difference did not exceed 15 years. Prior to that, a cohabiting couple without children was not recorded in statistics as being a family.

Another example of the change in family statistics following the change in everyday life is the concept of a *stepfamily*. In the census of 1990, a stepfamily is understood to mean a family, in which not all children are common to the partners. The spread of stepfamilies has caused the public administration problems in terms of determining the criteria for charging for children's day-care, for example.

Although the relative proportion of married couples among families with children has been falling continuously, most families with children (76%) are still supported by a married couple. The corresponding figure in 1960 was almost 90%. The proportion of cohabiting couples has increased since 1980, when they were first included in statistics. Cohabiting couples account for a tenth (9.3%) of families with children. Single-parent families are predominantly families with the mother and her children, which account for a tenth of all families. Nine out of ten children under school age live in families with two parents or other guardians.

The proportion of families with one child has varied. In 1960, these accounted for 37%; the proportion increased up until the 1980's, when families with one child accounted for almost half (48%). The figure has subsequently dropped and stood at 44% in 1998.

The most considerable change in the last few decades has occurred in terms of large families. In 1960, almost one in every six families (16%) still had four or more children aged under 18 living at home. In 1990, such families accounted for 3.5%, and the figure for 1998 was 2.0%.

The relative proportion of those aged 0–6 in the entire population has been diminishing continuously. A hundred years ago, the relative proportion of children under seven years of age was about a fifth (18.3%) of the whole population. In 1995, the corresponding proportion was less than a tenth (8.9%) of the whole population. The prognosis for 2010 shows a further decline and stands at 7.6%.

## **2.2. Women's entry into working life**

WOMEN STARTED to enter the labour market in Finland as a result of the change in the economic structure at the turn of the century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since the turn of the century, it had become common that adult women were supporting themselves – until they got married. At first, women functioned privately as maids in families and gradually moved into factories and public services. For a long time, however, agriculture was the operating environment, in which women were employed.

In order to function in an occupation, women either had to work away from the home or acquire work to be done at home. In both cases, they had to arrange the care of any children themselves. The proportion of services started to increase after the Second World War. The amount of women in gainful employment subsequently extended to married women.

Initially, most gainfully employed women were unmarried. In 1920, married women accounted for about a tenth (9.8%) of female labour. In 1917, for example, only 8.5% of all gainfully employed kindergarten teachers were married. In the pre-industrial era, married women rarely worked away from the home. However, they often gained extra income through various forms of cottage industry work. This proportion of women's employment has often been omitted from statistics, because it may have been seasonal and was practised privately. Gainful employment among married women started to increase principally after the Second World War at the same time as the number of people deriving their livelihood from agriculture was on the decline.

Between 1950–1970, the proportion of married women in female labour grew from 34% to 58%. In 1970, the increase in the volume of the total labour force already resulted from the growth in the volume of female labour. This change occurred so that the significance of industry as a source of livelihood for women declined, whereas trade and other services became more important.

Since 1950, statistics on women's involvement in gainful employment have also been compiled from the perspective of motherhood. Slightly over a third (37%) of women with children under seven years of age were gainfully employed in 1957. In addition to women in general, employment of married women also increased dramatically during and after the 1960's. This phase particularly embraced radical growth in the public service system dominated by women. In addition, the level of education among women has also risen. In 1998 there were 23.7% women of the whole population, who had an academic degree. As a point of comparison, the percentage of men was 21.2.

About four out of five married or cohabiting women with children under seven years of age have been included in the labour force since the late 1970's. Since 1986, some decrease can be discerned in the participation in the labour force of married or cohabiting women with children aged under seven, which is due to unemployment. Gainful employment among mothers of small children is regulated by the number of children, on the one hand, and the children's age, on the other.

### 2.3. Families with children aged 0 – 7 and the parents' employment situation

IN 1998, a total of 300 989 families had children under seven years of age. Their distribution by type of family was as follows:

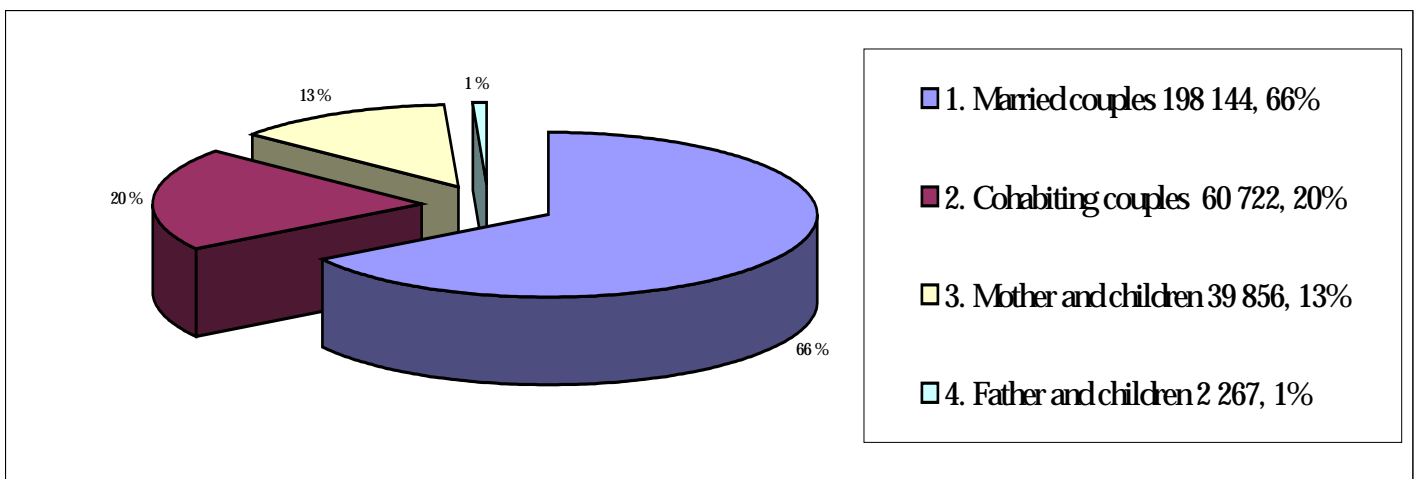


FIGURE 3. Family types with children under 7 years of age

In 58% of families headed by married couples, both parents are gainfully employed (Table 1). Unemployment or economic inactivity occurs more often in cohabiting families compared with families headed by married couples. In relative terms, the number of unemployed or economically inactive people is highest among single parent families, most of with a mother and children.

On average, both parents or the single parent are gainfully employed in two out of four families.

TABLE 1. Families with children under 7 years of age in 1998 in terms of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity<sup>1</sup>

Employment	Married couple %	Cohabiting couple %	Single parent %
Both parents or single parent employed	57.9	48.1	43.4
One employed, other unemployed	6.6	15.0	–
One employed, other economically inactive	31.0	26.0	–
Both parents or single parent unemployed	0.9	2.1	11.2
One unemployed, other economically inactive	2.0	4.3	–
Both parents or single parent economically inactive	1.7	4.5	25.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

<sup>1</sup> The labour market consists of the labour force currently in employment and unemployed job applicants. Economic inactive people include those who are excluded from the labour market in calculations for various reasons, such as housewives, people who have retired from work early and students. These groups are not in work but they do not actively seek work. Those who are on various types of leave such as parental leave are counted among the gainfully employed.

### 3. THE SYSTEM OF FAMILY POLICY BENEFITS

THE OBJECTIVE of Finnish family policy benefits is to cover the costs arising from child care so as to prevent children from becoming an excessive financial burden on their families. In 1997, family policy benefits to families with children amounted to about FIM 25 billion (€ 4.2 billion), which accounts for about 4% of the gross domestic product. Families with children receive the majority of support in the form of child benefit and day-care services. The concepts of the system of family policy benefits are explained in more detail in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with the system of children's day care. In this context, reference is also made to the figure illustrating the Finnish ECEC system, as shown in Chapter 1.5 (Figure 2).



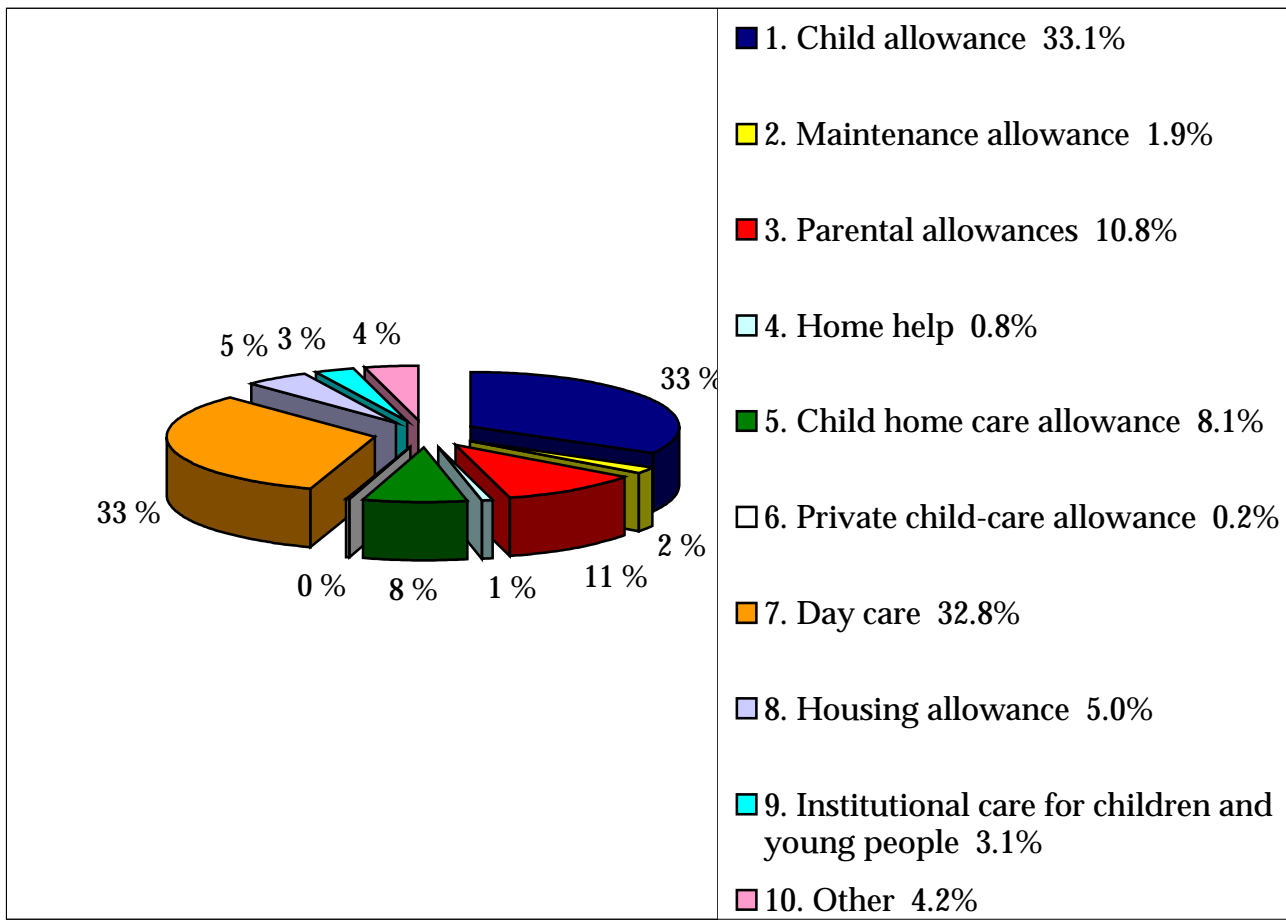


FIGURE 4. Distribution of family benefits in 1998

### 3.1. Child benefit

IN FINLAND, *child benefit* is the most significant means of levelling out the expenses between families with and those without children. It is paid from State funds for the maintenance of all children aged under 17 who are resident in Finland. Child benefit is a form of income exempt from tax and is not dependent on a family's financial status. The amount of child benefit depends on the number of children in the family. Child benefit is currently estimated to cover about half of the expenses children cost families.

TABLE 2. Amount of child benefit in 1999

Number of children	Amount per month
1 <sup>st</sup> child	FIM 535 / € 90
2 <sup>nd</sup> child	FIM 657 / € 110
3 <sup>rd</sup> child	FIM 779 / € 131
4 <sup>th</sup> child	FIM 901 / € 151
5 <sup>th</sup> and each subsequent child	FIM 1 023 / € 172

Single parents receive an additional FIM 200 (€ 33) per child.

### 3.2. Benefits available on the birth of a child

ON THE grounds of pregnancy, childbirth or child care, a mother and father can take *maternity, paternity or parental leave*, receiving maternity, paternity or parental allowance, respectively. Maternity, paternity and parental allowances are financed by the national health insurance system, where financial contributions are covered by the employer and the employee. The benefits are paid by the Social Insurance Institution.

The maternity allowance period preceding birth promotes the health of the mother and the unborn child by enabling the mother to be off work for some time before the birth. During the maternity allowance period following the birth, the mother can recuperate from childbirth and care for her new-born baby. The parental allowance period enables the family to choose whether they want the mother or the father to care for the child at home. The paternity allowance aims to help the father to participate in caring for the child and to support a positive development of the relationship between father and child.

#### Maternity grant

All expectant mothers resident in Finland, whose pregnancy has lasted for at least 154 days, are entitled to *maternity grant* paid by the State. In order to be eligible, an expectant mother must go to an antenatal clinic or doctor for a health check before the end of the fourth month of pregnancy.

An expectant mother may choose to take the maternity grant either as a cash benefit or in the form of a maternity pack. In 1999, the cash benefit was FIM 760 (€ 128). The maternity pack contains child-care items, a sleeping bag and clothing, including a playsuit and various other basic garments that a new-born baby needs.

The maternity pack is more popular than the cash benefit, with 76% of expectant mothers choosing the pack; the proportion is even higher among those expecting their first child.

### **Maternity leave and maternity allowance**

An expectant mother may start her maternity leave no earlier than 50 and no later than 30 workdays before the calculated time of the birth. The duration of maternity leave is 88 workdays (105 days including Saturdays), which amounts to slightly more than 17 weeks. The mother receives maternity allowance for the period of maternity leave, the amount of which is determined according to income earned, being 60% of an employees pay, being at least FIM 1 600 (€ 269) per month.

An expectant mother in a dangerous job is entitled to special maternity leave and special maternity allowance, unless her employer can assign her to an alternative task. Where necessary, special maternity leave may be granted for the entire duration of pregnancy. Dangerous work includes occupations involving a risk of exposure to chemicals or radiation.

### **Paternity leave and paternity allowance**

In connection with the birth of a child, a father may take 5–10 workdays (1–2 weeks, 6–12 days including Saturdays) of paternity leave while the mother is on maternity leave. The father is also entitled to an additional five workdays of paternity leave during the maternity or parental allowance period. For these periods, he receives paternity allowance. The paternity allowance payable for the period of paternity leave is earnings-related like maternity allowance.

Paternity leave has been gaining in popularity continuously. In 1997, almost 60% of fathers of babies exercised their rights to paternity leave.

### **Parental leave and parental allowance**

After the period of maternity leave, either one of the parents may take parental leave. The duration of parental leave is 133 workdays (slightly more than 26 weeks, 158 days including Saturdays) and will be extended by 50 workdays (60 days including Saturdays) per child in case of multiple births. Similar to maternity and paternity allowance, parental allowance is also determined on the basis of income earned. On average, parental allowance accounts for 60% of an employee's pay, being at least FIM 1 600 (€ 269) per month.

To date, fathers have only exercised their right to parental leave to a modest extent. In 1997, less than 2% of fathers took parental leave.

After the parental leave period, families have three different alternatives supported by public funding to provide for their child's care:

1. caring for the child at home on child-care leave and receiving child home care allowance up to the age of three;
2. having the child cared for at a private day-care place with private child-care allowance until the child goes to school; or
3. having the child cared for in municipal day care until the child goes to school.

### 3.3. Support for the care of small children

A SYSTEM has been build to help families arrange care for small children. According to this system families can choose either public day care or financial support. The system is described in figure 2. (Chapter 1.5.)

The care systems for small children have been developed with the objective of offering families various child-care options so as to take the different needs of families into account as well as possible. Women's active participation in working life has promoted the development of legislation governing care for small children and parents' employment security.

#### **Child-care leave and child home care allowance**

The parents of a small child have the right to take unpaid child-care leave from their work until the child is three years old. Either parent may take the leave, but they cannot both be on child-care leave at the same time. After the period of child-care leave, an employee has the right to return to their former job or to another comparable job.

Child-care leave is unpaid leave, but the family can receive *child home care allowance* paid by the local authority for the period of the leave. The allowance is available to a family with a child under three years of age, if the family does not opt for municipal day care or private child-care allowance to arrange the child's care. Child home care allowance is also paid for other children in the same family, who are under school age and not in municipal day care.

Child home care allowance may be granted immediately upon the end of the parental allowance period, and it is payable until the youngest child in the family reaches the age of three or goes to municipal day care, or the family chooses private child-care allowance. Child home care allowance is primarily used by parents to care for their children at home. Women account for 96% of the beneficiaries. Mothers caring for their children at home are mostly less educated women, whose families usually have more than one children under school age. Use of the child home care allowance is higher among low-income families.

Child home care allowance includes a basic care allowance paid separately for each eligible child. The amount of basic care allowance for one child under three years of age is FIM 1 500 (€ 252) per month (in 1999), with FIM 500 (€ 84) per month for each additional child under the age of three, and FIM 300 (€ 50) per month for each child, who has reached the age of three but is still under school age.

In addition to the basic care allowance, families may also receive a supplement, depending on their size and income. It is only paid for one child and the maximum amount is FIM 1 000 (€ 168) per month. Child home care allowance is taxable income and is funded by local authorities.

### **Partial child-care leave**

A parent is entitled to an unpaid reduction of working hours, known as partial child-care leave, until the end of the year, during which the child starts school. Each employer and employee will agree on partial child-care leave and its detailed arrangements as they see fit. Parents cannot both take partial child-care leave simultaneously.

### **Partial home care allowance**

Partial home care allowance is payable to a gainfully employed parent of a child under the age of three, if the parent's average working week does not exceed 30 hours due to child care. The amount of partial home care allowance is FIM 375 (€ 63) per month (in 1999), and it is taxable income and is funded by local authorities.

### **Private child-care allowance**

Local authorities may pay private child-care allowance to look after a child under school age resident in Finland either to a private child-care minder or private day-care centre of the parents' choice. The allowance is payable after the end of the parental allowance period until the child reaches school age. The allowance will cease if the child is transferred to municipal day care.

Private child-care allowance consists of a basic care allowance, which is FIM 700 (€ 118) per child per month, and of a supplement, which depends on the size and income of the individual family. Private child-care allowance is paid directly to the child-care minder and is taxable as the provider's income. For more information on private day care, see Chapter 4.5.

### **Housing allowance, maintenance allowance and home help**

The objective of providing *support for housing* is to make it easier for families to acquire accommodation of adequate size at a reasonable price and to ensure reasonable housing standards. Forms of housing support intended for families with children are housing allowance, government-subsidised housing loans and other interest subsidy, as well as tax relief for housing loans.

Housing allowance is a means to level out the costs of housing for people with low income by paying part of their reasonable housing expenses from the state funds. The amount of housing allowance depends on the size of the family, its income, housing expenses, and the size and age of the property, among other things.

Children from families where parents have divorced are entitled to *maintenance allowance* if one of their parents has failed to pay the child maintenance set by a court order or a maintenance agreement. The social authorities will collect unpaid maintenance payments

from the liable parent. Maintenance allowance is also payable to a child born out of wedlock, where paternity has not been established, and to a child adopted by a single adoptive parent.

In most part temporary *home help services* are provided on the grounds of reduced functional capacity, family circumstances, strain, illness, childbirth, disability or other similar reason for those who need help to manage tasks and functions of ordinary life. Home help services are chargeable depending on families income. Both maintenance allowance and home help services are funded by local authorities.

### **Other forms of support**

In practical terms, all expectant mothers and newborn babies with their parents are within the system of *antenatal and child health clinics* in Finland. The objective of clinic activities is to safeguard the best possible health for expectant mothers, unborn foetuses, newborn babies and whole families. Monitoring and ensuring the well-being of mothers and unborn foetuses, as well as preparing mothers and fathers for childbirth, have traditionally been among the main functions of antenatal clinics. Child health clinics in turn focus on supporting and monitoring children's growth and on providing guidance in the new life situation. More recently, the work has increasingly emphasised promotion of the psychological and psychosocial well-being of families. The forms of activity include agreed periodic family visits to the clinic and, where necessary, meetings at home with the family. The clinic system is part of the basic municipal social and health care services.

The task of *child guidance and family counselling* is to support and promote the positive development of children and families. To this end, local authorities organise guidance, counselling and provide other expert assistance in issues related to human relationships, family life and the upbringing of children. The work carried out by child guidance and family counselling clinics is based on multidisciplinary teamwork, involving physicians, psychologists and social workers. The system is part of the basic municipal social and health care services.

The parents of a child under the age of ten are entitled to get four days' leave from work when a child *falls ill* in order to arrange child care. Granting leave requires that both parents or the only parent be gainfully employed.

## **4. DAY CARE**

### **4.1. From kindergarten to day-care centre**

THE *KINDERGARTEN* activities developed by Friedrich Fröbel in Germany form the background for the emergence of kindergarten activities in Finland. These activities were introduced into Finland in two phases.

The first stage was when Uno Cygnaeus was assigned the task of planning public folk education in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. He incorporated influences of kindergarten activities both

into the pedagogical operating method and into subjects in the form of craft, physical education and drawing, for example. Cygnaeus also proposed that kindergarten activities, similar to crèche activities, be linked as part of the public school system. Cygnaeus' folk school proposal of 1860 would have determined the pedagogical content of rural village schools and urban nursery schools on the basis of kindergarten activities. However, the proposal failed to gain endorsement in this respect.

The second stage of the introduction of kindergarten activities in Finland occurred as a private activity, when Hanna Rothman set up a folk kindergarten in 1888. Rothman had supplemented her education as a teacher of small children by acquiring a kindergarten teacher's education in Germany. She initiated folk kindergarten activities, which aimed at preventive child welfare work among the children of the poorer section of the population. From the very beginning, a distinct objective was to provide child care while mothers were at work. The pedagogy applied to kindergarten activities was a practical solution to this objective. Folk kindergartens spread gradually, starting from cities and industrial towns.

The *crèche* for children under three years of age was intended as a child-care place primarily while mothers were at work. A mother could be working a few hours per day or have a regular full-time job. Crèches also had to be prepared to offer round-the-clock care in cases when children were not collected or were being collected by someone under the influence of alcohol. Children were cared for and provided with nourishing meals. Children in crèches were not regarded as being in need of actual education at this stage. Fairly soon, the crèche also became part of the second stage of the kindergarten ideology, i.e. the folk kindergarten.

In 1913, kindergartens were granted state subsidies for the first time, and since 1917, state budgets have regularly included an appropriation for kindergarten activities. Municipal kindergartens have only been established since 1919. *The Act on State Subsidies for Kindergartens* was passed in 1927. Subsequently, the municipalisation of kindergartens started in earnest. Crèche activities were excluded from this state-guaranteed financial aid. It was only in 1970 that an appropriation for crèches and extended crèches was included in the state budget.

In administrative terms, kindergartens operated under the National Board of General Education up until 1924, when they were transferred to the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs. There were debates about combining kindergarten and the first two forms of folk school in the 1920's.

The *Child Welfare Act* issued in 1936 provided that a local authority should, where necessary, either establish or maintain *institutions supporting and complementing upbringing at home* and undertake other measures for this purpose, or support those institutions established or activities provided by private organisations or people that were deemed to fulfil the said purpose. Kindergartens were brought under the municipal welfare boards. In the context of the Act, day care was conceptually defined in terms of *socially oriented day care*. Its forms of operation included crèches, day-care centres and kindergartens, but also organised neighbourly help, play activities at recreation grounds and playground work, as well as child-parking. Home help was also partially regarded as being a form of socially oriented day care.

The social debates that preceded the *Act on Children's Day Care of 1973* were conducted over the course of the quarter of a century between 1947–1973. In terms of time, the debate focused on the early 1970's and, in terms of content, on a few themes. These included, firstly, guaranteeing state subsidies to other forms of care besides kindergartens, which had enjoyed this statutory right since 1927. The second theme was the setting up of a single legislative framework to regulate children's day care and proposals to that effect. The third theme was child care at home, concerning family day care or care provided at home by parents themselves.

Through this above-mentioned new statute, the concept of a day-care centre became a new form of day care. Family day care was considered to be an equal form of public day care in terms of day-care fees, for example, but also because of public control. The Act on Children's Day Care requires that each local authority provides day care to such an extent and in such forms of operation as is required by the demand in the municipality. The Act on Children's Day Care combined the preceding institutional day-care activities under the title of day-care centre and embraced family day care as a legitimate form of care. Prior to the Act, different forms of care were also unequal in respect of their users in that kindergarten activities were less expensive than other forms of day care. The Act on Children's Day Care harmonised the day-care fees irrespective of form.

#### **4.2. History of family day care**

AS DEMAND for children's day care grew rapidly in Finland in the 1960's due to more and more mothers finding gainful employment, women helped each other. Some women acquired a job away from the home, whereas others employed themselves by taking another family's children in their care for a fee in addition to their own.

By looking after other children in their own homes, women – family child minders – were a decisive help in the day-care crisis of the 1960's, when there was a severe shortage of day-care places. Indeed, family day care became the most extensive form of home-based gainful employment in quantitative terms. At the end of the 1980's, family child minders accounted for 40% of all people in home-based gainful employment.

Different structural factors could be discerned underlying the decision to become a family child minder. The family-based economy, which had traditionally been agrarian, no longer employed a sufficient number of women. The family unit could not subsist financially on the income one parent earned. Moreover, the family unit had become smaller. The situation was also influenced by the fact that the public child-care machinery in the 1960's, as well as in the early 1970's, was primarily dimensioned to serve single parents and people without means. Another reason for becoming a family child minder was also the desire to look after one's own children at home.

Family day care was first mentioned in official Finnish documents as a new operating form of child care in 1951.



The first official guidelines for supervised family day care were issued in 1971. They stated that family day care had become a popular activity complementing institutional services. The local authorities were advised to intensify control and their own involvement in the organisation and training for family day care. The objective set was to organise family day care based on contracts of employment. The local authorities were further advised to inform families, by means of the mass media, of the fact that they could always turn to authorities when there were problems related to children's family day care.

In some cases, family day care was regarded as being more appropriate than institutional day care. Grounds for this included its flexibility. One element of flexibility was that this activity could also be provided in sparsely populated areas with few children. Family day care was regarded as being suitable for emotionally sensitive children and those susceptible to infections. This form of care was also considered to be appropriate for slowly developing children and those with multiple disabilities. It was perceived that family day care also lent itself to tending children with minor illnesses. Furthermore, it was considered suitable for schoolchildren as well.

Bearing in mind that family day care was provided at homes based on traditional upbringing at home without any particular vocational training, it was presented with demanding expectations in terms of care. The applicability of family day care to difficult care situations has not so much been justified with family child minders' vocational skills, but rather with their personal qualities, traditional family know-how and the conditions of family day care: at home – in a small group.

The stage at which family day care took shape and became organised occurred in Finland primarily between 1964 and 1972. The 1973 Act on Children's Day Care legitimised family day care as an equal form of day care.

At the beginning of the 1970's, family day care was the target of developmental visions, which waited some twenty years to materialise. These included family child minders' operating at municipal facilities and combining a day-care centre and family day care as a single operating unit. Today, part of family day care is carried out in the form of group family day care. This means that the local authority concerned has designated the facilities, where 2–3 family child minders work together. In many municipalities, the administration of family day care has been combined with that of day-care centres.

### **4.3. From folk school to comprehensive school**

THE FOLK school system was established in Finland in 1866, but the act governing general compulsory education came into effect in 1921. In Finland, children traditionally start school at a higher age (at 7) compared with other parts of Europe. The explanations for the late school-start have included factors related to geographical location and late industrialisation. As a result of the sparse population in the country, journeys to school were long, and it was deemed that children should be physically developed enough in order to manage these long journeys, especially during the dark and cold seasons. In a predominantly agricultural Finland, there was no need to bring children within the sphere of compulsory education or early childhood education and care too early.

A hundred years after the folk school system was established, it was time for concrete change. Traditionally, people had left folk school and gone on to civic school and from there to working life, or on to lower secondary school and from there to upper secondary school, which opened the way to an academic career. The time was right to combine folk school, civic school and lower secondary school into a 9-year comprehensive school. In Finland, the transition to comprehensive school took place gradually between 1972 and 1977, starting in Northern Finland. The first comprehensive school curriculum to be implemented in its entirety across the whole country was for the 1981–82 school year.

Lowering the age of starting compulsory school and the development of pre-school education were particularly prevalent issues in the 1970's. The *Act on the Premises of the School System* alone contained the notion that the municipal school system could include a kindergarten or pre-school classes. Different pre-school committees set in the 70's presented various alternatives and approaches to developing day care for children under school age and to reforming initial education at comprehensive school. However, the objectives of these committees failed to materialise at the time.

In the 1980's, policy definitions in society developed in the direction that reforms were no longer formulated on the basis of integrated systemic solutions. Instead, there was a preference to develop the services provided by existing organisations. The objectives, contents and implementation methods of early childhood education and care and pre-school education for six-year-olds were developed both in the 1970's and in the 1980's.

The pre-school experiment was first launched in 1971 in co-operation between school and social administrations in both comprehensive schools and day-care centres. At the time, curricula and pre-school models were developed in various operating environments. These experiments involved research at three universities. As a result of experimental activities, opportunities for the provision of pre-school education at comprehensive schools were created starting from 1985, which, however, required a licence from the Ministry of Education. The purpose was to introduce pre-school education into sparsely populated areas, where day-care services were unavailable.

#### 4.4. Municipal day care today

IN FINLAND, every child under school age has an unconditional *right* to day care provided by the local authority once the mother or father's period of parental allowance comes to an end, irrespective of the parents' financial status or whether or not they are in work. According to the Act on Children's Day Care, the objectives of day care are to support parents in their responsibilities to raise their children and to promote children's personal and balanced development together with their parents. Extending the unconditional right to day care to apply to all children under school age has emphasised the significance of day care in terms of early childhood education, in addition to its care aspect.

Local authorities provide day care at *day-care centres*, at group family day-care centres and in family day care at the child-care minder's home or in the form of group family day care. In addition, several local authorities organise supervised play activities open to everyone in playgrounds and at open day-care centres.

The number of children in day care centres may vary from just over ten to a hundred children. The children are divided into care groups. In practical terms, these groups are further divided according to age into under 3-year-olds and 3–6-year-olds, although there is no legislation on the division into groups. In addition, it is also common to have 'sibling groups', where siblings of the same family are placed in the same group regardless of their age. Legislation controlling the number of staff at day-care centres states that there may be a maximum of four under 3-year-old children or seven 3–6-year-old children in full-time care to each practical children's nurse or kindergarten teacher. In part-time care, there may be 13 children of at least three years of age to each practical children's nurse or kindergarten teacher.

*Family day care* is mostly used as a form of care for the smallest children. A family child minder may have a maximum of four children in full-time care, including the child minder's own children under school age. In addition, a family child minder may provide part-time care for one child, who has started pre-school education or school.

In *group family day care*, 2 or 3 family child minders care for children usually in facilities provided by the local authority. Two child-care minders may have eight children in full-time care and an additional two part-time children, who have started pre-school education or school.

*Open day-care centres* are places for parents or child-care minders to visit along with their child or children. Activities in open day-care centres vary by municipality and unit. Open day-care centres aim to provide social networks for people caring for children at home. Large numbers of open day-care centres were established in municipalities in the second half of the 1980's and they have proved to be extremely popular. Some centres were closed down in the early 1990's due to the economic recession. However, new centres have been established again more recently to provide parents with an alternative form of day-care activities.

The majority of children in day care spend the whole day in care, but part-time care is also provided. The local authorities also provide *round-the-clock care* for children of parents doing shift work.

Children in day care receive the necessary meals depending on the length of their day. During a full-time day meals consist of breakfast, lunch and a light afternoon snack, in round-the-clock care also dinner and evening snack is provided. Meals are free, that is they are included in the monthly fee.

Traditionally, *children in need of special care and education* have been given priority over other children in the selection of day care. As the current subjective right to day care has become effective, this precedence still applies to children aged over seven in need of special care and education.

According to the Decree on Children's Day Care, children in need of special care and education must have a statement from a medical specialist or other expert, which will provide day-care staff with information on the child's strengths, areas to be developed, and needs in

terms of support and rehabilitation. Consequently, these experts determine who is in need of special care and education.

Depending on the nature of a child's need for special care and education, the child may be placed in an ordinary day-care centre without special support measures. Alternatively, he or she may have an assistant, or the group size may be reduced by one or more children because of the child. The child may also be in an integrated special group, where some of the children are in need of special care and education, and the rest of the group consists of other children (for example, five special care children and seven other children). In addition, a child may in some rare cases be placed in a special group with all children in need of special care and education. The two latter alternatives in particular can only be arranged in major cities.

The Finnish Act on Children's Day Care also allows for care to be arranged for schoolchildren. Due to the economic recession, many local authorities have been forced to reduce the provision of morning and afternoon care for schoolchildren, and resources have been focused on the provision of day care for those children, who enjoy a subjective right to day care.

There is no specific mention of schoolchildren's afternoon care in the Finnish Act on Children's Day Care. The Basic Education Act provides that it is possible to arrange club activities for pupils in connection with basic education. With the aid of club activities, it is possible to support pupils hobbies, to generate positive learning experiences and to create well-functioning social relationships both with adults and with other children. Club activities may be organised in co-operation between pupils' homes, schools, various municipal administrations, associations, organisations and companies operating in society as well as with representatives of working life. Responsibility for co-ordination of the activities rests with the local authority concerned.

#### **4.5. Private day care**

IN FINLAND, private day care was an innovative initiator and developer of the day-care system decades before the public administration gradually assumed responsibility for the activities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and on a large scale only since the 1973 Act on Children's Day Care. By that date, there had been different forms of children's day care in Finland for almost 80 years. However, these activities were moderate in quantitative terms. One of the objectives of the Act on Children's Day Care was to substantially increase the provision of day care each year. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 7, for example.

The 1973 Act on Children's Day Care incorporated private day care as part of public day care in such a manner that it was even given the opportunity to receive the same state subsidies as municipal day care, provided that selection of children rested with the local authority. Providers of private day care primarily consisted of non-governmental organisations and associations.

Now that the local authorities are obligated to provide for children's day care, each local authority may still decide for itself as to how to fulfil this obligation. The municipal strategy determines the extent to which the local authority provides services independently and how

much it provides through purchasing services. During the economic recession of the early 1990's, many local authorities terminated day-care services provided under outsourcing contracts, and these contracts were changed into compensation calculated as costs per child.

With the aid of the private child-care allowance system (see Private child-care allowance, page 21), parents can now choose private day care, if they so wish, and can receive public aid to cover that, payable directly to the day-care provider.

Since the state subsidy reform and the realisation of the unconditional right to day care in Finland, the structural role of private day care has changed. The proportion of private day care, however, remains at a relatively moderate level, accounting for about 2% of day-care places. Nevertheless, structural change provides an opportunity for ongoing dialogue between public and private day care. The basic level of day-care services is governed by legislation in terms of staff dimensioning and training, for example, which means that maintenance of a fully private day-care service without public support has proved to be financially difficult.

#### 4.6. Other forms of ECEC

ALL OF the almost 600 *Finnish Evangelical Lutheran parishes* carry out the Church's own early childhood education and care in many different ways.

The oldest and most traditional form of operation is the Sunday school, the most extensive form is the children's playgroup. Playgroups provide 3–6-year-olds with stimulating activities based on Christian values. In pedagogical terms, the Church's ECEC objectives are in line with other ECEC objectives within society. The central feature is education based on children's play and interaction. Playgroups provide children with play, education and instruction. The aim of the playgroups is to support children's learning skills within the framework of their activities.

Among the brand new forms, one can mention family circles, pre-school circles for 5–6-year-olds and afternoon activities for small schoolchildren. It is characteristic of family circle activities that children participating in activities and adults accompanying them are together. In quantitative terms, family circle work has increased continuously since the early 1990's. Circle activities are mostly supervised by a parish children's instructor. Circles usually meet for a few hours a couple of times each week, and the content of the activities emphasises Christian education.

The most recent forms of operation also include afternoon activities for schoolchildren. In addition to the educational task, prevention of social exclusion is a significant challenge to schoolchildren's afternoon activities. This work is conducted by the Church in co-operation with local authorities and other local bodies. The volume of schoolchildren's afternoon activities organised by parishes has tripled over the last five years.

In some municipalities, parishes and local authorities have joined forces to provide pre-school education so that kindergarten teachers employed by the local authorities teach six-year-olds' pre-school groups.

There is also a small *Greek Orthodox Church* (the other national church) operating in Finland, which functions according to the same principles.

There are also several *child welfare organisations* operating in Finland, which, particularly since the 1940's, have participated in the provision of education and care services for small children and have been engaged in lobbying activities in order to increase services.

#### 4.7. Use of the different child-care arrangements

THE CHILD-care arrangements available for children under school age are presented by age group in the charts below. Based on their parents' choice, the majority of children use all publicly supported forms of child care before going to school. They are initially cared for at home by means of parental allowance, after which most families receive child home care allowance at least for a while. Finally, children attend municipal day care either at a day-care centre or in family day care, or the family arranges child care with the aid of the private child-care allowance. However, it must be borne in mind that there are some small rural municipalities in Finland, which are still unable to provide parents with the option of day-care centres.

Children in day-care centres and in family day care accounted for 65% and 35%, respectively, of all children in day care in the beginning of 1999. To date, there are only a few children in private day care.

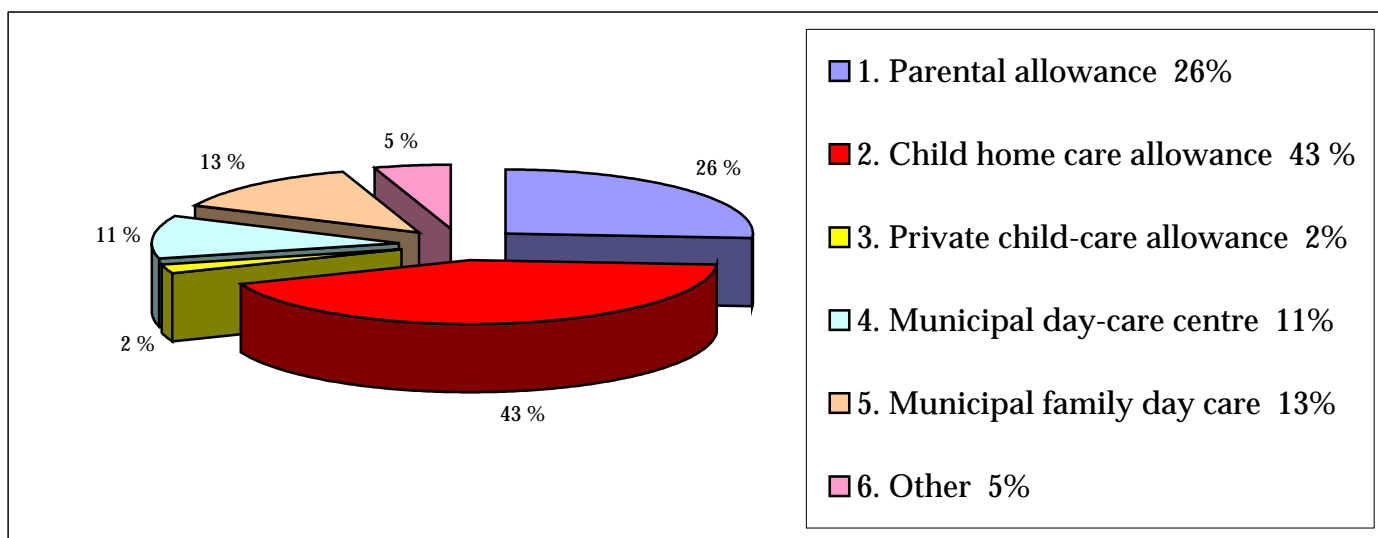


FIGURE 5. Forms of day care for children aged under 3 at the end of 1998

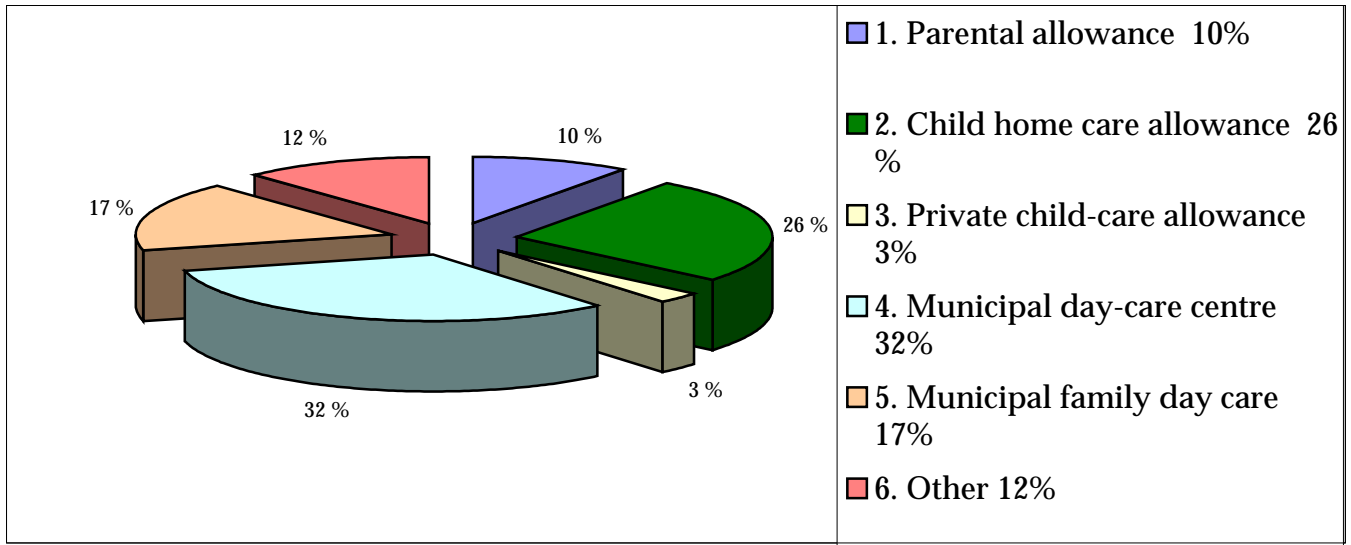


FIGURE 6. Day care for children aged under 7 at the end of 1998

## SECTION II: QUALITY

### 5. QUALITY

#### 5.1. Concept of a child

THE DEFINITION of a child in Finnish legislation is the same as that in the Convention on the Rights of the Child: a person below the age of 18 is considered to be a minor.

Education is always closely connected to the notions and knowledge about children, their growth, development and learning that are prevalent at any given moment. In addition, education is always bound by culture and society.

The notion of a child has shifted in a more child-focused direction. A child is not just an object and receiver of activity, but he or she is an active participant in a communal learning event. According to the current belief, learning has a strongly social character. A child learns together with others. The adult is no longer the only one who knows or creates knowledge, but learning is perceived as active analysis of one's own knowledge structure, which is founded on the child's own experiences and beliefs. Small children's self-motivated play has a central role in learning. Teaching and educating mean providing opportu-

nities and constructing a good framework. Objectives are not expressed in terms of changes occurring in children, but they are set for the learning environment.

In terms of social challenges, internationalisation and the development of information technology, for example, are a very different part of early childhood today than 20 years ago.

## 5.2. ECEC concepts

THE CONCEPTS of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and pre-school education are slightly different, depending on different perspectives. Often the concepts of early childhood education and care, pre-school education and day care are used as parallel or overlapping terms. In Finland, the term *early childhood education and care* is applied to the ages between 0 and 6 as a whole, including specific pre-school education for six-year-olds. Compulsory education ordinarily begins in the year, during which the child reaches the age of seven.

Public early childhood education and care may be considered to include care, education and instruction carried out in addition to the upbringing provided at home or in the immediate neighbourhood. The task of early childhood education and care is to promote children's welfare in all respects. The most important body carrying out early childhood education and care is the day-care centre. Specific pre-school education for six-year-olds is provided as part of early childhood education and care both in day care (within the social sector) and in school within the educational sector.

*The Act on Children's Day Care* regulates day care activities. The Act was amended in 1983 with the inclusion of *educational objectives*. However, these objectives do not cover pre-school education. In its report completed in the spring of 1999, the ECEC Working Group appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health introduced the idea of introducing an Act on Early Childhood Education and Care to repeal the current Act on Children's Day Care.

At present, specific pre-school education for six-year-olds is only regulated by the legislation governing the educational sector, i.e. the school legislation. Pursuant to the Comprehensive School Act, the Ministry of Education has provided for pre-school education given at comprehensive school. In the educational sector, pre-school education means the systematic education and instruction provided as part of early childhood education and care in the year preceding the commencement of compulsory education.

In 1994, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (Stakes) and the National Board of Education presented a joint policy document entitled *Premises for Planning Pre-school Education*, which is intended to be used as a tool for planning pre-school education for children under school age. *The Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education* was completed in 1996 as a result of co-operation between the National Board of Education and the Stakes and it steers pre-school education for six-year-olds provided by schools and is used as a recommendation in day care. This core curriculum replaced the objectives of pre-school education set out in the core curriculum for the comprehensive school. The core curriculum aimed to outline and harmonise the implementation of pre-



school education in day care and schools and to build a seamless transition from day care to school.

In addition, the Stakes produced a brochure entitled *Pre-school Education* in 1996, dealing with the principles governing the provision of pre-school education intended for all children under school age. The brochure is primarily intended as a basis for discussions for parents and children.

On the whole, the operating strategies of early childhood education and care have become increasingly outward-oriented and more open. In terms of pedagogy, there has been a development from an adult-driven to a child-focused approach, which lays emphasis on each child's subject status and individuality as well as on the peer group as an important initiator of the child's growth process.

Until now, children have been able to participate in systematic pre-school education in day-care centres, family day care, or within parishes and various organisations, private bodies and the school administration, prior to the beginning of compulsory education. Depending on the providing body, the quality and quantity of pre-school education have varied considerably. The pre-school reform to be implemented as from the year 2000 August will bring more integrity to activities for six-year-olds. The reform is presented in more detail in Chapter 12.

### **5.3. Development activities**

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES aim to improve the content, quality and accessibility of services, thus also enhancing day-care staff's occupational competence. However, municipal research and development in early childhood education and care have not been supported by financial arrangements since the 1970's, when increased state subsidies were granted to developmental activities at a municipal level. The financial conditions for research and development were further strained in the early part of the 1990's, with the introduction of a calculatory state subsidy system, which left financing for research and development more clearly dependent on the local authorities' own funds. The general economic recession also contributed to the reduction in these activities.

Despite the lack of funds, there are still plenty of regional and local development activities in the field of day care and early childhood education and care. The staff are active in participating in these projects, which contributes to promoting development of day-care and ECEC content. These projects are presented in Appendix 2.

### **5.4. Quality management in social and health care**

THE FIRST national recommendation for quality management in social and health care was drawn up in Finland in 1995. The three main principles of the recommendation were that:

- quality management is a part of everyday work;
- a client-focused approach should be a key aspect of quality management;

- information is a crucial tool for steering the implementation of quality management in social welfare and health care.

The main purpose of the national recommendation entitled 'Quality Management in Social Welfare and Health Care for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' is to:

- promote a client-focused approach;
- show how quality management supports good services;
- foster the initiation and development of quality management in all areas of social welfare and health care;
- fine-tune the agenda published in 1995;
- encourage co-operation in line with approved objectives and principles of quality management.

The recommendation applies to both public and private social and health care services. In addition to service providers, major participants in quality management include instructors, researchers and customer and trade organisations operating in the field.

Early childhood education and care is part of these national efforts to develop quality management. For example, the Early Childhood Education Centre at the University of Oulu has launched a joint day-care quality project with 22 municipalities. Efektia, an organisation operating in conjunction with the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, organises various development projects in municipalities. Several municipalities also have their own projects related to quality management and development of early childhood education and care.

For about ten years now, local authorities have conducted client satisfaction surveys concerning children's day care, as with other municipal services. The results concerning children's day care have been positive.

## 5.5. Evaluation

### **Inspection and evaluation of children's day care**

Children's day care has not involved centralised inspection and evaluation performed by the state administration corresponding to that of the educational sector. Until the late 1980's, children's day care was steered through legislation in quite a detailed manner. Steering through legislation was connected to the state subsidies for operating costs, which means that the evaluation and inspection of operations were also conducted using this system. Activities under steering through legislation were formalistic and homogeneous. This steering system was dismantled in the late 1980's and replaced by steering by information.

The Act and Decree on Children's Day Care still determine the framework for activities, but the local authorities now have higher levels of freedom than previously in terms of implementation of the activities.

In addition to the above-mentioned dismantling of steering through legislation and the reform of the state subsidy practices, the strategy of acknowledging the differences between municipalities has also been supported by the new Local Government Act, effective as from

1995. This lays greater emphasis on the participatory and influential role of municipal inhabitants than the previous act.

A new developmental trend to have emerged in recent years in children's day care is discussion of quality and its assessment. It can be assumed that this theme will come strongly to the fore over the next few years. In addition to the municipal differences, this discussion has been one of the main reasons for the emergence of a new innovative project called Edini (Educare-Internet-Interaction). The Edini project will launch an Internet environment, where dialogue between different ECEC participants plays a major role. The idea of the website is also to visualise the different development and research projects accomplished in early childhood education and care in Finland and also to bring into discussion the many different good practices carried out in the field. The Edini project will be implemented in Stakes (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health) between 2000–2002 and should then become a method for quality management and steering by information in early childhood education and care.

### **Inspection and evaluation of education**

Historically, there has been a system to inspect education in Finland. Since the 1960's, inspectors have operated in conjunction with the Provincial State Offices. As part of the decentralisation of the school sector and administration and the consolidation of municipal self-government, regular inspections of schools were discontinued in the late 1980's. There are still school inspectors in the Provincial State Offices, but their tasks are related to certain administrative duties, on the one hand, and to the general development of education, on the other. The inspectors (Provincial State Offices) can only interfere in the affairs of an individual local authority or school if they receive complaints from citizens concerning isolated cases. This has been authorised as a result of the new Local Government Act enacted in 1995.

In the new legislation of 1999, evaluation of education was stipulated as being a statutory duty at all levels. Self-evaluation is a statutory duty of each educational institution, i.e. the education provider. External evaluation of schools and education is a statutory duty of the State, and of the National Board of Education in particular.

The national evaluation conducted by the National Board of Education is primarily divided into two parts. On the one hand, based on a sample of about 5% of educational institutions, the achievements of comprehensive school 9th-formers in the main subjects are assessed at regular intervals over a few years. On the other hand, the National Board of Education prepares specific thematic evaluations of different types of schools and other issues important to instruction, such as immigrants, social exclusion, special education and pupil counselling.

Parliament has required that, within three years of the total pre-school reform coming into force, the Government should submit a report concerning the pre-school reform, which will evaluate the effects of the reform and will assess whether the objectives set have been achieved. This report is due in 2004–2005.

In recent years, a significant topic of debate in Finland has been whether an ex-post evaluation system is a sufficient replacement for the abolished inspection system.

## **SECTION III: ACCESS**

### **6. VOLUME AND ACCESS**

#### **6.1. Quantitative history of children's day care**

BEFORE THE 1973 Act on Children's Day Care came into effect, there were about 30 000 municipal full-time day-care places in the entire country, which meant that a day-care place was only available to one in ten children in need of care.

In rural areas, public day care was only provided for 3.5% of those in need of it. Although, in proportion, there were more day-care places in urban areas, the real shortage in cities was higher compared with rural areas. Consequently, at the time when the Act on Children's Day Care came into force, day-care centre services primarily covered child-care services for single parents in urban areas. The objective of the 1973 Act on Children's Day Care was to provide day-care services in order for them to offer day-care places appropriate for children's care and education, as well as continuous care at the time of day required; nevertheless, in practical terms, statutory services were primarily directed at families, which needed them either for educational or care-related reasons. The spirit of the 1973 Act on Children's Day Care has only really started to apply in the 1990's, as families have gained an unconditional right to receive day care for their children before they go to school.

National data collected on the situation of children's day care prior to the 1970's was scarce and haphazard.

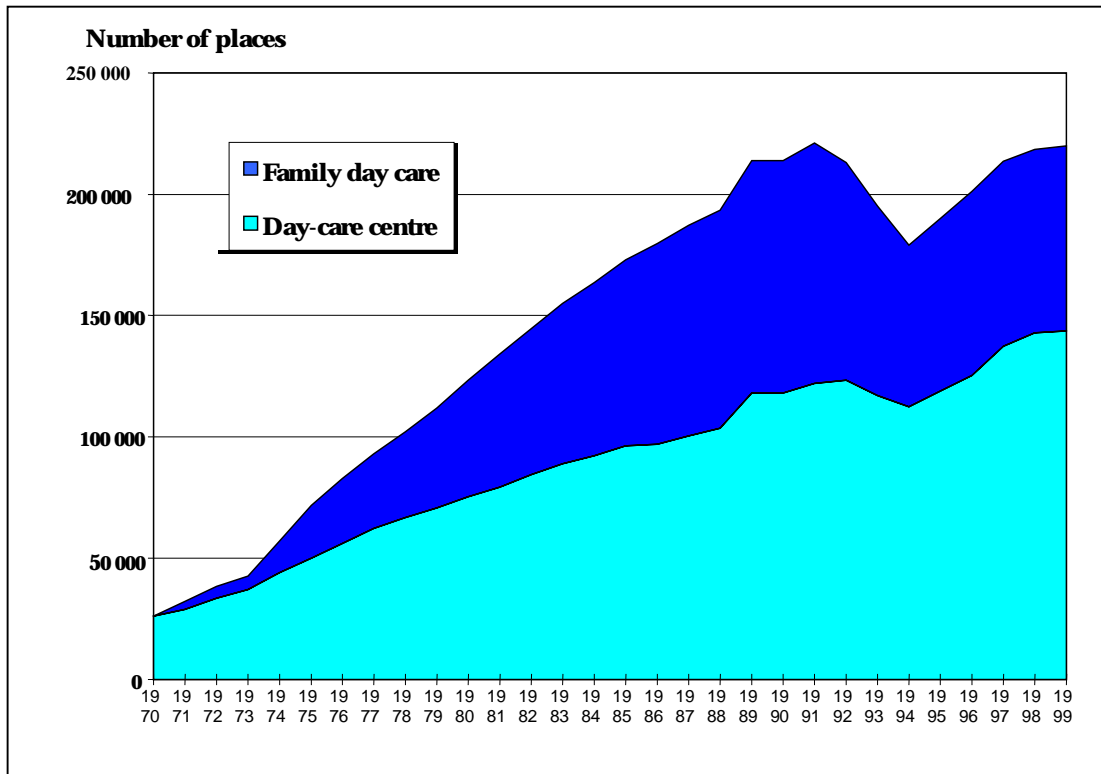
There have been significant changes in the number of day-care places in the 1980's and 1990's. The number of day-care places has grown steadily since 1973, when the Act on Children's Day Care came into effect, up until 1990, when there were about 214 000 day-care places. Subsequently, as a result of the economic recession and mass unemployment, the number of day-care places has dropped considerably. Provision of family day care in particular was reduced. The number of day-care places took an upward turn again in 1994 as unemployment lessened and local authorities prepared for the extension of their obligations under the Act on Children's Day Care to apply to all children under school age. The growth in day-care provision reached its peak during 1995. In the autumn of 1997, the number of children in municipal day care was again slightly less than 214 000, more or less equating to the same number as before the recession. The number of children in day care continued to increase and, in January 1999, there were 220 000 children in municipal day

care. According to population forecasts, the number of children under school age will fall over the next few years, which in turn will reduce demand for day-care places.

TABLE 3. Developments in the number of day-care places in 1985–1997

	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1997 September</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Full-time care</i></b>				
Under 3-year-olds	–	33.6	27.4	25.2
3–6-year-olds	–	66.4	72.6	74.8
	–	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b><i>Part-time care</i></b>				
0–6-year-olds	–	65.1	69.2	80.0
Schoolchildren	–	34.9	30.8	20.0
	–	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b><i>Total day care, N</i></b>	172 930	213 880	178 980	213 600
<b>Of these</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Full-time care	72.5	76.7	81.7	78.9
Part-time care	27.5	23.3	18.3	21.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: Stakes years 1985–1994. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1997



Source: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

FIGURE 7. Developments in municipal day-care places in 1970–1999

## 6.2. Current situation

### Number of children in municipal day care

The number of children in day care provided by the local authorities has increased since 1997. In January 1999, there were about 213 000 children under school age in municipal day care, which means an increase of well over 9 000 children from 1997, when the previous survey was conducted.

Conversely, the number of schoolchildren in morning and afternoon care has continued to decline. Day care is provided for about 7 000 small schoolchildren, which means that the number of morning- and afternoon-care places provided by the social sector in day care is about 2 000 less than two years ago.

At present, the total number of children in municipal day care is about 220 000.

TABLE 4. Children in municipal day care on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1999

	<b>Day-care centre</b>	<b>Family day care</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of the age group</b>
<b><i>Full-time care</i></b>				
Under 3-year-olds	18 627	20 927	39 554	22.4
3–6-year-olds	96 373	44 650	141 023	54.2
<b><i>Total</i></b>	115 000	65 577	180 577	41.3
Of whom 6-year-olds	29 355	5 924	35 279	52.9
<b><i>Part-time care</i></b>				
Under 3-year-olds	849	1 321	2 170	1.2
3–6-year-olds	23 925	6 318	30 243	11.6
Schoolchildren	3 900	3 064	6 964	–
<b><i>Total</i></b>	28 674	10 703	39 377	–
Of whom 6-year-olds	13 313	2 263	15 576	23.4
<b><i>All</i></b>				
0–6-year-olds	139 774	73 216	212 990	48.8
Schoolchildren	3 900	3 064	6 964	–
<b><i>Total</i></b>	143 674	76 280	219 954	–
Of whom 6-year-olds	42 668	8 187	50 856	76.4

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Stakes

About 49% of children under school age are in municipal day care. However, there are differences in the day-care participation rate examined in accordance with the population of individual municipalities. In municipalities with more than 50 000 inhabitants, 0–6-year-olds in day care account for 54%, whereas municipalities with less than 5 000 inhabitants have 40% of the age group in day care.

Children in day care account for about 24% of the under three-year-olds' age group and about 66% of the 3–6-year-olds' age group. Of the six-year-olds, 76.4% are in day-care services.

The majority (66%) of children under school age in municipal day care are in day-care centres. Children in family day care account for 34%.

Furthermore, the majority of children are in full-time care. The proportion of children in full-time care has increased slightly since 1997. Of children under school age in day care, those in full-time and part-time care account for 85% and 15% respectively.

At present, about 7% of children in municipal day care need special care and education. The figure is not very high yet, but, based on the surveys conducted, it is anticipated that the need is growing. The majority of children's problems are clearly related to speech and language (29%). Socio-emotional problems are experienced by 14% of these children, whereas 13% have general delays in development or chronic diseases and difficult allergies.

According to the Basic Education Act, a pupil who cannot be provided with other instruction due to disability, illness, delayed development or emotional disorder, shall be admitted or transferred to special education. Special education is arranged both in special groups and integrated in regular education. About 1% of children in day care and 15% of children in need of special support are in special groups.

In Finland, the number of children in private day care is relatively modest. At the end of 1998, a total of about 12 000 children were in private day care. However, provision of private day care has increased in recent years.

### **Access to day care**

In January 1999, when the day-care situation was last investigated, the majority of local authorities were able to provide a day-care place when the need for care first arose. There was a shortage of day-care places in 26 municipalities (about 6% of all municipalities). The total shortage of full-time places is about 1 000. The shortage of places is highest in large municipalities in Southern Finland. It also occurs to some extent in some medium-sized municipalities, whereas the deficit is only very slight in small municipalities with less than 5 000 inhabitants.

Local authorities are not always able to provide a day-care place in the form or at the time requested by the parents, although this is an *obligation* stipulated by law.

Small municipalities can take parents' wishes into account better when compared with large municipalities. There are also problems in arranging an urgent place. In addition, municipalities do not have enough places for the children of parents who work evenings, weekends and shifts.

Many local authorities arrange play activities for children and their provision has increased with the expansion of their obligations under the Act on Children's Day Care. However, some 40% of municipalities did not arrange play activities at all in 1997. This can be explained by the fact that there are several small municipalities in Finland, where the number of children under the age of seven is small.

In terms of access to day care, long distances may present a problem. Finland is a very sparsely populated country, with the exception of the Helsinki area and the regional growth centres. The population density is only 17 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Due to the sparse population,



provision of services is difficult and the principle of regional equality is not always fulfilled. In rural areas, day care is often provided in the form of family day care, and there are municipalities that have no day-care centres at all.

### 6.3. Pre-school education for six-year-olds in day care and at school

IN FINLAND, children start school at the age of seven. Comprehensive school lasts 9 years. Prior to starting comprehensive school, children have been able to participate in one-year pre-school education. Pre-school education has been an activity provided either at municipal day-care centres or by family child minders, parishes or schools. Due to different providers, pre-school education has been very heterogeneous in terms of quantity and quality. It has varied from a few hours per week provided by parishes up to 21 hours per week within the educational sector. There has not been a uniform statutory basis for pre-school education.

For the most part, pre-school education has been carried out within the administrative branch of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and the local authorities have received funding for that purpose according to the regulations of this Ministry. Families have paid fees in proportion to their income and number of children. Within the educational sector, the Ministry of Education has granted a total of about 6 000 pre-school licences to 200 local authorities. In this case, funding has been allocated in accordance with legislation governing the educational sector and such pre-school education has been free of charge for families.

Approximately 78% of six-year-old children have participated in pre-school education based on a focused curriculum. Participation in pre-school education has increased slightly since 1997, when the subject was last investigated.

TABLE 5. Six-year-olds participating in municipal pre-school education in January 1999

Providing body group	Number of children	% of all participants in pre-school education	% of the age
Social sector	45 535	87.4	68.4
Educational sector	6 561	12.6	9.9
<i>Total</i>	52 096	100.0	78.3

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

When examined by province, there are no considerable differences in the provision of pre-school education. Conversely, there are variations in the participation in pre-school education by municipality. In some municipalities, all six-year-olds are in pre-school education,

whereas there are a few municipalities where only slightly less than a fifth of six-year-olds participate in pre-school education. Similarly, there are some differences in the participation in pre-school education when examined in terms of the municipal population.

When examined according to the municipal population, there are some differences in the participation in pre-school education. In large municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, the participation rate is generally more than 80% of six-year-olds. Where the municipal population is between 20 000 and 50 000, the participation rate is at least 47% of six-year-olds, with an average of 79%. The participation rate is slightly lower in municipalities with a population between 5 000 and 20 000. In these municipalities, about 70% of six-year-olds participate in municipal pre-school education. Again, in small municipalities with less than 5 000 inhabitants, the proportion of those in pre-school education increases. In two thirds of these municipalities, the rate of participation in six-year-olds' pre-school education is 80% or more. The municipalities, where the participation rate in pre-school education is low, are generally rural municipalities with less than 20 000 inhabitants.

TABLE 6. Proportion of 6-year-olds in pre-school education according to municipal population, % of 6-year-olds in January 1999

Municipal Population	Pre-school education in the social sector, % of 6-year-olds	Pre-school education in the educational sector, % of 6-year-olds	Total % of 6-year-olds
More than 50 000	81	4	85
50 000 – 20 001	76	3	79
20 000 – 10 001	62	8	70
10 000 – 5 001	52	19	71
5 000 or less	48	32	80
Total	68	10	78

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

#### 6.4. Pre-school activities provided by other bodies

IN ADDITION to municipal social and educational sectors, pre-school or equivalent circle activities are also provided in many parts (in 57% of municipalities) by other bodies, mostly by parishes and private day-care providers.

Parishes provide pre-school activities in about 40% of municipalities. Almost 8 000 six-year-old children participate in the activities, accounting for about 12% of the age group. Pre-school education provided by parishes often differs from that provided by the social and educational sectors in terms of educational background of staff, the number of hours in pre-school education and its content.

Pre-school education provided in private day care in January 1999 was available in 68 municipalities. About 2 000 six-year-old children participate in pre-school education within private day care, accounting for 3% of the age group.

According to the Act and Decree effective as from August 2000, six-year-olds' pre-school education may be provided by a parish or another private body, but the activities shall fulfil the criteria put forward in legislation. Pre-school activities will always be approved by the local authority concerned. The role of private providers is expected to be relatively small in quantitative terms.

### **6.5. Changes in working conditions and the need for shift care**

NOWADAYS, AN increasing number of parents with small children have unstable working conditions, with short and varying employment relationships. Periods of employment and unemployment alternate. People on today's labour market are forced to accept jobs that may be very difficult in terms of working hours. Changes in working conditions are also reflected in day-care needs. Traditionally, day care has primarily been provided according to the needs of parents working regular office hours (8 am–4 pm) and the need for care during the evenings, at night, over weekends and during shift work has been modest.

However, the number of children in day care, whose parents work shifts or irregular hours, has increased almost invariably in all municipalities, large and small alike. Surveys show that the children of parents working irregular hours accounted for 8–9% of all children in day care.

According to estimates, half the municipalities have enough places for children, whose parents work nights, weekends or shifts. It is remarkable that the number of parents working irregular hours is also on the increase in small municipalities, and provision of shift care or other atypical forms of care is perceived to be a problem.

### **6.6. Number of children in day care aged under one**

CHANGES IN working life may also be revealed by the proportion of very small children in day care. Almost 40% of local authorities estimate that an increasing number of under one-year-olds are being brought to day care. In the autumn of 1998, under one-year-olds accounted for slightly less than one per cent of children in day care.

Children are also brought to care during the parental allowance period. Slightly less than half (44%) of the local authorities interviewed for a survey stated that there were children in day care, whose parents were receiving parental allowance. The parents of these children are primarily students and self-employed people. In some cases, fear of losing their jobs causes people to return to work in the middle of parental leave, or they must accept a new job before the end of parental leave. On the other hand, day care also plays a significant role as a social service preventing child welfare measures. A child may be brought to day care during the parental allowance period in order to support the family in coping with sudden changes in the family or with a parent's exhaustion or sudden illness, for example.

## SECTION IV: REGULATIONS

### 7. REGULATIONS

#### 7.1. Regulations in steering

IN THE early part of the 1990's, Finland went through extensive deregulation. Decision-making powers were increasingly delegated to the local level, for example. The various collective, general and regulatory memoranda issued by the Ministries to local authorities were abolished. Nowadays, operations of the local authorities are governed by legislation, including acts, decrees and resolutions. The new Local Government Act came into force in 1995. Early childhood education and care falling within the administrative branch of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is governed by the 1973 Act on Children's Day Care and subsequent amendments. The legislation governing the educational sector has been reformed as from the beginning of 1999. The new Basic Education Act also contains provisions for pre-school education.

#### 7.2. Structures of steering

THE BASIC structures of steering early childhood education and care exist on national, regional and local levels. The main participants in steering include Parliament, the Government, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (Stakes), the National Board of Education, the Provincial State Offices and the local authorities.

##### National level

The nature of steering conducted by Parliament, the Government and the two Ministries is chiefly in the form of legislation through *acts, decrees and resolutions*.

The task of the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, is *to monitor, evaluate and investigate* the operations of and developments in social and health care, to disseminate information and to conduct development activities. In respect of early childhood education and care, its work has involved publishing activities, preparation of the core curriculum for pre-school education together with the National Board of Education and research and development activities.

The National Board of Education is an office operating under the control of the Ministry of Education. Its tasks include preparation of the core curriculum for pre-school education. The first *Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education* was confirmed in Finland in 1996. A currently ongoing task is to formulate a new core curriculum for pre-school education, which is to be confirmed in time to be available for pre-school education for the 2000–2001 school year, when the reform of pre-school education for six-year-olds comes into effect.

## **Provincial level**

In the six provinces, responsibility for steering rests with the respective Provincial State Offices. The task of the Provincial State Offices is *to control, steer and monitor* the lawfulness and appropriateness of the local authorities' activities. At a provincial level, ECEC services have been assigned to two departments: the Social and Health Care Department and the Education and Culture Department, depending on which is the administrative sector where a particular activity is provided. The Provincial State Offices are steered by the Ministries through target outcome agreements.

## **Local level**

At a local (municipal) level, each local authority is responsible for both implementation and steering of services. In Finland, local authorities are very autonomous in administrative terms. At a municipal level, matters related to early childhood education and care are dealt with within the social and health care, school, youth and leisure administrations. The *Local Government Act*, which came into effect in the mid-1990's, also provides municipal inhabitants with more extensive opportunities to influence.

## **Research organisations**

Steering by information in the field of early childhood education and care is also provided by institutions of higher education and other research institutes through research. These organisations produce the latest research information on childhood, growth, development and learning. Research in the fields of childhood and early childhood education and care has increased considerably during the last few decades. At present, about 10% of research into education concentrates on early childhood education and care. The focus has gradually shifted from the detached study of early childhood education and care towards closer and closer examination of a child's everyday life and its empathetic interpretation.

One of the most significant changes occurred in August 1995, when ECEC kindergarten teacher training was finally, after years spent carrying out various experiments, transferred to universities and established as an academic field of research and instruction.

An important change and development trend can also be perceived in the dramatic increase in research conducted in the field of early childhood education and care over the last few decades. The increase in information on the essence of childhood, childhood learning and the contextual nature of growth has introduced new challenges on the development of staff education and training, which have subsequently led to changes in the entire field of early childhood education and care.

## SECTION V: STAFFING

### 8. STAFF

#### 8.1. Staff qualifications and dimensioning at day-care centres

DAY CARE staff for Finnish children come from diverse educational backgrounds. However, this occupational diversity has not been a disadvantage; instead, the multidisciplinary character enables activities conforming with the *EduCare* philosophy, where education, instruction and care form a natural integrated whole. The know-how of each occupation is used in co-operation in order to achieve the educational objectives of day care.

Almost all Finnish day-care staff have received training for their work that has prepared them for early childhood education and care. The training aims at internalisation of children's growth and development and of the activities to support them.

The structure and dimensioning of staff at day-care centres is governed by the Decree on Children's Day Care. Previously, the Decree determined the group sizes for day-care centres and family day care. Nowadays, regulation of the size of child groups at day-care centres has been replaced by regulation of the staff to children ratio. In each day-care centre, at least every third person operating in care and education assignments must have professional qualifications conforming to the Decree on the Professional Qualifications of Social Welfare Personnel – i.e. a post-secondary level qualification. Other people with care and education duties must have an upper secondary level qualification.

According to the Decree, there must be at least one trained member of staff to a maximum of seven children in day care, who have reached the age of three. For younger children, there must be at least one person with vocational education to a maximum of four children.

With regard to children aged three or over in part-time care, the ratio of staff to children is 1:13.

In the last few decades, the training and composition of staff in day-care centres have changed on several occasions. In the early years after the Act on Children's Day Care came into effect, day-care centres had kindergarten teachers, social educators, practical children's nurses and day-care assistants discharging care and educational duties.

At present, *care and education staff* operating at day-care centres include kindergarten teachers, special kindergarten teachers, social educators or Bachelors of Social Sciences, Bachelors and Masters of Education, practical children's nurses, kindergarten practical nurses and practical nurses.

*Heads of day-care centres* are mostly kindergarten teachers or social educators in terms of their educational background; in the near future, they will probably also include Bachelors of Education and Masters of Education or of Early Childhood Education and Care.

Children in need of special care and education must be taken into account in the number of personnel with care and educational responsibilities, unless the day-care centre concerned has a special assistant for any such children. There is usually *a special kindergarten teacher* in an integrated special group or special group in the day-care centre. In large municipalities there are also itinerant special kindergarten teachers and other rehabilitation staff.

In addition, day-care centres include *other staff* mainly carrying out kitchen and cleaning tasks.

The responsibility for planning and implementation of ECEC in day care and its pre-school education rests predominantly with kindergarten teachers, Bachelors of Education and social educators. Planning, organisation and implementation involve all education and care staff in the day-care sector.

## 8.2. Staff qualifications and dimensioning in family day care

IN *FAMILY day care*, child minders usually operate alone when caring for children at home. A family day-care home may care for a maximum of four children at the same time, including the family child minder's own children under school age. In addition to these, such a group may include one child in part-time care, who attends pre-school education or school.

In *group family day care*, there are usually two child minders; for specific reasons and allowing for local conditions, there may also be three child minders with their groups. In this case, one of the family child minders must have at least an upper secondary level qualification.

The suitability of family child minders has not really been justified with vocational or educational requirements but with personal qualities and traditional family know-how.

The *steering of family day care* plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of family child minders' vocational skills, as well as in the control of the quality of care. This is the responsibility of the family day-care supervisor or the head of the day-care centre. A person responsible for steering must also be able to give support in issues related to how children's learning difficulties are handled. An important task of the supervisor is to arrange supplementary training for child minders and to activate them in the development of their own work.

## 8.3. Staff qualifications and dimensioning in the educational sector

WHERE PRE-SCHOOL education is provided within the school sector, the qualifications required of staff are governed by the Decree on the Qualifications of Educational Staff. According to the Decree, where pre-school education is provided in a separate pre-school class, people permitted to give instruction include those with a kindergarten teacher's degree or a Bachelor of Education degree – a lower academic degree (min. 120 credits) – in addition to those with class teacher's education.

Where pre-school education is provided in conjunction with forms 1–2 at comprehensive school, teachers must be qualified class teachers. According to the Decree on the Degrees in Education and Teacher Education, class teachers currently complete a higher academic degree (min. 160 credits).

According to the pre-school reform (see Chapter 12), in addition to those mentioned above, such social educators, social instructors and Bachelors of Social Sciences, who have worked as teachers in pre-school education or started their training before the amendment of the Act becomes effective, are qualified to provide pre-school education in day care after completing 15–20 credits worth of studies, depending on their work experience.

Provisions regulating group sizes have been abolished from the legislation governing comprehensive schools. However, the law stipulates that the size of teaching groups must be formed so as to achieve the objectives set forth in the curriculum.

In pre-school education within the educational sector, the main responsibility for instruction rests with qualified class teachers. Where pre-school education is provided in a separate pre-school class, the person responsible for instruction may also be a kindergarten teacher.

#### 8.4. The current state of training

AMONG DAY-CARE employee groups, *kindergarten teachers* and special kindergarten teachers are currently the only groups receiving university education. Kindergarten teacher education was definitively transferred to universities as of August 1995. At present, kindergarten teachers complete the Bachelor of Education degree, which is one of the lower academic degrees. This lasts 3 years (120 credits). The objectives are determined in the Decree on the Degrees in Education and Teacher Education. The education emphasises practice and research. It provides the ability to analyse the needs of children and families in society and to meet them through pedagogy.

*Special kindergarten teachers* are trained by the Departments of Special Education at the Universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä. The basic educational requirement for both departments is the kindergarten teacher's degree or a Bachelor of Education degree in kindergarten teacher education. The scope of the studies in both departments is 23 or 35 credits, depending on previous studies. In addition, the University of Jyväskylä offers a Master's degree programme for special ECEC teachers (160 credits), which provides the opportunity to specifically start studying to become a special kindergarten teacher directly after completing the matriculation examination at general upper secondary school.

Training for social educators has been discontinued, and education in the field has mainly been transferred to polytechnics, with people graduating as *Bachelors of Social Sciences*. The education they provide is extensive, and graduates may work in day care and child welfare, as well as in social and youth work. The education lasts 3.5 years (140 credits). Professional competence in polytechnic degrees is built on the theoretical bases of Social Sciences and Education. Early childhood education and care is not only considered as being a cognitive process, but attention is mainly focused on the child's social growth. Polytechnic stu-



dies do not have a similar statutory basis as university studies. Both polytechnics and universities prepare their own curricula and degree programmes.

Training for kindergarten practical nurses and practical children's nurses has been discontinued. The present education is the upper secondary level Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care, with graduates qualifying as *practical nurses*. This new qualification is an extensive initial vocational qualification. Practical nurses employed in day care have specialised in their studies in the care and education of children and young people. At present, the scope of education is three years; specialisation studies have become more in-depth and extensive and practical training has been increased.

Most *family day-care supervisors*, who are the administrative superiors of family child minders, are qualified kindergarten teachers or social educators, as well as other professionals in social and health care or education, such as Bachelors or Masters of Education.

From the very beginning, the training of *family child minders* has been the most poorly organised and the most incoherent of all educational alternatives in day care. At present, the duration of family child minders' training varies considerably in different municipalities. The training is mainly provided at evening courses at social welfare and home economics institutions, as well as in the form of apprenticeship training. A Vocational Qualification in Family Day Care is currently being planned. The intended scope is about 40 credits.

In the autumn of 1999, a working group was appointed within the National Board of Education to deal with the guidelines for the Vocational Qualification in Family Day Care. Preparatory training courses for the Vocational Qualification in Family Day Care may start in August 2000 at the earliest.

### **8.5. Supplementary staff training**

DAY-CARE STAFF participate primarily in short-term supplementary training – mostly in their own time and at their own expense, as the training appropriations for day-care centres are minimal. The basic responsibility for supplementary training rests, however, with the employers, but, since 1992, employers have no longer had a statutory obligation to provide in-service training. Local authorities arrange some short-term training for their staff.

Within the educational administration, the collective agreement for civil servants and employees in the educational sector includes in-service training, albeit modest in terms of provision. For the time being, however, staff working in the day-care sector have not been able to participate in such training.

### **8.6. Gender equality in the staff structure**

VARIOUS SURVEYS have established that the kindergarten teacher is one of the occupations most clearly differentiated by gender. In addition, the Equality Programme of the Finnish

Government also states that the unbalanced gender structure of day-care staff presents a special problem for early childhood education and care provided in children's day care.

The number of men in other occupational groups besides kindergarten teachers is not known, but it is fair to say that the majority of men among day-care staff work as kindergarten teachers. Male kindergarten teachers account for about 4% of the profession. However, the number of men applying for and admitted to the training is higher than the number actually staying in the field. In 1998, about 12% of the people who applied for kindergarten teacher training were men. Furthermore, almost 9% of the people who started the training were men. It has been observed that poor pay and weak status are disadvantages that drive people to change occupations.

From the perspective of children, the small proportion of men in the day-care staff is unfortunate, since men would be needed to alter the traditional gender roles and to offer a masculine behaviour model. Furthermore, people working in the field of paediatric psychiatry have become aware of boys showing symptoms that have been interpreted to be an indication of a need for a male figure and a kind of father figure in a community dominated by women.

### **8.7. Approach of day-care staff to their work**

SURVEYS OF job satisfaction among day-care staff have observed some change in this respect. Previously, employees were satisfied with their jobs and were satisfied psychologically, and there were no differences between occupational groups. Even at present, staff's views of their work seem to be quite consistent, irrespective of occupational group. However, as a result of the municipal savings programmes and the earlier recession, the day-care framework has developed for the worse in the opinion of staff. The situation was perceived to be particularly problematic among heads of day-care centres, who have to strike a balance between financial savings and operational demands. Parents of children have also noticed this. Now as society is recovering from depression, municipalities direct additional resources to day care. This has reduced the hard workload of the day care personnel.

Nevertheless, many employees feel that the quality of day care has improved, as the activities have become more child-focused, taking better account of children's individual needs. Implementation of work is also more flexible and freer than previously and, consequently, the atmosphere at work is perceived to be better. Co-operation with parents also functions better than previously, partially because the educational awareness of parents is increasing.

On the other hand, the work has become more difficult as problems of families and children's insecurity are growing. The anxieties that children have also show in day care in the form of closer co-operation with municipal social workers. Demand for special kindergarten teachers has also increased.

## 8.8. Wages, staff turnover, role of the trade unions

IN 1998, Finnish wage and salary earners' average (gross) earnings for regular working hours were € 1 899 per month (FIM 11 300).

TABLE 7. Average earnings in children's day care and basic education  
(situation in October 1998)  
Monthly earnings for regular working hours

	<b>FIM</b>	<b>Euros</b>
<b><i>Children's day care</i></b>		
Head of day-care centre	11 442	1 924
Kindergarten teacher	9 393	1 580
Practical children's nurse	8 857	1 490
Day-care assistant	7 543	1 269
Family child-care minder	7 747	1 303
<b><i>Comprehensive school</i></b>		
Class teacher	11 547	1 942

Source: Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

No statistical data is available on the turnover of employees. However, employees operating in the field work almost exclusively for local authorities, which means that transfers usually take place to a corresponding unit in the same or another municipality.

Almost 100% of employees and office-holders are organised into their respective trade unions. The national labour market organisations representing employees and office-holders negotiate and make the collective agreements for employees and office-holders concerning their wages and other terms of employment. The organisations also operate as lobbies for their own member groups in matters concerning the content of pre-school education and staff qualifications.

## **SECTION VI: PROGRAMME CONTENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **9. PROGRAMME CONTENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **9.1. Content of ECEC**

THE DEBATE on the *educational objectives* of day care started at the same time as and immediately after the Act on Children's Day Care came into effect. In 1980, educational objectives were deliberated by a Parliamentary Committee. Its arguments for the significance of educational objectives to day care included the following:

Day care is an activity that supports upbringing at home. Parents must be informed of the nature of education their child receives in day care. The objectives enable ensuring in advance that this activity is sufficiently versatile and supports children's development. The decision-makers providing day care must be aware of the use of funds. In terms of evaluating the activities, it is important for planning to be carried out diligently. Evaluation makes it possible to establish the extent to which the activities have met the objectives they are set.

The Parliamentary Committee on Educational Objectives also strongly emphasised the priority of parents as educators of their child. It particularly emphasised the fact that education in day care must be in line and consistent with upbringing at home.

Based on the Committee's work, an amendment known as the Section on Educational Objectives was added to the Act on Children's Day Care in 1983. The Section states, for example, that the objectives of day care are to support the homes of children in day care in their responsibilities to raise their children and to promote the balanced development of children together with parents. For its part, day care shall provide children with safe and warm relationships, activities supporting children's development in a versatile manner, as well as a favourable growth environment based on individual children's circumstances.

According to a child's age and individual needs, day care shall, bearing in mind the general cultural heritage, promote the child's physical, social and emotional development and support the child's aesthetic, intellectual, ethical and religious education. In supporting their religious education, the beliefs of the child's parents or guardians must be respected. In the promotion of the child's development, day care should support the child's growth into responsible adulthood and peace as well as into love and respect for the environment.

In recent years, a wide-ranging debate has started on children's development and learning. The question of the kind of future, for which children should be prepared, has become the essential issue in the provision of early childhood education and care in Finland. In this context, it is also necessary to ponder which theoretical viewpoints should be observed in the provision of education and instruction in early childhood.

Today, growing and learning are understood to constitute a lifelong process. Observing children's everyday activities, one can perceive that children's self-motivated play is a natu-

ral way to learn things related to their physical, emotional, social and intellectual development. A child is an active learner, whose learning is guided by curiosity, will to explore and joy of realisation. Instead of emphasising the individual nature of growing, communality is raised as an important element.

The core of learning is not in the information offered being pre-digested from the outside, but in the interaction between a child and the environment.

Upbringing at home and day care form the foundation for lifelong learning. Early childhood education and care are still associated with care, education and instruction alike. This development has been influenced by Finnish children's need for full-time day care while their parents are at work. With small children, the share of basic care is emphasised, and even pre-school education is intertwined with basic care situations. As children become more independent, the instructional element becomes stronger. The significance of play has a central part in all activities.

## **9.2. Premises for six-year-olds' pre-school education**

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION is the content-based, pedagogically oriented part of early childhood education and care. Pre-school education means systematic and conscious support for the growth, development and learning of children. The activities are based on pedagogical awareness of children's development, the continuous nature of learning and its significance to children, and on knowledge of the subject field. A central foundation for learning in pre-school education is formed by the peer group, play and activities offered by adults. Children learn everywhere, and learning is not tied to specific instances of pre-school education. Instead of managing teaching methods, it is more important in pre-school education to understand the special character of childhood and childhood learning.

Pre-school education involves exploring various phenomena together with children in a thematic and project-type manner, and topics are studied holistically in different subject fields. Many of the pre-school subject fields form a flexible continuum with the topics dealt with in the initial education at school. Pre-school education builds a bridge between day care and school instruction.

At present, there are various practices in the planning and implementation of pre-school education, but as from 1st August 2000, pre-school education for all children participating in free-of-charge pre-school education is to be organised in accordance with a curriculum drawn up on the basis of the national core curriculum.

## **9.3. Children's special needs in ECEC**

CHILDREN'S DISTINCT developmental anomalies can often be identified when they are still in the maternity hospital. The Finnish health clinic system covers all children and has a central bearing on the detection of various developmental anomalies and delays in children, and clinics may also refer such children for further examination as necessary. The relatively comprehensive day-care system plays a central role in the observation and detection of

various developmental delays, etc. Various problems with language development and emotions can also be perceived in day care.

Children in day care must be provided with the special services they need at a sufficiently early stage. The earlier that children's special needs are detected and the sooner that rehabilitative early childhood education and care is started, the better the results that can be achieved for the children, their families and society as a whole. Day care and rehabilitative early childhood education and care are usually arranged together with other children, however, at the same time ensuring that the child gets the special services he or she needs and that the staff have sufficient training.

The law states that a rehabilitation plan should be drawn up for children in need of special care and education to support the monitoring of growth and learning. Planning and implementation of special day care require co-operation with other bodies. In several municipalities, there is a special day-care working group, whose task is to monitor the need for and the provision of special day care, to co-operate in the development of special day care and, where necessary, to negotiate the organisation of special day care for individual children. According to local needs, the working group includes representatives of health care services, the social sector, child guidance and family counselling and the school sector.

A child admitted to special education must be provided with a personal plan covering the organisation of education. The plan contains a description of the pupil's abilities and attainment level, the objectives of education, a description of the organisation of education, the organisation of and people responsible for monitoring, as well as the criteria for pupil assessment. This plan is drawn up in co-operation with parents and people responsible for pupil welfare services and education. In addition to education, it also covers arrangements related to support services.

For some children, their own parents are the experts who request a more detailed examination of their child's development. However, some developmental delays and anomalies in children are still left undetected, in which case problems only arise at school as various learning blocks.

During 1999–2001, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is implementing a project, which aims to develop the operating methods and practices in early childhood education and care to better meet the educational and rehabilitative needs of children in need of special care and education. One of the project objectives is to increase and harmonise the preparation of rehabilitation plans.

#### **9.4. Consideration of language and culture in ECEC**

ACCORDING TO the Act on Children's Day Care, each local authority must provide day care in Finnish and Swedish, which are the national languages of Finland. In addition, the Sámi language is used in the Sámi domicile area in Lapland. Day care should also support development of the language and culture of Romany speakers and the children of various immigrant groups.

The need for Swedish-language day care is concentrated in the municipalities on the South and West Coasts of Finland. Such day care has been provided in these municipalities where necessary as part of the municipal day-care system.

Guaranteeing day care in the Sámi language has presented more of a problem for several reasons. The Sámi people living in Finland belong to three different Sámi language areas: the languages spoken in Lapland include North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. Distances in Lapland are vast, and there are only a few children under school age. The total number of Sámi speaking children under the age of seven in 1999 was 121 and thus the Sámi language is on the 16<sup>th</sup> place among different language groups in Finland. The problem has also been finding staff formally qualified for early childhood education and care, who are able to speak the Sámi language.

Some local authorities provide and develop foreign-language day care at the request of parents. In addition, Finns have also scientifically developed language instruction in early childhood education and care and basic education through what is known as language immersion pedagogy.

Internationality and the meeting of cultures are also visible in many ways in Finnish day care.

TABLE 8. 0–6 years old children in different language groups in Finland

Language group	Total number of people	Number of children aged 0 years	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years
Finland's official languages 31.12.1999								
Finnish	4 783 224	52 075	52 249	54 600	55 841	58 091	60 076	59 951
Swedish	292 439	3 158	3 239	3 359	3 597	3 694	3 751	3 758
Sámi	1 690	12	19	17	9	21	20	23
The five largest language groups besides the official languages 31.12.1999								
Russian	25 681	281	222	196	240	266	264	254
Estonian	10 024	84	86	93	86	107	132	120
English	6 780	57	63	67	49	66	67	72
Somali	6 251	288	325	306	304	272	230	149
Arabic	4 605	104	102	85	67	80	76	84

Source: Finland Statistics, 1999

## 9.5. Transition from home to day care and from day care to school

THERE ARE no formal uniform special arrangements for starting day care in Finland. However, it is common practice that parents are invited, on the part of the day-care system, to provide their children with an opportunity to visit their future day-care place in advance. If the parents so wish, their child may stay in day care for shorter periods at first and the parents will also have a chance to take part in day care with their child. This flexible start of

day care is thus based on an agreement between the parents, on the one hand, and the local authorities and individual day-care places, on the other.

Another prevailing practice that has emerged in day care is to celebrate when six-year-olds are about to start school. Prior to their transition to school in the autumn, all new pupils are invited to visit their future school and schoolmates in the preceding spring.

School-start has also been supported by means of various experimental and developmental activities. In some municipalities, schools have developed pupil tutor activities for school-children starting basic education, where pupils in the second and third forms act as personal tutors for the newcomers.

## **SECTION VII: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **10. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

#### **10.1. Overview**

THE LOCAL Government Act (1995) emphasises the opportunities the municipal inhabitants have to participate in decision-making. According to the Act, each local authority must see to it that the inhabitants and users of services in the municipality have the opportunities to participate in and influence its activities.

A local authority must inform the inhabitants of matters pending in the municipality, plans related to them, handling of issues, decisions taken and their effects. The inhabitants must also be informed as to how questions and opinions on these matters can be expressed to decision-makers and planners. Naturally, this also applies to day-care and educational services.

According to the Act on Children's Day Care, the objectives of day care are to support parents in their responsibilities to raise their children and to promote children's personal and balanced development together with their parents. In so far as is possible, the Act provides that day care must be provided in the form requested by each child's parents or other guardians. In supporting their religious education, the beliefs of the child's parents or guardians must be respected. The same Act places emphasis on preparation of a rehabilitation plan for a child in need of special care and education together with the child's parents.



## 10.2. Forms of co-operation

IN FINLAND, day-care staff have always co-operated with parents, however while usually retaining their professional autonomy. The quantity, direction, quality and implementation forms of co-operation between family and day care have varied over the decades.

The status of parents in day care has changed since the Act on Children's Day Care came into force in 1973. The same trend continued in the 1980's, when the administration started to abandon steering through legislation. A significant change in the status of parents in day care was brought about by the subjective right to day care. The statutory subjective right of parents to receive a day-care place for their child is a rare privilege even on an international level.

The increasing number of immigrants has set special requirements to take families' cultural differences into account. Moreover, integration of children in need of special care and education into the groups of other children of their age has also entailed closer co-operation with parents.

All this has inevitably led to change in the traditional premises emphasising the professional autonomy of staff. The necessity of co-operation between family and day care is justified from the perspectives of the children in day care, their parents and of supporting the work of the day-care staff.

At the same time as day care and the entire child-care system for small children has been developed to increase the options parents have, more emphasis has been placed on parents' increasingly conscious right to be involved in influencing the framework of their children's everyday life and routines in early childhood education and care. Home upbringing and early childhood education will jointly create the foundation for lifelong learning. It is also generally acknowledged that ECEC activities are most productive when they simultaneously support the families' values and expectations.

Families, children and parents today are important partners for service provision and are no longer seen as its targets. The right that children and their parents have to participate is contributing to a change in the operating methods in early childhood education and care. This applies to both everyday and preventive or rehabilitative activities.

Parents must have a right to express their opinions and to be heard. Parents are experts in issues concerning their children and educational work will therefore only succeed in co-operation with parents. The meeting of staff and parents as equal adults is the foundation for co-operation.

Day-care staff and parents should have convergent views on the grounds for education and care. The children's parents will define the values and principles that should form the basis for their child's care and instruction. These issues include the language to be spoken with the child, religious and ethical education, and arrangements for meals and rest.

Individual plans, which form a basis for assessment discussions during and at the end of each year of activity, have increased consideration for children's individuality. The objec-

tives of activities are explained to parents and considered together with the parents. This aims to achieve a shared understanding of education. Informal daily talks when dropping off and collecting the child are also important. Parents may be preoccupied by the sufficiency of day-care places, but they also want to discuss the content and quality of day care.

The planning of day-care education aims to combine both the expertise of parents concerning their child and the expertise of staff, absorbed through training and work experience. The direction of co-operation and influence is reciprocal.

Although the local authorities do not have a statutory obligation to draw up individual care and education plans for children, this is done in some municipalities. The City of Helsinki uses a care and education agreement made in joint consultation between day-care staff and parents. The idea of a care agreement emerged on the basis of a 1996 customer survey and study to assess the quality factors in day care. The purpose of the agreement is to increase dialogue about educational objectives and attitudes, thus improving the parents' opportunities to influence. The agreement was introduced in 1998, and the aim is to reach 95% coverage during this period of activity. A future objective is to introduce annual child-specific assessment discussions. In addition, there are discussions on the plan to provide each child with their own pre-school and initial education portfolio, which would be used to compile information given by various bodies concerning the child's learning and which could later be used when the child starts school.

### **10.3. Co-operation between parents**

ALL DAY-CARE centres are engaged in co-operation with parents at some level. Objective-setting and forms of implementation for co-operation vary according to how the significance of co-operation is understood. Usually, however, co-operation is being developed towards the family. Co-operation is no longer restricted as a duty or right of individual occupational groups, but the work of all occupational groups is guided by an educational model based on co-operation.

In some municipalities, groups of parents have designed surveys evaluating the quality of municipal day care and expressed their opinions on day-care issues. Some day-care centres have parents' councils to discuss or decide the objectives and principles of the day-care centre's activities and financial management within the framework set by the municipal budget.

In some rare cases, children's parents have established an association and founded a day-care centre as an association. In such cases, the local authority purchases day-care services from this association.

## SECTION VIII: FUNDING AND FINANCING

### 11. FINANCING AND FEES

#### 11.1. Overview of the financing of services

IN FINLAND and in the other Nordic countries, the municipal administration provides the majority of public services. The operations of the local authorities form a central part of the public economy.

The State participates in the financing of basic municipal services through a specific state subsidy system. The *state subsidy system* has three key tasks:

- to finance municipal provision of services;
- to level out economic differences between municipalities; and
- to steer municipal activities.

There has been a distinct structural change in the relationship between the State and the local authorities during the last ten years.

Within service sectors, a funding system based more clearly on averages and calculations has been introduced. The system in the administrative sector of social and health care is based on state subsidies calculated per inhabitant. The state subsidies for social and health care are scaled in accordance with factors caused by the structures of municipalities, not so much according to volume.

Conversely, the basis of the system within the educational and cultural sector is usually the volume of the activity – the student quantity or some other performance indicator, such as the number of lessons in instruction – and an average unit price, such as annual costs per pupil. The social and health care administration grants its state subsidies to the basic local authorities, the municipalities, whereas the Ministry of Education grants them to the providers of activities, i.e. not only to the municipalities, but also to federations of municipalities or individual educational institutions. There are quite distinct differences between the systems. This structure originated in the 1980's as part of what is known as the Valtava reform, and it was confirmed by Finnish Parliament as part of the reform of 1993.

Another key change is the equalisation system between municipalities. Prior to the 1993 reform, levelling out the differences between municipalities was carried out within the sectoral systems – educational, social and health care sectors – with the aid of what is known as the financial capacity classification of municipalities. The situation may be characterised as follows: the sectoral systems level out differences in the structure of expenditure between municipalities; equalisation of tax revenue in turn levels out differences in the municipal income base.

A third change is the considerable decline in state subsidies in recent years:

- in 1994      FIM 37.6 billion (€ 6.3 billion);
- in 1999      FIM 24.1 billion (€ 4.1 billion).

For the most part, this is because of savings that had to be made as part of the general economic policy as a result of the 'great depression' of 1991–1993.

A fourth change concerns legislation. The project to dismantle legal norms and the 'free municipality' experiment in the late 1980's resulted, through partial reform, in a completely reformed *Local Government Act (1995)* and in reforms of municipal state subsidies in 1993 and further in 1996/1997, as well as in the comprehensive reform of school legislation (1999), among other things.

All these developments have aimed to increase the municipalities' powers and responsibilities.

## **11.2. Financing of ECEC services**

THE ECEC services provided by the local authorities are predominantly financed through the tax revenues levied by the State and the local authorities.

Over the decades, there have been significant changes in the financing of day care. When the first kindergartens were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their funding was covered via donations, such as the profits of the state-owned alcohol company. In 1927, a state subsidy was guaranteed to kindergartens for the first time through legislation. At the time, state aid covered a third of the operating costs. In addition, local authorities could finance the operation of kindergartens.

In 1973, as the Act on Children's Day Care became effective, financing was also reformed. State subsidies were now granted to all forms of day care, including day-care centres, provision of family day care and play activities. State subsidy for operating costs accounted for 35 – 80 % of the costs, depending on the municipality's financial status. It was also possible to receive state subsidy for project costs.

The state subsidy system has been reformed on several occasions. The most significant change took place in 1993. This was the shift from the previous state subsidy system, which was strictly tied to actual costs, to a calculatory state subsidy. The local authorities have been guaranteed regional autonomy. On the other hand, legislation imposes extensive obligations to provide basic services – particularly those of the social and health care and educational sectors – on the local authorities. State subsidies are now on average 24 % of social and health care costs.

The annual total costs of municipal day care amounted to about FIM 8.3 billion (€ 1.5 billion) in 1997.

## **11.3. Financing of the educational sector**

THE BASIC Education Act stipulates that education is free of charge. Accordingly, education and the necessary schoolbooks and other learning materials, as well as work equipment and materials are free of charge for pupils.

People who attend instruction must also be provided with a properly organised and supervised balanced meal free of charge every schoolday. Where the distance between home and school exceeds 5 kilometres, pupils are entitled to transportation free of charge.

Financing of the educational sector is governed by the Act on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision, and more specific provisions and guidelines are provided in the *Decree* issued by virtue of the Act. Accordingly, the Government confirms annually the average amounts for the unit prices to be used during the following financial year as the criteria for financing.

#### 11.4. Fees

THE LOCAL authorities charge a monthly fee for their day-care services, determined in accordance with the family's income and size. Maximum fees are provided by the Act on Client Fees in Social Welfare and Health Care.

The fee for full-time day care is based on the income limit determined for families by the Act; the fee charged being a set percentage of the amount, by which a family's income exceeds the limit. Both the amount set as the income limit and the payment percentage vary according to the number of parents or other guardians, the number of children under school age and the number of children under the age of 18 in the family. Those families, whose income does not exceed the set income limit, cannot be charged a fee. The highest fee for full-time care may be no more than FIM 1 100 (€ 185) per month as from the beginning of the year 2000.

In terms of part-time care, a local authority may charge a fee adjusted to the reduced hours spent in day care. The local authorities may also charge fees for temporary use of day-care services and for play activities according to criteria that they have themselves determined.

Compensation is paid to families whose children are unable to attend due to illness, if the absences amount to more than ten day-care days per month. Compensation for absence due to reasons other than illness will only be paid if the absence lasts a whole month. There are 21 day-care days per month on average.

Fees may usually be charged for 11 months of the year, which means that the family's month of holiday is free of charge, although the child's day-care place is also available during the holiday period.

The local authorities charge client fees so that they cover an average of 15% of the costs incurred by provision of day care.

Pre-school education is free of charge both in day care and at school.

## SECTION IX: PRE-SCHOOL REFORM

### 12. PRE-SCHOOL REFORM OF 2000–2001

#### 12.1. Background for reform

PROVISION OF pre-school education for six-year-old children has been prepared in Finland since the late 1960's. The first pre-school experiments were launched in 1971. However, it was only in 1999 that the Government Programme stated that free-of-charge pre-school education be introduced for all six-year-olds on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2000. At the same time, a right to pre-school education and a comprehensive *obligation of provision for the local authorities* will be imposed to take effect on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2001. Children's parents have the opportunity to choose whether they wish to take advantage of pre-school education offered to the family free of charge.

Matters related to lowering the age of starting compulsory education will also be investigated separately.

#### 12.2. Pre-school arrangements

EACH LOCAL authority has the obligation to provide pre-school education to children residing in the municipality. A local authority may provide pre-school education independently or in co-operation with other local authorities, or may purchase it from a state-owned educational institution or from a private body, which has been granted a license to organise pre-school education. However, the local authority is always responsible for ensuring that the services are provided in compliance with the law. Each local authority independently decides whether pre-school education should be organised within the social or educational sector. In practical terms, this means that the local authority may decide independently whether pre-school education is provided in conjunction with a day-care centre or school.

A local authority with both Finnish- and Swedish-speaking inhabitants is obligated to provide pre-school education separately for both language groups. The language of instruction may also be the Sámi or Romany language or sign language.

Pre-school education is to be organised in each municipality so as to ensure that pupils' travel to school is as safe and short as possible. In addition, it must be borne in mind that children participating in pre-school education also have the unconditional right to use day-care services, if their parents so wish. Unlike basic education, however, the local authorities do not have any obligation to compensate for travel expenses of children participating in pre-school education. Nevertheless, Parliament has required that amendments to legislation, enabling resolution of the transportation issue, should be prepared as soon as possible, in order that they come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2001 at the same time as the pre-school reform.

### 12.3. Concept of pre-school education

LEGISLATION EXCLUSIVELY uses the term ‘pre-school education’ to mean the instruction mainly provided for six-year-olds before the commencement of basic education. Pre-school education has been defined as being part of early childhood education and care.

Pre-school education is also considered to include the instruction provided for children within extended compulsory education in the first year of compulsory education, and the instruction provided for children, who have been granted a deferment of starting school, in the year that compulsory education would ordinarily start.

#### Objectives of pre-school education

The objective of pre-school education is to support children’s growth towards humanity and ethically responsible membership of society, and to provide children with the knowledge and skills necessary in life. The objective of pre-school education is to improve children’s learning conditions. A further objective of pre-school education as part of early childhood education and care is to smooth out individual differences in children’s readiness to start school, to prevent growth in differences.

#### Implementation of pre-school education

According to legislation, pre-school education is to be provided at least 700 hours per year, which really means about 18 hours per week. However, there are no detailed provisions on the school year, the number of schooldays, the end of schoolwork, the length of schooldays or the duration of periods of pre-school teaching; instead, the practical arrangements of pre-school education are decided by each local authority as the education provider. The education provider must adopt a curriculum for the education, prepared separately for instruction in the Finnish, Swedish and Sámi languages and, where necessary, for instruction provided in other languages. Based on the curriculum, the education provider is to approve an ‘annual plan’, which governs the provision of pre-school education.

In terms of size, the teaching groups must be composed so as to enable achievement of the objectives set in the curriculum. A recommendation on the maximum size of pre-school groups is to be issued in the spring of 2000.

Where pre-school education is provided at a day-care place, the provisions enacted in the Decree on Children’s Day Care on staff and the number of children will, however, apply.

#### Pre-school curricula

The currently effective *Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education* was prepared by the National Board of Education and the Stakes in 1996. At the time, the National Board of Education confirmed it as the standard for pre-school education provided in the educational sector. Within the social sector, it functions as a recommendation.

The scope of pre-school education will be 700 hours. On the one hand, this requires that new core curriculum be drawn up for pre-school education and, on the other hand, it has a bearing on basic education. Basic education will have to take better account of the objectives and contents of pre-school education. The objective of the reform is to form pre-school education and forms 1 and 2 of basic education into an integrated whole, which is based on early childhood education and care, and which creates a foundation for other basic education.

In the autumn of 1999, a steering group was appointed to define the decisions in principle concerning the development of the core curriculum for pre-school and initial education. It also co-ordinates the work of the expert group preparing the core curriculum and steers the preparation of the core curriculum to ensure completion of the proposal for the core curriculum for pre-school education by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2000 and of the respective proposal for initial education by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2001. Preparation of the core curriculum is carried out in broadly-based co-operation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Trade Union of Education, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (Stakes) and the National Board of Education. The reform is also backed by a municipal project based on extensive open interaction and involving 98 local authorities.

All 0–6-year-olds enjoy a subjective right to day care. There is no specific mention of afternoon care in the Finnish Act on Children's Day Care. The Basic Education Act provides that it is possible to arrange club activities for pupils in connection with basic education. With the aid of club activities, it is possible to support pupils' hobbies, to generate positive learning experiences and to create well-functioning social relationships both with adults and with other children. Club activities may be organised in co-operation between pupils' homes, schools, various municipal administrations, associations, organisations and companies operating in society as well as with representatives of working life. Responsibility for co-ordination of the activities rests with the local authority concerned.

#### **12.4. Pre-school reform and financing**

THE FINANCING of pre-school activities is governed by the Act and Decree on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision. These statutes are applicable irrespective of the administrative sector, under which pre-school education is carried out. According to the legislation, pre-school education and the necessary schoolbooks and other learning materials, as well as work equipment and materials, are free of charge to children. Children must also be provided with a properly organised and supervised balanced meal free of charge.

The regulation and steering of pre-school education within two different branches of administration has been perceived to be inconvenient and inappropriate. Therefore, the aim is uniform regulation. In the future, pre-school education will fall within the remit of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education will be responsible for legislation, national core curricula, financing and other forms of steering. In addition, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, on the one hand, and the National Board of Education and the Stakes, on the other, will be obligated to co-operate in the formulation of the general objectives of pre-school education and its core curriculum.



In the future, all forms of pre-school education will also be brought under the funding system of the educational and cultural sector. The financing of activities will be enacted in the above-mentioned Act and Decree on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision. These statutes will be applicable to pre-school education irrespective of where it is provided.

The unit price for pre-school education, which forms the basis for financing, is – with the exception of pupils within extended compulsory education – 85% of the unit price for basic education set for the education provider concerned. The proportion of municipal contribution of the educational costs will be calculated per inhabitant, not according to the number of pupils. The price per inhabitant will be calculated nationally from the educational expenditure. There are special provisions governing the calculation of unit prices for the years 2000 and 2001. Pupil volumes will be calculated according to the situation on 20th September. For autumn 2000, the estimated volumes of pupils will be applied. Free-of-charge pre-school education will be taken into account as a factor reducing day-care fees.

Starting from 1st August 2000, the local authorities may provide pre-school education in compliance with the new provisions without a separate licence from a state authority and may receive pupil-specific state subsidy for pre-school education from the estimate of educational expenditure in the state budget.

## **12.5. The issue of lowering the compulsory school age in Finland**

THE PROGRAMME (1999) of Prime Minister Lipponen's Government includes the following: 'Studies will be conducted to investigate the feasibility of lowering the age of starting compulsory education in the 9-year comprehensive school system from the year 2003.'

It is important to note that this investigation task does not refer to the ongoing reform of six-year-olds' pre-school education, but to the shift of the current nine-year basic education to start a year earlier – that is, to start at the age of 6 and to end at the age of 15.

There are at least two different perspectives underlying the investigation task. On the one hand, compulsory school age in Finland is one year later than in most other European countries. On the other hand, the issue also involves a labour policy perspective. According to the forecast, Finland will be threatened by a labour shortage within ten years. This is due to both the ongoing vigorous technological and economic developments and to the ageing population. As a result, completion rates of education should be accelerated. Introduction of an earlier start to basic education would provide one way of achieving this.

Lowering the age of starting compulsory education and introducing an earlier start to basic education are only just under investigation at the Ministry of Education. No political decisions have been made on the issue.

## CONCLUSIONS

THE KINDERGARTEN activities developed by Friedrich Fröbel in Germany also form the background for the emergence of kindergarten activities in Finland. The introduction of kindergarten activities in Finland occurred as a private activity, which was incoherent and marginal. Structural changes in society in the 1960's and 1970's led to urbanisation and increasing employment of women away from the home. This created pressure to develop municipal day care. The Act on Children's Day Care came into force in 1973. During the 'golden years' of welfare at the end of the 1970's and the early 1980's, the State helped to realise subjective rights, in which a central issue was the right of every child to supported growth and learning. Day care became part of the integrated whole of early childhood education and care, in which services and financial support formed alternative elements based on the choice of the family.

The Finnish system of early childhood education and care policy may be described with the concept of EduCare, where care, education and instruction have been combined to form an integrated whole and where play is a central tool of pedagogical activities.

The basic qualitative level of Finnish early childhood education and care is good even from an international perspective. Ever since 1973, the Act on Children's Day Care has provided a framework for the implementation of day care. The Act clearly defines the physical setting for the provision of day care. Well-educated and multi-disciplinary staff are also among the strengths of the Finnish system. The municipal systems provide families with several day-care alternatives catering for different needs. In addition, the system is inexpensive for clients, and the earnings-related day-care fees do not involve considerable differences in terms of Finn marks. As a public service, children's day care has a very positive image. This can be seen in several local authorities' quality surveys, for example, which have investigated parents' satisfaction with their children's day care. Another strength associated with day care lies in its several different tasks. Day care does not only mean education and instruction, but it also has a role as a social service. Similarly, day care has a child welfare function, particularly as a preventive measure.

At the turn of the 1990's, steering and regulation by the central government were relieved both in the educational and the social sectors. Regulation was increasingly redirected towards steering by information. In addition, the 1990's also saw reform of the criteria for granting state subsidies and the ratification of the new Local Government Act. State subsidies are now determined on a calculatory basis so as to allow for the proportion of different age groups in the municipal population. Each local authority then uses its own municipal strategy as the basis for allocating services to different age groups. The Local Government Act, as reformed in 1995, consolidates the municipal inhabitants' influential and participatory role. These changes have resulted in the emergence of slight but consistent differences in the provision of services between local authorities. The local authorities are obligated, but also empowered, to continuously search for better structural and content-related solutions. On the one hand, this entails an improvement in the quality of operations, but, on the other hand, the effects may also be negative. From a child's point of view, educational inequality in different parts of the country may increase. In this context, however, it is worth pointing out that day-care and pre-school legislation guarantees that the criteria for operations remain the same in terms of the number of staff and children, staff training and day-

care fees, for example. With regard to day-care fees, the maximum amount has been determined nationally, but the local authorities may otherwise fix the fee independently.

What is essential in the future is the thorough investigation of the need for a steering system. This will, however, call for support from research, in order to determine the real needs in the field in terms of the nature of the steering system.

The innovative policy definitions of the 1990's included the concession of the unconditional right to day care, first to under three-year-olds in 1990, and then to all children aged under seven in 1996. The 1990 unconditional right to a day-care place for all under three-year-olds also included the chance to choose child home care allowance instead of municipal day care. In 1997, financial support for the use of a private day-care provider's services was added to the alternatives available to families.

From the perspective of Finnish early childhood education and care, the 1990's were a period of drastic change. On the one hand, changes have been difficult both for families and local authorities and, on the other hand, they have constituted innovative policy definitions, leading to the creation of something new.

The economic recession in the early 1990's also affected public service activities. In terms of children's day care, this was reflected in the reduction in operations by local authorities, but also in the declining use of services due to increased unemployment among parents of small children. This low point is clearly illustrated in Figure 7, for example. Many local authorities discontinued places in family day care in particular.

The major changes in the latter part of the 1990's included the transition of kindergarten teacher education at universities in 1995. Instead of the former title of kindergarten teacher, people now graduate as Bachelors in Early Childhood Education, which opens up the opportunity to complete a Master's degree. In addition, early childhood education and care is also gaining a foothold as a concrete scientific discipline.

Another major change initiated in the late 1990's was the implementation of pre-school education free of charge for six-year-olds, which starts in 2000 and becomes an obligation to the local authorities in 2001. Resolution of the issue of pre-school education for six-year-olds has indeed been an administrative objective in Finland since the 1960's. The solution now reached takes the form of a 'mixed model' entailing close co-operation between the social and educational sectors, which is probably a unique model even in international terms. Pre-school education for six-year-olds has been realised in the spirit of the 'EduCare' concept; in other words, the solution takes into account the fact that more than half the six-year-olds are currently in full-time day care.

Changing the right to day care into a subjective right tied to children's age led some local authorities to adopt practices where resources were exclusively allocated to the provision of day care for children entitled to the unconditional right to day care. This day-care right did not include afternoon care for schoolchildren. Consequently, the majority of local authorities excluded it from their operations. At present, schoolchildren's afternoon care rests with private organisations and parishes in many municipalities. The local authorities often offer them space in school buildings, for example, and the activities are organised in the form of

playgroups. However, the activities are not systematic or comprehensive. At the national level, the question of organising afternoon care has therefore been perceived to form a major challenge. In addition to searching for a solution to the problem in an increase in activities organised by various organisations, there have been discussions on various alternative models; for example, if comprehensive school teachers started to observe overall working hours (corresponding to standard office hours), instead of only being present for teaching hours, this would alleviate the problem.

A definite weakness in the implementation of our early childhood education and care has been the lack of a binding standard curriculum. The first national core curriculum was only completed in 1996. This functions as a standard in the pre-school education provided within the educational sector, whereas it is only a recommendation within day care. With the new core curriculum, which is currently under preparation and becomes effective in August 2000 as an experiment, it is possible to increase the methodical nature of early childhood education and care and its consciously purposeful approach to six-year-olds' pre-school education. It may be assumed that this will also have a more general effect on quality improvement and on increasing educational equality among children in different municipalities.

Both the implementation of six-year-olds' pre-school education as co-operation between two administrative sectors and the unification of the different types of education have contributed to influencing increased practical co-operation at the level of municipalities as well as operational units. The continuum of children's learning from pre-school education to initial education is being promoted more and more clearly by means of both joint curricula of pre-school education and schools, and various operational co-operation models. The transition of ECEC education into the university sector is not only significant in terms of education policy, but it is also seen as being essential from the perspective of lifelong learning and its promotion.

The reform of pre-school education for six-year-olds has contributed to the emergence of concern for the position of younger children. As the debate only concentrates on six-year-olds, ECEC staff fear that under six-year-olds are in threat of being excluded from development. Therefore, at the same time as the pre-school debate, there are ongoing discussions on early childhood education and care intended for under six-year-old children in particular. In ECEC research, this concern for younger children can be seen in an increase in research into early childhood interaction, for example.

One of the effects of the transfer of pedagogical ECEC education into the university sector is the increase in various research and development activities. Research has also brought about an international perspective on early childhood education and care in a new way. In recent years, quality and its research have been emphasised in both national and international discussions in different fields. In Finland, several individual quality projects were launched in the late 1990's, with the objective of improving the quality of early childhood education and care on a continuous basis. Quality work is also perceived at the national level as being an important factor in increasing educational equality. Therefore, a national quality project is being launched to search for uniform policy definitions for quality work in the field of early childhood education and care.

Finnish early childhood education still has the problem of weak connection between theoretical and practical knowledge of education. New research innovations enter the educational work in the field at a relatively slow pace, regardless of the close contacts between research and education. Our rapidly changing society places completely new challenges on educational reform. One of today's development targets is to meet the parents. Up until now, ECEC education has clearly focused on the educational process from the educator's point of view, and the broader context, embracing the child's entire family, has been left in the background. Co-operation with families has thus also been rigid and superficial. A future challenge in Finnish early childhood education and care is to become an increasingly visible and transparent activity. The parents' role can no longer be examined from a client's point of view alone, but they should be acknowledged as pedagogical partners. This perspective of involving the parents calls for support from various methods of co-operation and interaction. In our rapidly changing social situation, consideration must also be given to new types of working methods and operating environments brought about by the development of information technology.

In the future, early childhood education and care must be better equipped to reflect changes in our society as a whole. As working life becomes more and more unstable due to the growth in various short-term and part-time employment relationships, this will also bring new pressure to increase the flexibility of our ECEC system. One of the inevitable future changes in Finland is the falling number of children under seven years of age. This will also make it essential to shape the current models of implementation of day care to better meet the various care and education needs. Similarly, as society changes, the increase in the number of children in need of special care and education will place new qualitative demands on the ECEC system. A further challenge will emerge as more and more different cultural minorities become part of reality in Finnish society.

After formulating the core curricula for pre-school education, it will also become topical to build up the national ECEC policy definitions in Finland, which will lead to standardisation of the entire ECEC system. The specification of early childhood education and care, both in scientific and practical terms, will alone require the support of research and development activities. From the perspective of lifelong learning, we must be able to define the policies of social education from the birth of a child to the threshold of adulthood.

## Appendix 1. LEGISLATION

Act on Children's Day Care (1973)	L lasten päivähoidosta
Decree on Children's Day Care (1973)	A lasten päivähoidosta
Decree on the Professional Qualifications of Social Welfare Personnel (1992)	A sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusehdoista
Act on the Premises of the School System (1968)	L koulujärjestelmän perusteista
Basic Education Act (1998)	Perusopetuslaki
Decree on the Qualifications of Educational Staff (1998)	A opetustoimen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista
Decree on the Degrees in Education and Teacher Education (1995)	A kasvatustieteellisen alan tutkinnoista ja opettajankoulutuksesta
Act on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision (1998)	L opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta
Decree on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision (1998)	A opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta
Local Government Act (1995)	Kuntalaki
Child Welfare Act (1983)	Lastensuojelulaki
Child Welfare Decree (1983)	Lastensuojeluasetus
Social Welfare Act (1982)	Sosiaalihuoltolaki
Act on Child Allowance (1992)	Lapsilisälaki
Act on the Child Home Care Allowance and the Private Care Allowance (1996)	Laki lasten kotihoidon ja yksityisen hoidon tuesta
Act on Planning and Government Grants for Social Welfare and Health (1992)	Laki sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon suunnittelusta ja valtionosuudesta
Act on Client Fees in Social Welfare and Health Care (1992)	Laki sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon asiakasmaksuista
Decree on Client Fees in Social Welfare and Health Care (1992)	Asetus sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon asiakasmaksuista 1992
Employment contract Act (1970)	Työsopimuslaki

## GLOSSARY

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health	Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö
Centre for Welfare and Health	Stakes
Ministry of Education	Opetusministeriö
National Board of Education	Opetushallitus
National Research and Development	
Association of Finnish Local and	
Regional Authorities	Kuntaliitto
province	Lääni
Provincial State Office	Lääninhallitus
local authority / municipality	Kunta
early childhood education and care	Varhaiskasvatus
pre-school education for six-year-olds	6-vuotiaiden esiopetus
initial education	Alkuopetus
lifelong learning	Elinikäinen oppiminen
information society	Tietoyhteiskunta
sustainable development	Kestävä kehitys
family	Perhe
married couple	Aviopari
cohabiting couple	Avopari
stepfamily	Uusperhe
partner	Puoliso
single parent	Yksinhuoltaja
child benefit system	Lapsilisäjärjestelmä
maternity leave	Äitiysvapaa
paternity leave	Isyysvapaa
parental leave	Vanhempainvapaa
maternity allowance	Äitiysraha
paternity allowance	Isyysraha
parental allowance	Vanhempainraha
maternity grant	Äitiysavustus
child home care allowance	Kotihoidon tuki
partial child-care leave	Osittainen hoitovapaa
partial child-care allowance	Osittainen hoitoraha
private child-care allowance	Yksityisen hoidon tuki
housing allowance	Asumistuki
maintenance allowance	Elatustuki
home help	Kodinhoitoapu
child guidance and family counselling	Kasvatus- ja perheneuvonta
kindergarten	Lastentarha
crèche	Seimi
day-care centre	Päiväkoti

family day care	Perhepäivähoito
group family day care	Ryhmäperhepäivähoito
open day-care centre	Avoim päiväkot
socially oriented day care	Päivähuolto
basic education	Perusopetus
folk school (hist.)	Kansakoulu (hist.)
civic school (hist.)	Kansalaiskoulu (hist.)
lower secondary school (hist.)	Keskikoulu (hist.)
comprehensive school	Peruskoulu
upper secondary school	Lukio
university	Yliopisto
polytechnic	Ammattikorkeakoulu
head of day-care centre	Päiväkodin johtaja
kindergarten teacher	Lastentarhanopettaja
social educator	Sosiaalikasvattaja
Bachelor of Social Sciences	Sosionomi
Bachelor of Education	Kasvatustieteen kandidaatti
Master of Education	Kasvatustieteen maisteri
practical children's nurse	Lastenhoitaja
kindergarten practical nurse	Päivähoitaja
practical nurse	Lähihoitaja
family child minder	Perhepäivähoitaja
special kindergarten teacher	Erityislastentarhanopettaja
class teacher	Luokanopettaja
Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education curriculum	Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet
Premises for Planning Pre-school Education	Opetussuunnitelma
state subsidy system	Esiopetuksen suunnittelun lähtökohtia
	Valtionosuusjärjestelmä



## **Appendix 2. DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH IN THE FIELDS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION**

Since 1992, the Stakes has been collating information on Finnish development and research projects in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The most recent report, published in 1999, contains information on about a thousand projects, which has been received from 250 local authorities as well as from universities and research institutes.

The Stakes is to introduce an Internet-based collection of information in the year 2000. The network-based information will involve an opportunity for discussion and consultation with peer groups, but also with experts in different fields.

The central thematic sectors in the most recent list of ECEC and pre-school development projects are as follows:

- For the good of the child together with the family

The development projects are related to co-operation, not only with parents, but also with grandparents. The theme involves development of sibling group activities and day care as part of child welfare.

- A common world

This theme deals with projects of natural and environmental education and sustainable development. Projects dealing with community and value education include native place projects and work education. The theme involves implementation of projects related to self-esteem and group activities, as well as projects concentrating on education for international understanding and the problems of immigrant families.

- Worlds of play and channels of learning

These development projects emphasise play as providing a world of learning for children. This section involves projects related to physical education, dance and adventure, as well as art education projects. Collaborative learning and active learning together with a child-focused philosophy underline the child's right to participation and self-expression. The projects also deal with learning projects in mathematics and their native tongue. The use of computers in early childhood education and care presents a new pedagogical dimension. There are also development projects in municipalities, which explore the Montessori and Reggio Emilia pedagogical systems. In recent years, Finnish day care has developed Growth Portfolios to describe and record individual children's lives and growth. Based on the Growth Portfolios, it is possible to evaluate day-care work and the achievement of its objectives. For children, the portfolio gives them something of their own, including their own memories, a story about themselves. Children can take their portfolios to a new day-care place or, later, to school. At best, the Growth Portfolio also provides contact between home and day care.

- Special day care

Need for special day care has increased in recent years, which is also evident from the growth in development work. Identification of a need for special day care as early as possible is one of the areas of development work. In addition, new means of working are also being sought in municipalities by developing operating models, for example, where a special care provider will co-operate with children, families, day-care staff and other partners. The local authorities are developing co-operation between different administrations in many ways and are promoting regional networking of different parties in special day care. The flexible transition to school of children in need of special care and education is one of the targets of development work. Some of the projects focus on certain areas of special support, such as children's linguistic and speech disorders or hearing defects and also provide for children with autism and motion disorders.

- Pre-school and initial education

This theme deals with co-operation projects between day care and school in terms of planning, activities and facilities. The projects also concern those of pre-school and initial education not tied to year classes, as well as those developing the pre-school curriculum and content.

- Quality of day care

The quality of day care is seen as early childhood education and care stemming from the needs of the child and the family. Content-related quality plays a central role in the activities, but their productivity has also been taken into account. Sets of quality indicators have been prepared on the basis of client surveys directed at parents and children. Quality is also being enhanced by means of training.

- The various services of day care

This theme deals with the various child-care alternatives provided for families by day care besides day-care centre activities, as well as their development, including family day care, playgroup and play activities and experiments in evening care. The projects also present the service projects of sparsely populated areas, shift, evening and part-time care, as well as the service voucher experiment.

- A developing working community

The maintenance and development of vocational competence, work motivation and interaction in the working community are emphasised in this theme, together with staff training and occupational guidance. The nature of leadership in day care is becoming increasingly administrative and extensive, which means that responsibilities are distributed to teams of employees. New information and enthusiasm to develop one's own work are being sought from co-operation networks. There are also experiments on results-based payment.

- Finlandssvenska utvecklingsprojekt (Swedish-speaking development project)

The development work in Swedish-language day care in Finland focuses on the quality of day care. The content areas emphasised include the environment, nature and mathematics. Co-operation between home and day care is also being developed.

The following list presents the ongoing research and development projects as reported by universities and research institutes. Education for kindergarten teachers was transferred to the control of universities in 1995, which has stimulated research in the field.

*University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education*

- A Child-focused Theory of Education
- Didactics in Pre-school and Initial Education

*University of Helsinki, Kindergarten Teacher Education*

- Cultures of Pre-school Education for Six-year-olds
- Views of Educational Staff on Problematic Behaviour among Children at Day-care Centres, Problematic Situations in Education and How to Influence Them
- You Are Always Somewhere – Where Are You at a Day-care Centre?
- Literacy in a Rucksack
- Educational Thinking and Argumentation Skills Reflected in the Educational Views of Teachers Specialising in Initial Education
- Teacher Teams in Kindergarten Teacher Education
- A Child as a Changing Participant in Day-care Centre Situations
- Art in Early Childhood Education and Care – Visual Art Education and Its Inter-artistic Connections in the Context of Education and Culture
- From Kindergarten to Day Care – the Path of Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care into a Part of Nordic Welfare in 1945–1973
- Integration of Environmental and Natural Studies and Mathematics in Pre-school and Initial Education

*University of Helsinki, Department of Social Psychology*

- Development of Interaction Skills among Kindergarten Teacher Students
- Connections between Children's Temperament and Social Activities at a Day-care Centre
- Multiethnic Education at a Day-care Centre
- Small Children's Spontaneous Mathematics

*University of Joensuu, Faculty of Education*

- From Pre-school Education to the Third Form of Comprehensive School (the ESKO Project)
- New Methods of Teaching Children and of Children's Learning in Pre-school Education
- Physical Education as Support for Learning Difficulties
- Integrating Psychomotor Rehabilitation as Part of Day-care Centre

Activities

- The Computer as a Children's Learning Environment in Early Childhood Learning
- Impact Study of Continuing Training Programmes in Pre-school and Initial Education
- Learning and Teaching Mathematics in Pre-school and Initial Education

*University of Jyväskylä, Department of Teacher Education*

- From Pre-schoolers to First-formers
- Development and Guidance of Learning Skills in Pre-school and Initial Education

*University of Jyväskylä, Department of Early Childhood Education*

- Searching for a Common Path – Preparation of the Curricula for Pre-school and Initial Education as an Action Study

*University of Jyväskylä, Institute for Educational Research*

- Flexibility in the Teaching and Learning of 5–8-year-olds
- Growth Portfolios as a Bridge from Day-care Centre to School
- Bridges from Day-care Centre to School
- Digital Portfolios as Tools for Teacher Discussion and Co-operation

*University of Oulu, Early Childhood Education Centre*

- Professional Ethics Thinking in Teachers' Narratives
- Biographies and Narratives as Describers and Tools of Personal and Professional Growth among Students Studying to Become Teachers in Early Childhood Education and Care
- Quality Assessment in Day Care
- Quality of Family Day Care
- Development Project of University Co-operation
- Leadership in a Day-care Centre Community
- Management of a Day-care Centre in Finland
- Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Work
- Learning in Childhood
- The Role of the Adult in Play Pedagogy
- An Action Analysis of a Child Group on the Conditions and Opportunities of Collaboration
- Trainers of ECEC Teachers as Consultants of Teacher Training Day-care Centres
- Kindergarten Teacher as an Implementer of Early Childhood Education and Care
- Early Childhood Education and Care and ECEC Research in a Changing Societal Orientation
- The India Project

*University of Oulu, Kajaani Department of Teacher Education*

- Research and Development Project of Children's Physical and Health Education

- Development of Mastery of the Profession in ECEC Work
- The Fifth Dimension as a Development Factor of Learning Conditions
- Children's Play and Social Relationships in Day Care
- The Fundamental Questions of Lifelong Learning in the Master's Education in Early Childhood Education and Care
- Development and Developmental Activities of under Three-year-olds
- Children, Culture and Everyday Life
- Elementary Mathematics through Fairy Tales and Play
- The Joint Perception and Action of Mother and Child in the Cyclic Development Anticipating the Child's Speech

*University of Tampere, Kindergarten Teacher Education*

- Drama Play in Early Childhood Education and Care
- Educational Views of Kindergarten Teacher Students and Their Shaping as Interpreted by the Students on the Basis of Their Biographies
- Changes in Children's Conceptual Models and the Development of Children's Exploration Strategies in the PICCO Environment
- The Developing Expertise of Kindergarten Teachers
- Leadership in Early Childhood Centres (ILP Project)
- The Day-care Centre as a Multidisciplinary Working Community
- Family, Work and Early Childhood Education and Care
- The Future Perspective in Teacher Education and Teaching
- Music in the Education and Guidance of Children's Instructors
- 'It Sure is Hard Work Being a Child like That' – Circumstances of FAS Children Taken into Custody
- Establishment of Tampere Kindergarten Seminary in 1955, Measures Leading to the Establishment and Operations in the Early Years
- Societal and Historical Barriers to Providing Pre-school Education
- Pre-school Education as a Target of Pedagogical Development Work

*University of Turku, Department of Education*

- Children's Conceptual Understanding
- Guidance of Learning
- Small Children's Social Relationships

*University of Turku, Department of Teacher Education in Rauma*

- Transaction Analysis of Education
- Study of ECEC Networks
- Oppiva – Developing the Learning Conditions of Children in Family Day Care
- Sound Workshop Experiment

*University of Turku, Centre for Extension Studies*

- Development of Day Care in Small Municipalities

*Stakes*

- Early Childhood Education and Care, Information Technology, Interaction – A Research and Development Project

- The 'Children Narrate' Research Group
- The Public Social and Health Service System and Production of Welfare
- Reconciling Work and Family Life
- Families with Children Survey 1998
- Research and Development of Methods and Practices in Child Welfare Work.