



Recent Social Monitoring and Reporting Activities in Finland

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Introduction

- New government in 2023
- Changing role of social monitoring in Finland
- THL, social reporting and monitoring in shaping policies
- Example: Population health and social well-being review 2023
- Other activities and future directions
- Conclusions



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The Change of Government in 2023

- A major turn towards a very conservative Parliament
- New government coalition set new policy priorities
 - Economic stabilisation and measures to support employment
 - Immigration policy, and security policy in focus
- Changes in health and social policy
 - Welfare policies: service reform, opening the market

Seats in the Parliament (of 200 MPs)

- National Coalition Party 48 (prime minister)
- Finns 45 (minister of finance)
- Social Democratic Party 43
- Centre Party 23
- Green Party 13
- Left Alliance 11
- Swedish People's Party 10
- Christian Democratic Party 5



New Government's Role in Social Monitoring

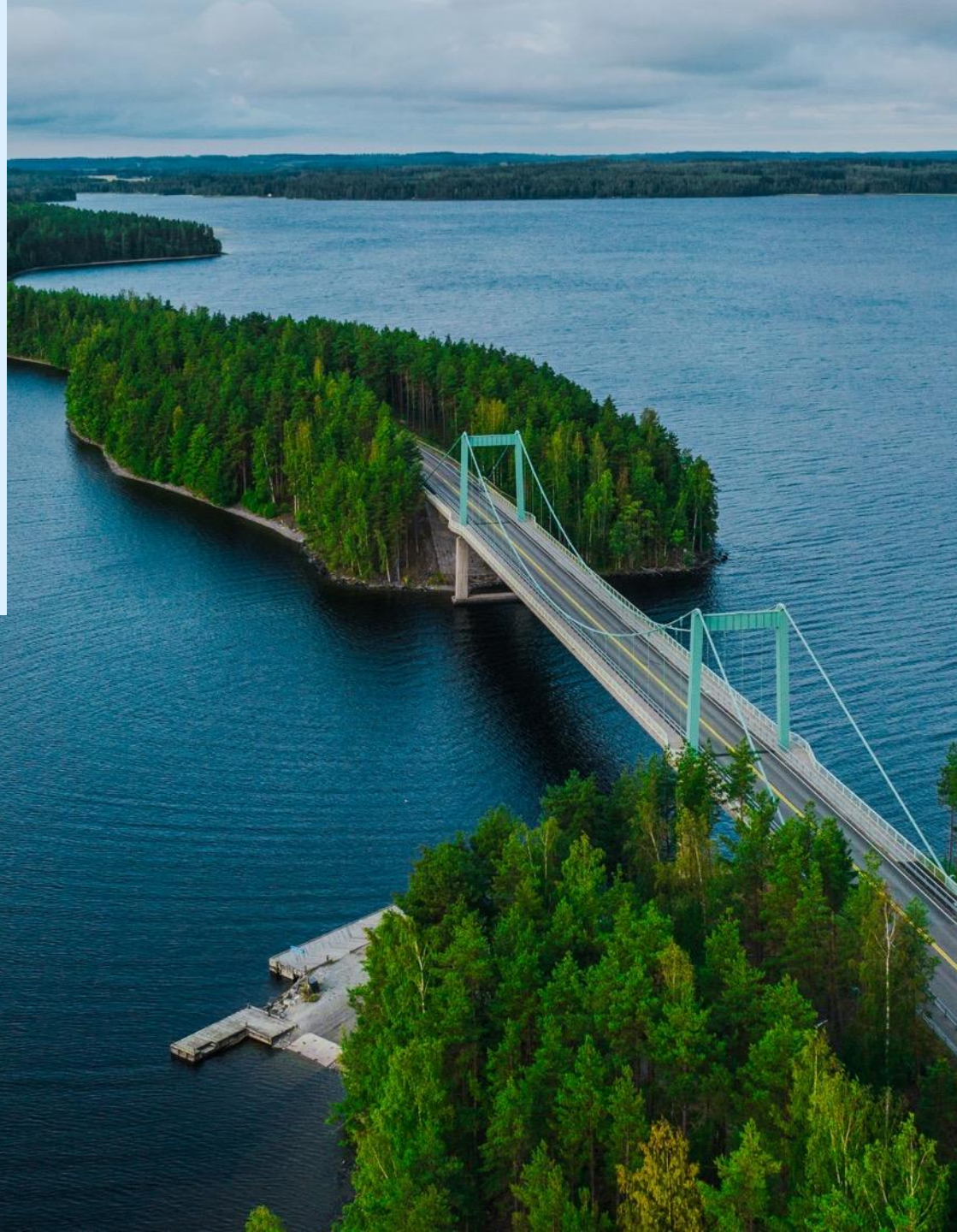
- Shift in priorities and in emphasis on social issues
 - Social policy at the service of employment, defence and immigration policies
- Key changes affecting social monitoring and reporting
 - Changes in the use of information: e.g. lack of overall impact assessments
- Government's approach to transparency and data-driven decision-making
 - Declining relevance of statements (e.g. on the acts prepared for ministries)
 - Disregard for research-based evaluation



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We have five branches located in Helsinki, Kuopio, Oulu, Tampere and Turku.



We annually employ over

1,300
persons (2023)

83%
of our employees are highly educated.

24%
of our employees have researcher training.





We are
a champion of
unique data.

Our data covers
different phenomena
in the social and
health care sector
on an exceptionally
broad scale.

The statistics and
population surveys
we produce describe,
among other things,
the population's
lifestyles and service
use.

Our data helps
develop health
and social services.



THL's Role in Social Monitoring

- THL's mandate and expertise in social reporting
 - Our mandate is based on two elements
 - Law on THL 1§ ” To promote the well-being and health of the population, to prevent disease and social problems... is THL
 - An annual performance agreement with the MSAH
 - Expertise is based on
 - The status of statistical authority on social and health issues
 - Maintenance of registries on them
 - Data collections covering more than 50 years
 - Established reporting on these issues
 - E.g. the *Social Welfare in Finland* report every four years since 2000, latest in 2022 (#7)
- Relevance of THL's work for policymakers, researchers, and the public
 - Despite the changes, THL remains important as a provider of independent policy evaluation, as a research institute and informing the population (e.g. appx. 200 press releases annually)
 - MSAH's efforts for strengthening evidence-based policy making

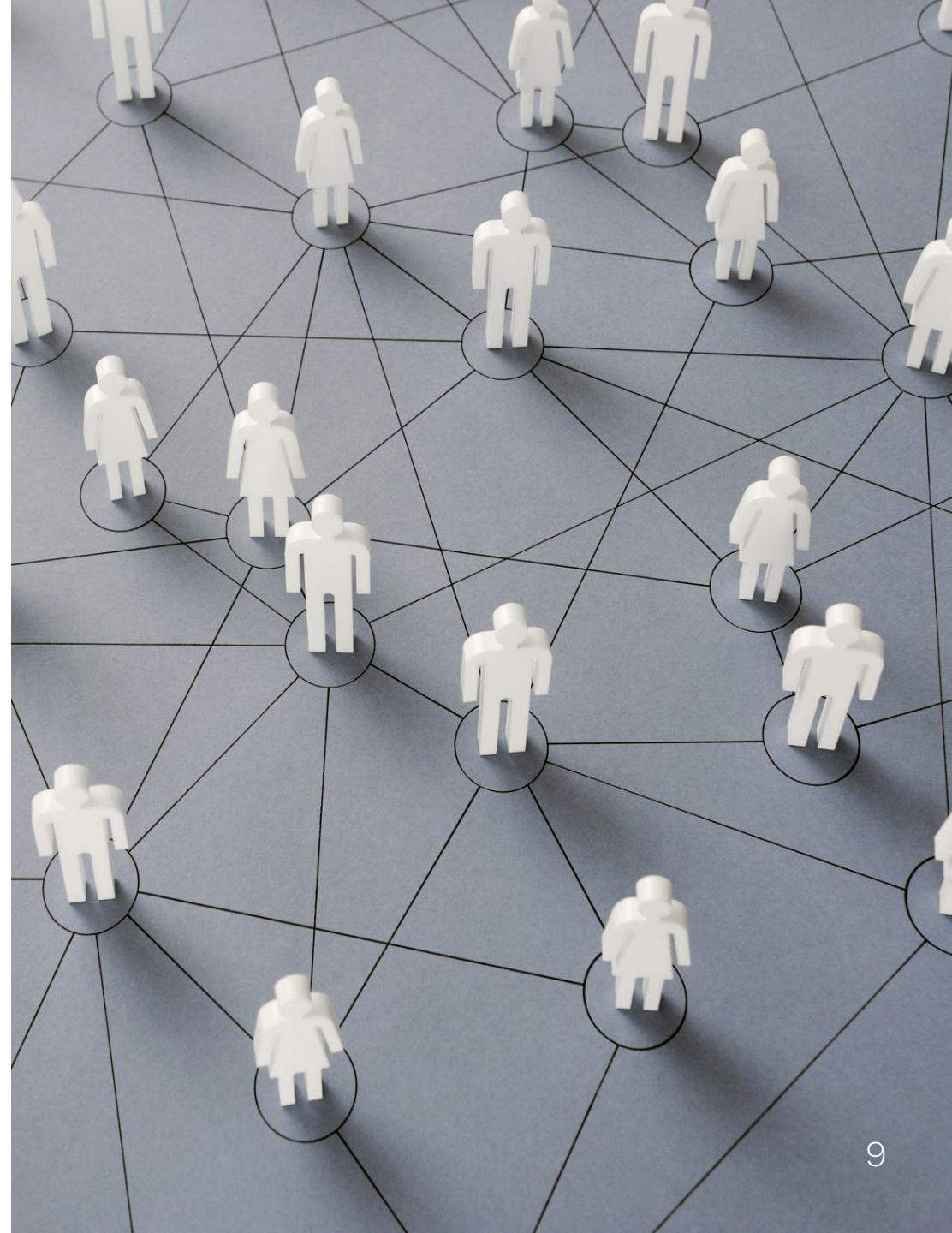


Population Health and Social Well-being Review 2023

- Aim: To provide a comprehensive overview of the key socio-political questions to which the future government should find answers
 - Commissioned by and edited in collaboration with THL and Kela (Social Insurance Institution)
 - <https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/146429> (in Finnish)
- Main theme: social sustainability ('Aiming for a Socially Sustainable Society') with reference to planetary health and wellbeing
- Key areas of focus: social well-being, population health and health disparities, social inequality, social and health services
- The report consisted of three elements: an overview (69p), an extensive slideshow (82 slides) and a summary of the slideshow (11 slides)
 - Aiming for versatility, accessibility, especially for policy makers in ministries at different levels
 - Differs from traditional scientific reports in that the content was presented as concisely as possible and (3-5) policy recommendations were presented for each sub-theme



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Main Findings from the 2023 Report: 10 key messages

Demographic change will test the sustainability of society

Drugs are a major source of harm

Obesity is a major public health problem

Child poverty has not decreased

Socio-economic disparities in health and well-being remain high

Mental health problems among young people have increased

Ethnic minorities experience high levels of discrimination

The organisation of care for the elderly is a critical issue

We need to invest in the adequacy and availability of health and social care staff

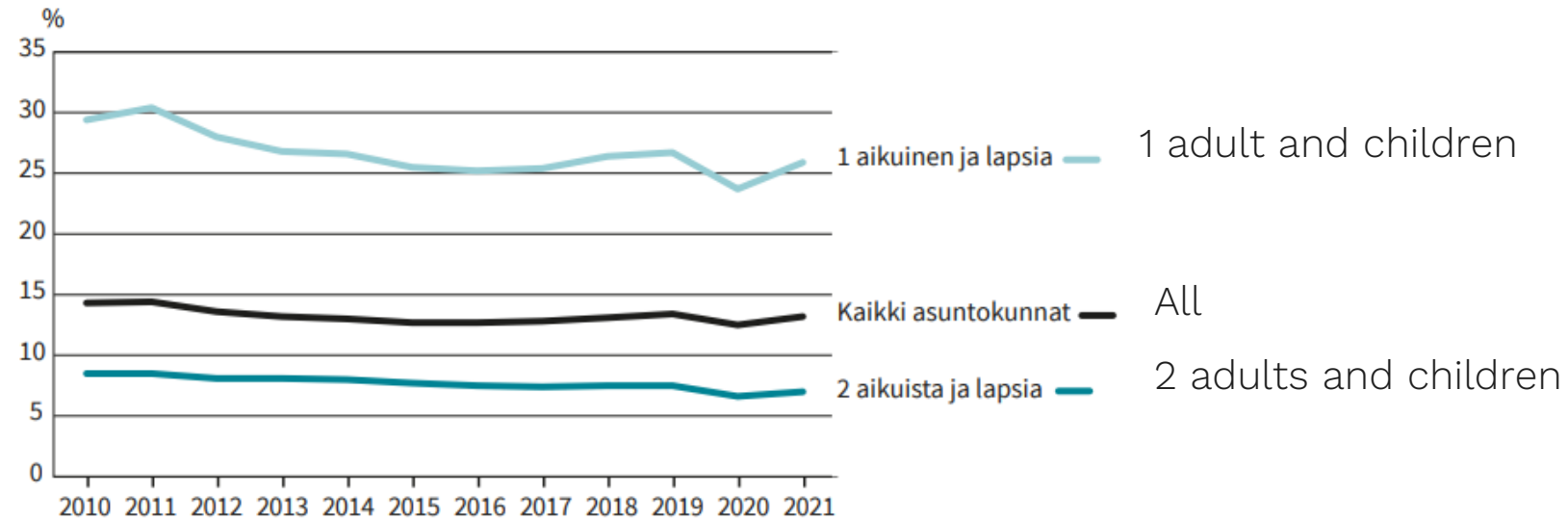
Strengthening the resilience of the social and health services sector for the future



3 Child poverty has not decreased

Snapshot and trends:

- The share of children living in poor families has not decreased significantly in the 2000s. In 2021, 12% of children under 18 was living in low-income families.
- In single-parent families, families with several children and families with parents from a foreign background income problems and low income are more common than in other families with children.
- The difficulties faced by families with children in making ends meet were exacerbated by the Covid-epidemic starting in the spring of 2020.
- In 2022, accelerating inflation could make it harder for families with children to make ends meet, even if the change is not yet reflected in poverty measures.
- The number of families with children receiving income support has decreased, but the share of long-term recipients remains stable.



Low-income rate (60% of median) of the household-dwelling population in all household-dwelling units and in families with children by number of adults in the household-dwelling unit, 2010-2021. Source: Statistics Finland.

Proposed actions:

- To reduce child poverty and promote the well-being of families with children, we need not only to improve the employment of carers and facilitate reconciling work and family life, but also to ensure that the social security and service system is able to respond to the needs of families experiencing difficulties in making ends meet.
- Reconciling work and family life is facilitated by, among other things, affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care, as well as morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren. The level of benefits, index-linking and various child benefit increases are important in social protection.
- Free leisure activities can support children's inclusion and equality.

Policy Impact, i.e. what we know about the use and effectiveness of the review

- Published after Easter 2023 (press conference), just before the government negotiations
- During the preparation phase the Ministry (MSAH) was informed well in advance and at various levels, in an effort to ensure that the material would be used
- The government negotiations themselves were very difficult and non-transparent, so no information was leaked on how and to what extent this particular material was used
- Sources from the Ministry at least seemed to appreciate and asked for additional material (note: this was NOT initiated by the Ministry)



The Follow-up Report of Autumn 2023

- A quick "follow-up" was conducted during Fall 2023: it comprised first evaluations of the *likely outcomes* of the government programme
- Some remarks:
 - The aim to reduce inequalities does NOT feature
 - Tight immigration policies and economic policies are clearly visible:
 - Economic policy: cuts can increase inequality and lead to livelihood problems as well as absolute deprivation and poverty
 - Immigration policy: austerity erodes social trust and cohesion.
 - Particular attention is paid to issues such as mental health (e.g. mental health of young people, ability to work), the role of health promotion and preventive work would appear to be strengthened.
 - Increased levels of poor mental health and well-being among young people will be addressed in many ways



CARD 4: Child poverty has not decreased

Main observations and proposed actions from the review based on the evaluation:

- It is essential not only to improve the employment of child carers and make it easier to reconcile work and family life, but also to ensure that the social security and service system is able to respond to the needs of families with children experiencing difficulties in making ends meet.
- Reconciling work and family life is facilitated by, among other things, affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care, as well as morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren. The level of benefits, index-linking and various child benefit increases are important in social protection.
- Free leisure activities can support children's inclusion and equality.

What the government program says?

- There are both actions that may prevent/alleviate poverty and actions that are likely to increase poverty
 - some measures target those at higher risk of poverty (e.g. increases in child benefit for children under 3)
 - some target for working parents who are at lower risk of poverty (child tax credit for income tax).
- **Cuts in social benefits** likely increase the risk of poverty for families with children, especially if they are in a vulnerable position in working life (unemployment, illness, disability, discrimination). Working parents' livelihoods and employment status are undermined, for example, by the reduction in protection against dismissal and the possibility of concluding a fixed-term contract for a year without a specific reason.
- **Many general objectives**, the impact of which will depend on implementation (e.g. developing a carer's allowance for study grants, increasing the participation rate of children with a migrant background in early childhood education, guiding parents of children under school age receiving income support into the labour market, promoting the reconciliation of work and family life and developing family leave...).
- **Promoting child-friendly policies**, assessing child and family impact in decision-making and recognising the diversity of families with children.

Other Social Reporting Activities in 2023

- By THL:
 - 7 State of Social Affairs brief reports
 - Healthy Finland Survey: 49 online reports (themes covered Livelihood, Social Sustainability, Perceived Security, QoL, Perceived Health, Social Support, Discrimination)
- By others:
 - ITLA Children's Foundation: Child Poverty Solutions for Finland –report (in English)
<https://itla.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Navigator-2023-2-child-poverty-solutions-for-finland.pdf>
 - SOSTE: Social Barometer 2023



Future Directions for Social Monitoring in Finland



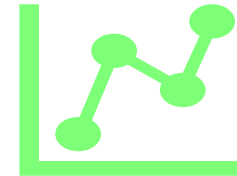
Upcoming THL projects and reports

Update on the 2023 review, Jan 2025

To be utilized as material for government's mid-term negotiations and regional elections

More versatile, more prestigious as a publication (the THL Reports series)

Aiming for making communication more systematic and effective



Methodological and conceptual development

Visualisations, quicker and simpler reporting

Forecasts, cost assessment

Social issues and social sustainability are increasingly discussed in relation to other dimensions of sustainability

Social issues are increasingly combined with security

Conclusions

- Changes in the political environment have significantly altered the role of information in decision-making in Finland
- Yet, social monitoring and reporting remain vitally important. The measurement and understanding of the state of social affairs are needed to project the development of social sustainability and inequalities in well-being
- For the research to be relevant, the “Five Evils” need to be tackled with



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5 EVILS PERSIST

- Timeliness
- Complexity
- Communication
- Changing circumstances
- Political pressures



Thank you for your attention

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS? ADVICE?

* AI was used to comprise an outline for the presentation