

Programme to  
address reform  
in child and  
family services



Working together towards good everyday life for children,  
young people and families

# RIGHT TYPE OF SUPPORT AT THE RIGHT TIME

FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES





## WORKING TOWARDS GOOD EVERYDAY LIFE FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

*Together  
Close to you*

### Government's key project to reform services for children, young people and families

Children and young people have the right to live a good life. Ensuring this is primarily the responsibility of parents, but they are supported by the municipalities, the government, civil society organisations and many other actors.

The Government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä wants children, young people and their parents to be able to access the services they need more easily than is currently the case. This brochure describes how the programme to address reform in child and family services (LAPE) planned by the Government will improve the lives of all children and young people living in Finland.

The Government's plan is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations and approved by the Finnish Par-

liament. Further information on the rights of the child is available at [www.lastensivut.fi](http://www.lastensivut.fi) (in Finnish).

The Government's plan also takes into account children and young people who have moved to Finland from abroad. Young people under the age of 18 who have come to Finland without their parents are need particular looking after as a communal effort.

The project also covers services for young people. Individuals over the age of 18 are legally regarded as adults, but this should not mean that they can no longer access services aimed at young people if they still need them.

Authorities must work together to provide support in securing a place to study or in finding a job, in health issues and in other important matters so that young adults can find their place in life.

## What is LAPE?

The programme to address reform in child and family services (LAPE) promotes a good life for children and young people. The goals set are that when the programme of reform ends:

- Children, young people and families get the right type of support at the right time
- Decision-makers and professionals are better able to interact with children and young people
- Decision-makers and professionals are familiar with the rights of the child and professionals cooperate more efficiently
- Adults take the views of children and young people into consideration when planning services in schools, early childhood education, health services, child protection and youth work
- Decision-makers identify the impacts of their decisions on children before making decisions

**New approaches cannot be adopted overnight. It takes time to develop them and put them into practice.**

*Now is the right moment to take action*

For whose good are we working now?

**For your good!**

For the good of every child and young person living in Finland.

- You may live in a large or small town or in the countryside
- You may live in a family with one, two or more parents
- You may live with a foster family or in a children's home
- You may have a father and a mother or parents of the same gender
- Your family may be part of the majority population or belong to an ethnic minority
- You may have been born in Finland or abroad
- Your life may be impacted by your own or a family member's disability or ill health

# Which services are we talking about here?

- Healthcare, home services for families with children, family work and developmental and family counselling clinics
- Child health clinics and early childhood education
- School and the services of the school nurse, doctor, social worker and psychologist
- Recreational activities for children and young people and other group activities
- Youth work, libraries and cultural services
- Support for the parents of children and young people, for example, in addressing problems related to health, alcohol, violence or finances
- Services for parents separating or divorcing
- Child protection

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## What needs to be improved in the way things are now?

- Children do not have access to understandable information about services
- Adults do not always find out the views of children and young people
- Parents do not receive timely help for their problems
- Services are fragmented between different service providers
- Children, young people and families do not always find the right service at the right time
- Authorities do not know how to act in a way that inspires confidence in them among children and young people
- Authorities do not cooperate enough with each other or know enough about each other's activities

## What will change with LAPE?

- Authorities support children and families early enough
- Authorities are better able to interact with children, young people and families
- The various authorities work together for the good of children and young people
- Child and youth work carried out by civil society organisations and religious communities supplement the services of the municipalities
- Decision-makers take the impacts of their decisions on children and young people into account in everything they do
- Authorities provide more services online



## How should services for children and young people be organised?

Society must organise services in such a way as to ensure that they are appropriate for different people and different situations. It must be easy to access services. Under the Government's plan, public authorities must cooperate with each other in such a way as to ensure that the child and their family no longer need to deal separately with many different authorities. Instead, the authorities will work together to assist the child and the family.

It is important that authorities listen to the views of the child and their parents regarding the family's needs. Support must be brought to the home, school and other environment of the child and integrated into everyday life. Providing the child and their family members with the right type of support at the right time will strengthen their resources and enable them to improve the situation themselves.

Authorities must take into account all those who are close to the child or young person. In addition to the parents, these may include siblings, grandparents, other relatives or friends of the family.

The child or young person must also be able to use their mother tongue when dealing with the authorities. The mother tongue can be a spoken language or a signed language. If the child or young person is unable to communicate through speech because of a disability, for example, means appropriate for them must be used to ascertain their views.



## Where are the services provided?

After 2020, healthcare and social services will be organised by counties. A county will consist of several municipalities. The county will be responsible, for example, for organising child protection, mental healthcare services, rehabilitation and various medical services.

The municipalities will continue to be responsible for education and culture services such as early childhood education, basic education, youth work, library and sports services and for the development of residential areas. The home municipality therefore will continue to decide on many of the services that are important for children and young people.

The aim of LAPE is to bring together various services for children in so-called family centres. Professionals from various sectors would work together in a network-like manner as support for families. The family centre could also obtain the services of a medical specialist. Sometimes children and families would use the services of central hospitals, in the same way as they do now.

In some cases, the level of special expertise required may not be available in every municipality or even in every county. Such highly specialised support may be needed, for example, by children with disabilities and their families. Special support is also needed by children and young people who have experienced violence or sexual abuse or have committed offences themselves. In this case, too, the aim is primarily for professionals to provide services close to the child or young person.

*What do you think? What could be done better?*

# When should children and families be able to receive support?



Children, young people and families must get support early enough. If, for example, a parent is ill or tired or has a substance abuse problem, the authorities must help the parent without delay. The earlier the family receives help, the easier it is to solve problems.

Authorities must also provide assistance if there are serious disputes at home. Outside counselling can help parents to settle their dispute or split up as amicably as possible.

At times parents' problems can be so serious that the child or young person cannot continue living at home. That is when child protection services are needed. The aim of LAPE, however, is to reduce the need to take children and young people into care, that is, to place them with another family or in institutional care outside their own home. Child protection can provide support for the parents, for the whole family or arrange a support person or a support family for the child.

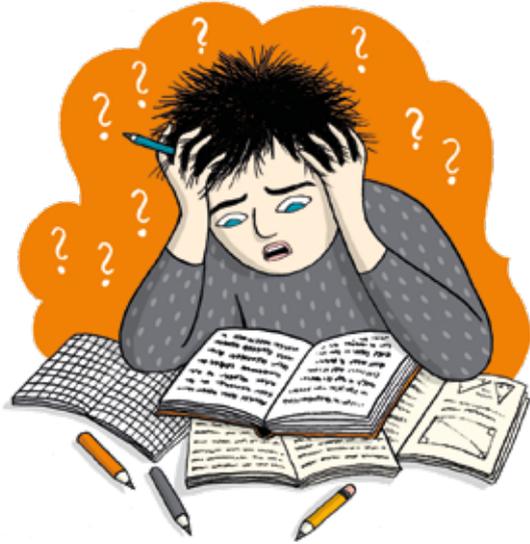
## How will the Government monitor the implementation and success of its plan?

*If LAPE is successful in its objectives, by 2025 in Finland:*

- Interaction between children and young people and their parents will have improved
- Loneliness will be a problem for fewer children and young people
- Every child and young person will have at least one close and safe adult
- Bullying in daycare centres, schools and during leisure time will have decreased
- Every child and young person will have a hobby
- Children and young people will enjoy attending school and will complete their education
- Children and young people will not have to suffer violence or from parents' substance abuse
- Young people will not end up being involved in criminal activities
- Parents in the process of separation or divorce will be supported so that they are able to minimise the impacts of the separation or divorce on their children's lives
- Parents' workplaces will be family friendly (for example, working hours may be flexible), enabling parents to cope better at work and at home
- Children, young people and parents will feel that the services and support provided by society are helpful and beneficial and that they can influence important issues in their lives

## When will the plan be implemented?

The Government has allocated approximately EUR 40 million to the reform project in child and family services. The plan will be implemented mainly between 2017 and 2018. Children and young people will be included in planning and implementing the project. Implementation of the project is being steered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture under their ministers in charge.



## What should policymakers do now?

- In all their activities, decision-makers must always assess the impacts of decisions concerning, for example, the economy, the environment, transport, housing or education on the lives of children and young people.
- When deciding on spending, decision-makers must ascertain the advantages and disadvantages their decision could have as regards children and young people. The impacts may emerge rapidly or more slowly.
- Authorities must collect data on the wellbeing of children and young people so that the decision-makers know how they are doing.
- Decision-makers must utilise the information that researchers produce about the lives of children and young people.
- Decision-makers must make sure legislation does not prevent but promotes the good management of matters relating to children and young people. Authorities must be able to provide one another with important information, but in such a way that protection of the personal data of the child or young person is not compromised. If legislation contains provisions that make it unduly difficult to manage matters relating to children or young people, these must be rethought and re-enacted.
- Decision-makers must determine how the best interest of children and young people are realised in situations where parents from different countries separate or divorce and a disagreement arises on custody of the child. These situations are complicated by the fact that different countries may have different laws.

## What can you do?

If you notice that there is room for improvement in something, take action. Talk about the issue with the staff at your school or write to a newspaper. As a resident of your municipality you can write or call the locally elected officials (such as the local councillors, members of the local executive and local authority committees). Youth councils, student unions and various civil society organisations are also good places in which to exert influence. Social media is a good place to stimulate discussion.

You can also email the Director of Child and Family Services Reform Maria Kaisa Aula ([mariakaisa.aula@stm.fi](mailto:mariakaisa.aula@stm.fi)), Project Manager Hanne Kalmari, ([hanne.kalmari@stm.fi](mailto:hanne.kalmari@stm.fi)) or Project Manager Katja Bergbacka ([katja.bergbacka@minedu.fi](mailto:katja.bergbacka@minedu.fi)).

## What must authorities do now?

- Municipalities, county-level regional governments, and central government must operate in a child-friendly manner, in other words, the best interest of the child must be taken into account in all decisions.
- Authorities must cooperate not only with each other but also with civil society organisations and other actors such as the Church and its parishes. All these actors work for the good of children and young people, so it makes sense that they are aware of each other's work and support each other.
- Adults working for the good of children and young people must undergo training and develop their competencies in areas such as interacting with children. Professionals must also guide each other and disseminate their good ideas to others too.

# Who can I ask for more information about LAPE?

Work relating to LAPE is being carried out at the national, county and municipal levels. The easiest way to get more information is to contact your local change agent. The change agents will refer your question forward if necessary.

For the up-to-date contact details of the change agents, visit [stm.fi/lapsi-ja-perhepalvelut/muutosagentit](http://stm.fi/lapsi-ja-perhepalvelut/muutosagentit) (in Finnish).

GOVERNMENT  
KEY PROJECTS  
2016-2018



Read more about the national programme to address reform in child and family services:

Websites: <http://stm.fi/en/programme-to-address-child-and-family-services>

Twitter: @STM\_Uutiset  
@THLlapemuutos  
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#kärkihanke

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