

# Voluntary National Review 2025 of Finland

## Views of Civil Society

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**Introduction: Compilation of the Civil Society Perspectives**

The views of civil society, including young people, were collected through over 15 different consultations, bilateral meetings and written feedback. A wide range of civil society actors, representing different generations and sectors, debated Finland’s successes and challenges. This report offers a glimpse of civil society priorities and concerns. When the report refers to civil society perspectives, it refers to viewpoints presented in the various consultations, based on data and civil society’s vast experience and expertise. Reflecting the diversity of civil society, not all those who participated in the consultations agree on all the contents of the civil society report.

Civil society actors that participated in the consultations included: Amnesty International Finnish Section; Church Resources Agency; Dalit Solidarity Network in Finland; Disability Partnership Finland; European Anti Poverty Network Finland EAPN-Fin; Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters; Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm); Finn Church Aid; Finnish Development NGOs Fingo; Finnish HIV Foundation; Finnish National Committee for UNICEF; Finnish Red Cross; Finnish Roma Association; Finnish Youth, Peace and Security network; Foodaid.fi; Food and Forest Development Finland; Lions International; Operaatio Arktis; Peabud ry; Plan International Finland Children's Board; Pro Ethical Trade Finland; Save the Children Finland; Siemenpuu Foundation; SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health; Technology for Life; The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions; The Coalition of Finnish Women’s Associations NYTKIS; The Committee of 100 in Finland; The Equestrian Federation of Finland; The Family Federation of Finland Väestöliitto; The Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses; The Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed; The Martha Association; The Threshold Association; Trade Union for the Public Welfare Sectors (JHL); Trade Union of Education (OAJ); Trade Union Solidarity Center of Finland SASK; Transfeminines NGO; WWF Finland; Youth Agenda2030 -Group.

## SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- Finland is a welfare state with advanced social protection systems and measures.
- Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government has made significant cuts to social security. Overall, there is a risk that ongoing cuts to social security will increase the number of people living under the national poverty line and leave particularly vulnerable people behind.

Social security benefits were increased and additional measures taken to reduce the risk of poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Important measures to address child poverty have included adopting the European Child Guarantee, drawing up the first National Child Strategy (2021) and launching its Implementation Plan (2024–2027).

However, Orpo's Government has introduced significant cuts and freezes to social security, which have impacted a range of unemployment benefits, housing allowances and reimbursements for healthcare-related costs. At the same time, customer fees for healthcare and social welfare services were increased. With simultaneous growth in [unemployment](#) and inflation, including the rapid rise in costs of living, the cuts have been cause for [alarm](#).

No comprehensive impact analyses were conducted during the planning phase, but [simulations](#) project an increase in rates of poverty. The need for [food assistance](#) and the number of [foreclosures and default notices](#) has already grown. Relatively speaking, students and unemployed people are projected to suffer the greatest cumulative impact of the ongoing changes to social security.

The Orpo Government seems to be acting against the 2023 recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which states that Finland should avoid cuts to social security benefits that will affect children at risk of poverty and exclusion. [More](#) than one in ten children in Finland now live in low-income families. It seems unlikely that commitments to reduce the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the context of the Child Guarantee will be met. [Surveyed](#) children and young people describe shortages of nutritious food, hygiene products and medicines and are increasingly concerned about their futures.

Unemployment and long-term reliance on social security increases lifelong poverty, extending all the way to pensions. In 2022, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons urged the Government to address old-age poverty. Civil society organisations point out that children of migrant families, single-parent households or low-income families are also at particular risk of poverty.

An emerging form of poverty is linked to the reliance on digitalisation for access to basic services in society. Increasingly, people cannot afford the required hardware and software, including new skills, to keep up with digitalisation, which puts them at risk of social exclusion.

When it comes to ending poverty internationally, Finland had poverty eradication as a primary goal of its international development policy until 2023. The current government's approach focuses on the connection between trade and development, with a less explicit focus on poverty eradication and the needs of Least Developed Countries.

## SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- In contrast to the bleak situation globally, food security and domestic food production in Finland have remained at a relatively good level through the recent crises.
- There is, however, concern about decreasing access to nutritious and sufficient food for all people and rising rates of malnutrition.

The increase in community-supported agriculture initiatives in Finland is a positive trend. However, policies should be developed to better reflect environmental degradation and climate change to secure future food production and food security. In Finland and elsewhere, primary and other food producers are among the first to experience the impacts of climate change. Efforts to limit agricultural runoff that pollutes the Baltic Sea, including [regenerative and carbon farming](#), are encouraging.

Positive steps already taken include the [National Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2030 \(2022\)](#), which includes important targets and measures to ensure food and nutrition security. Several regions in Finland have also developed climate change adaptation plans. [New food recommendations](#) promote the adoption of healthier, more climate-friendly diets. However, the circular nutrient economy remains in its infancy. The legislative environment is not considered supportive enough of novel food innovations including cell-based food production.

Civil society surveys from 2023 [report](#) an increased demand for food aid in Finland. [Food prices](#) rose particularly sharply in 2023. Food aid distributors are seeing more variation among people in need, including students, families with children, unemployed people and older people. Among those seeking food aid, the proportion of people with immigrant backgrounds, including Ukrainians, is rising. In a 2023 [survey](#), 14 per cent of children from low-income families reported that they did not have sufficient food at home, which is double compared to the previous year. The nutritional value of food is also a challenge for low-income families and for those suffering from obesity. [Research](#) shows that consumers have had to reduce their consumption of vegetables, for example, due to cost considerations.

The organisation of food aid benefitted from reforms that institutionalised and consolidated state subsidies for food aid (2024) and from the revision of waste legislation (2020), which made it easier to donate surplus food. The State's annual allocation of EUR 3 million to food assistance is welcome but does not address the root causes of food insecurity such as unemployment, mental health problems and homelessness.

With regard to Finland's role internationally, civil society actors expressed their concern about the negative impacts of Finnish food imports on land use, deforestation, water resources and emissions elsewhere in the world. Civil society actors feel that these aspects are not sufficiently understood or measured. Considering the projected future impact of climate change, civil society actors feel that Finland is not providing enough funding to support small-scale food producers' efforts to adapt to climate change in Least Developed Countries. Green Climate Funding, for example, is not sufficiently channelled to food systems development or small-scale farmers.

### SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- Over the last several government terms, Finland has attempted necessary large-scale healthcare and social welfare service reforms in order to keep providing high-quality services for all.
- There is a concern about rising inequality with respect to health services and support for well-being.

On a global scale, the overall status of healthcare and access to health services in Finland is good. Clear progress has been made with regard to reducing mortality and preventing communicable diseases. Civil society organisations have contributed to and played a substantial role in multistakeholder health sector competence centres. Finland reached the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets in 2023 and successfully piloted the provision of free contraceptives and sexual counselling to all persons under 25 years of age in 2022–2023. Finland is a global leader in the field of sexology.

Finland has several ongoing or planned national health programmes and reforms [driven by](#) demographic [changes](#) such as a weakening dependency ratio and urbanisation. Nevertheless, Finland faces challenges when it comes to ensuring healthy lives, especially for its ageing population. [Shortages of healthcare staff](#) and [closures of services and facilities](#) impact access to services. There are clear health [disparities](#) between population groups based on gender, language skills, ethnic background, geographic location and socio-economic status. [Distance](#) to services is a challenge for people living in remote and rural areas. On the other hand, it can also be [difficult](#) to access healthcare services in urban areas due to high demand. Older people, for their part, face inequities when accessing digital health services.

Civil society actors assess that the current resources available for healthcare and social welfare services and related reforms are inadequate. The lack of resources jeopardises service delivery and preventive measures. Service availability is projected to decrease with the further [public funding cuts](#) faced by many [civil society organisations](#) providing healthcare and social welfare services. This is expected to reduce the availability of [low-threshold services](#) for those most at risk of being left behind, including testing services for sexually transmitted

diseases. Current policy shifts may also reduce access to healthcare services for undocumented migrants.

There is a perception among civil society actors that the price of being ill in Finland is too high for some people as a result of changes to social security on the one hand and client fees in public healthcare on the other. For example, there are concerns that cuts to social insurance reimbursements for the cost of travel to healthcare services will disproportionately reduce access to health services for people with disabilities. There are reports that low-income families and older people with comorbidities are choosing between buying food or filling prescriptions.

At the same time, Finland is facing emerging health challenges such as a growing number of people living with memory disorders, higher rates of obesity and a decrease in mental health, particularly among young people. The availability of institutional care services is already inadequate, and family caregivers are increasingly stretched beyond their capacity. Resources for the prevention and treatment of substance abuse have declined.

## SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- Finland has a high level of participation in learning.
- However, Finland has been unable to halt the degeneration of its educational system and the decline in educational outcomes, particularly among younger children, which has been observed since the early 2000s.

Participation rates in primary and secondary education are high. The extension of compulsory education until the age of 18 under the [Compulsory Education Act](#) (2020) appears to have had a positive impact. Making upper secondary education free of charge has enhanced equality in access to education for children from different socio-economic backgrounds. Finland has wanted to increase the number of young people with higher education to 50 per cent of young people, but reaching the target would require significant additional financial investment.

Gender differences in educational outcomes are evident, with girls outperforming boys in most subjects. Regional disparities have also emerged. Students from [less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds](#) tend to have worse educational outcomes than their peers. International [human rights bodies](#) have called on Finland to take further measures to ensure equal access to education for all, including Roma, the Indigenous Sámi people, and children and young people with disabilities.

An increasing shortage in and attrition of qualified teachers is emerging, especially in early childhood education and care. Civil society is concerned about the negative impact that cuts made in 2024 to funding for adult education will have on teachers' in-service training, which the

Special Rapporteur on the right to education encouraged education providers to actively facilitate.

The accessibility plan for higher education (2021) has set out to promote accessibility, equality, participation and diversity in higher education. Finland still has highly gender-segregated fields of study, however, and the number of students from foreign backgrounds in universities is relatively small.

Finland reformed its approach to continuous learning in 2019–2023 and established the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (SECLE). Under Orpo's Government, follow-up to the reform has been limited. Adult education opportunities have been reduced. In 2023, fewer employed people reported undertaking independent studies. A lack of sufficient support for adults with disabilities as a part of employment services makes it challenging for them to retrain and re-enter employment. Without lifelong learning, older people are in danger of being left behind in digital development.

A comprehensive action plan or strategy for democracy and human rights education is needed. The current Government's funding cuts, including to the Finnish National Board of Education and civil society organisations, have directly reduced Finland's ability to advance global citizenship education and education for sustainable development.

Finland's international commitment to education has increased and education remains one of the priority areas in Finnish development cooperation. Finland continues to be involved in international priority projects, and has established FinCEED and invested in education-related initiatives within the EU's Global Gateway strategy. After a slight increase, the development assistance budget for education-related activities is projected to decrease drastically in 2025.

## SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- Finland has reached a high level of gender equality.
- Challenges remain; of particular concern are the alarming levels of violence against women.

Several legislative amendments have advanced gender equality in Finland, many of which were included in the Government's 2020–2023 Action Plan for Gender Equality. Improvements have been made to the Abortion Act, the Criminal Code and transgender legislation, as well as the Marriage Act to allow for the annulment of forced marriages. Finland has adopted an Action Plan for Combatting Violence against Women (2022–2025). Orpo's Government also consulted with civil society actors when drawing up the Gender Equality Programme for 2024–2027.

Nevertheless, progress has been uneven. Finland was ranked fourth on the EU gender equality index in 2020, but by 2023, Finland had dropped to eighth place. Finland's [scores on the index dropped](#) in the domains of knowledge, money, power and time.

The number of women business leaders in Finland has stagnated. Online harassment and hate speech [targets women in particular](#). Online harassment is something young people are also particularly concerned about. Women are more impacted by the online harassment, and many women's organisations report that it reduces the willingness of women to enter politics.

Despite the 2022 reforms of the parental leave system and attempts to increase gender equality in unpaid domestic work, women's pensions are still about 20 per cent lower than those of men. Finland has not managed to close the pay gap, and women still take on a greater share of unpaid domestic and care work. Women face pregnancy discrimination and transgender people report regular discrimination in the job market. Particularly organisations that work to promote the rights of sexual minorities fear a weakening of the commitment to safeguarding and advancing LGBTIQ+ rights.

Levels of violence against women remain alarmingly high, with reported intimate partner violence increasing. [Almost half of girls](#) attending the eighth and ninth grades have experienced sexual harassment. Transgender people also report high levels of violence. There are concerns about how cuts to public funding will impact the work to combat violence.

Those at particular risk of being left behind include disabled women belonging to ethnic minorities and sexual and gender minorities. Women with low education levels who have migrated to Finland also face discrimination. Proposed changes to work permits may further discriminate against pregnant immigrant women.

## SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- The situation with regard to water management and sanitation in Finland is largely positive.
- There is still room for improvement in water recycling, reducing agricultural nutrient releases and strengthening water stewardship, both nationally and internationally.

All people in Finland have [access](#) to safe and affordable drinking water, as well as adequate sanitation and hygiene. Finland has set ambitious goals for the sustainable use of water and has initiated several national programmes to achieve these goals. Current programmes include the second phase (2024–2025) of the Water Protection Enhancement Programme (2019–2023) and the National Water Stewardship Action Plan for 2023–2025, which is part of the National Roadmap for Water Stewardship by 2030, initiated in 2019. A target has been set for [Finnish companies](#) to become leaders in water stewardship by 2030.

Enhancing water stewardship is also one of the objectives of the Finnish International Water Strategy. A [focus](#) on international value chains is crucial, as they account for an estimated 50

to 80 per cent of the total water consumption by Finnish industries and households abroad, including in areas suffering from severe water-related problems.

Finland aims to integrate water stewardship into all sectors of society, and there is strong ground for policy coherence and cross-sectoral cooperation in this sphere. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has drawn up the aforementioned roadmap in cooperation with other ministries, Finnish research institutes and WWF Finland. Civil society organisations are recognised as equal stakeholders, playing a key role in raising awareness about water stewardship and exposing water-related violations in companies' facilities in Finland and in value chains abroad.

The results of these programmes will only be measurable in the coming years, but the potential for ambitious achievements is well recognised. Positive developments already include the safe treatment of nearly all wastewater in 2023 and progress in river basin and flood risk management, among other areas. Cooperation with neighbouring countries on transboundary waters has been effective, and positive results have been achieved in the restoration, management, protection and/or rehabilitation of aquatic bird habitats, shore meadows and mires.

In terms of global responsibility, water and sanitation is a thematic sector, but not a policy priority, in Finnish Official Development Assistance (ODA). Finland's expertise in this sector includes international development cooperation but also water mediation initiatives. Public development cooperation finance for this sector ranged from EUR 11.7. to 12.6. million between 2020 and 2023, with only EUR 6.6 million allocated in 2021.

## SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

- Finland has made advancements in terms of its energy transition.
- Finland has challenges in ensuring a sustained, just energy transition at the national and global levels.

Economics, technological progress and a goal of self-sufficiency are driving the green transition in Finland. There has been a relatively steady decline in the use of coal and peat in [Finland's energy mix](#). Finland has made a wide range of energy investments. Orpo's Government Programme contains several entries on clean energy. The continued commitment to the national Climate Act and Finland's target of being carbon neutral by 2035 are commendable.

Despite the positive overall direction of development, challenges remain. The intermittence of weather-dependent renewable energy poses an increased challenge for the electric grid and thus for its reliability. Furthermore, it triggers the fluctuation of prices, which can increase inequalities and place a burden on poorer households.

Civil society actors sense a decrease in political support for the green transition. The 2024 legislative amendment of the Act on the Promotion of the Use of Renewable Fuels in Transport lowers the level of ambition and moderates the increase in the statutory distribution obligation and additional obligation for 2025–2027. The lack of EU regulatory support for vehicles using domestically produced biogas in Finland has slowed down the transport sector's transition to carbon neutrality.

Finnish people are showing interest in participating in the energy market as producers. However, the perception of civil society actors is that there are still legislative hurdles and disincentives to this, such as expensive connection charges.

Though Finland reports that all people have access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services, regional and social differences are apparent and there is a risk that vulnerable households will be left behind in the ongoing energy transition. Also absent from the discussion and implementation of a just transition are future generations.

Internationally, civil society actors do not see Finland adequately considering how its development and climate finance reduces inequalities and leaves no one behind in ensuring universal access to clean, renewable energy. Finland's advocacy for reducing the share of fossil energy investments in development bank financing has been valuable, as has its development cooperation initiatives to support local renewable energy solutions.

## SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- Among fluctuations in employment and unemployment rates, positive developments can be seen regarding the status of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) young people.
- Finland is not doing enough to reduce the human rights impacts of business activities.

Finland's economic performance in terms of GDP growth and GDP per employed persons has fluctuated over the past few years. When compared to incomes, consumers' purchasing power has weakened considerably since 2021 due to rising energy prices, interest rates and inflation. [Consumer confidence](#) has remained low for over 2 years.

Finland made progress on [employment and unemployment rates](#) under Sanna Marin's Government. Under Petteri Orpo's Government, employment has declined. The trend of decreasing full-time work and increasing part-time and temporary work has continued. The proportion of long-term unemployed persons among all job seekers has risen.

Orpo's Government has cut support to services for the unemployed, including the hard-to-employ. Persons in wage-subsidised employment are finding it more difficult to meet the

conditions required to qualify for certain unemployment benefits. The rights of asylum seekers and immigrants to work in Finland have also been weakened.

Orpo's Government is enacting significant labour legislation that weakens workers' rights, some of which is in conflict with ILO Conventions 144, 87 and 98. Employees have felt inadequately heard during the legislative process. Particularly trade unions consider the 120 Publications of the Finnish Government 2025:71 restricting of political and sympathy strikes and the fining of individual employees and trade unions involved problematic. There is also a proposal to limit the national conciliator's role in collective bargaining negotiations. As a result of policy shifts, Finland has become the first Nordic country to lose its top-tier rating in the ITUC Global Rights Index.

Globally, Finland's material footprints per capita and material consumption rates remain higher than the EU average. Disappointingly, Finland only [voted in favour](#) of the EU's corporate sustainability due diligence directive after provisions that would have enabled trade unions to take legal action against non-compliant firms were removed from the draft. Civil society actors are also dismayed that decent work is no longer one of the stated priorities of Finland's development policy.

## SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

- Finland has high levels of commitment to technology and innovation.
- Finland is struggling to ensure that its development is equitable, sustainable and resource-efficient.

Finland has made a long-term [political commitment](#) to increase its RDI investments to 4 per cent of GDP. Finland introduced a Circular Economy Strategic Programme in 2021, and the circular economy has gained traction among various actors, including in the Finnish private sector. The 2021 agreements between the Government and university cities to build innovation ecosystems hold a lot of potential.

Despite these efforts, few concrete results have been seen. The sustainability of innovation clusters around core themes such as food and energy depends on the extent to which they can reduce their resource use and move away from less-clean technologies or value chains that economically, socially or ecologically exploit third countries. Civil society actors are also concerned that innovation capacity will be undermined by cuts to students' and young entrepreneurs' social security and the Government's seeming prejudices towards labour migration to Finland.

Maintaining reliable hard and digital infrastructure in a sustainable manner in Finland is a [challenge](#). Civil society actors recognise the related questions concerning security of supply and equitable access. Civil society actors are concerned that the needs of an ageing population

and the impact of climate change are not being adequately considered in planning and implementation.

The use of virgin raw materials remains [unsustainable](#). Civil society feels that Finland lacks policy instruments to manage systemic change, including price controls for the use of natural resources. In advancing the green transition, reliance has largely been on market-based incentives, mostly in sectors where this has been profitable. Planning and managing the phase-out of unsustainable industries and anticipating the need to retrain workers in jobs that will become obsolete is not being done in an economically or socially responsible manner.

Finnish industry, particularly the forestry sector, has not managed to increase its manufacturing added value as per its own targets. Closely linked with levels of felling, forests are no longer a carbon sink in Finland. Finland is projected [to fail to meet its carbon neutrality target](#) by 2035, which may oblige Finland to buy expensive carbon credits.

## SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

- Finland has taken initiative to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws and policies.
- Current developments in attitudes and policies, including fiscal, wage and social protection policies, are undermining efforts and strides towards equality.

Some policies shown to increase inequalities in access to benefits and a secure income, such as the 'activation model' in employment legislation, have been reformed. In addition, the preliminary results of the new family leave model appear to be positive.

However, since 2020, Finland has not succeeded in reducing income inequality when measured by the Gini coefficient, for example. The income of the bottom 40 per cent of the population [has not grown](#) at a rate higher than the national average. The three lowest income deciles are anticipated to experience further losses of income due to recent policy changes. Simulations of the impact of current policies project further growth in inequality, [estimating](#) a 9.2 per cent increase of the number of poor people at population level and a 13.6 per cent increase in the number of poor children. At the same time, reduced support to employment services raises concerns that the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, and students and young people will not have access to adequate services to find employment and enhance their income status.

Discrimination is a significant and increasing [problem](#) in Finland. People of immigrant origin experience various forms of discrimination at multiple, compounding levels. The 'Being Black in the EU' [report](#) drawn up by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2023 found that 66 per cent of respondents of African descent had felt discriminated against in the year before the survey. The study ranked Finland the third-most racist country in the EU. The large gap in knowledge between children of immigrant origin and other children has been linked to

factors including persistent discrimination, harassment and the high incidence of bullying in schools. In this context, the Ministry of Education and Culture's action plan to promote diversity in the arts and culture is of high value.

Employment rates among immigrants have continued to grow in recent years, particularly among immigrant [women](#). However, civil society actors foresee that the current government's migration policies will negatively impact the status of people migrating to Finland. Civil society actors are also concerned about the gendered and racialised division of the labour market, where migrant women are still predominantly directed towards the care sector and into precarious jobs. Sexual minorities and people living with disabilities are also reported to experience discrimination in the labour market.

## SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- Finland has relatively well-developed infrastructure and protection of cultural and natural heritage.
- Accessibility and climate change considerations do not have sufficient prominence in planning and implementation.

Finland has often been seen as a model for addressing homelessness and [was on track](#) to being the first EU Member State to reach the target of eradicating homelessness by 2027. However, due to recent cuts in social security and deteriorating conditions for social housing, the number of [evictions](#) has grown. In 2023, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Finland develop measures to prevent homelessness.

There are significant regional inequities in access to public transportation. Youth, particularly in urban areas, associate improved public transportation with the green transition. However, civil society actor's support for the development of new rail infrastructure depends somewhat on whether it is undertaken with minimum disruptions to ecosystems and with consideration for the rights of the Indigenous Sámi people. As recommended by the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, public transport should ensure accessibility.

The process of ratifying the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage is under preparation. Efforts to digitalise cultural heritage play a significant role in increasing accessibility. Sudden and extensive cuts to funding for arts and culture is challenging the sector. Regional differences are emerging in the range of cultural experiences available. Funding cuts mean that fewer free, accessible cultural activities will be available for youth, in care homes and in early childhood education and care centres, for example. Civil society actors are concerned about the potential impact on societal cohesion.

Regional differences are also evident in the impact of disasters such as severe flooding. Civil society actors find that the disaster risk management of local governments is insufficient considering the increased risks posed by climate change.

The proportion of [persons, particularly women and girls, that have experienced](#) physical or sexual harassment, including in public spaces, is alarming. People with immigrant status and those belonging to sexual minorities are at particular risk of harassment.

## SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- Finland's collaborative and holistic circular economy approach has great potential.
- Finland's material footprint and domestic material consumption remain at alarming levels.

Finland supported the EU regulation promoting the repair of goods and ultimately voted in favour of the EU Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence (2024). It was encouraging that some Finnish private sector actors voiced their support for stronger legislation. However, the number of Finnish companies publishing sustainability reports has not significantly increased.

Of urgent concern is Finland's failure to reduce its domestic material consumption. Finland's average per capita [material footprint](#) is seven times higher than the global sustainability boundary. Finland's economic structure remains closely tied to the consumption of raw materials and energy and [inadequately accounts](#) for environmental costs and biodiversity loss. Environmentally harmful subsidies, including fossil fuel subsidies and other direct [subsidies](#) to the transport sector, are still too high. Despite Finland's Circular Economy Programme, effective measures for the holistic promotion of the circular economy are absent. Though Finland has progressed in material recycling, aspects such as reducing the use of virgin resources in construction and industry lag behind. The pressing need to establish targets and decrease unsustainable resource consumption conflicts with the reduction in public funding for Finnish organisations promoting sustainable consumption.

Despite some progress, levels of food waste remain high. Actions are now being coordinated through a national roadmap aiming to halve food waste by 2030. In relative terms, the new nutritional recommendations regarding meat consumption, and the recommendations' potential impact on large-scale catering, may have a more significant impact in the Finnish context.

In addition to the national context, a just transition should consider the global context and the negative cross-border environmental and social impacts of Finnish consumption. Civil society actors argue that Finnish consumption-based emissions are significantly higher than the Finnish carbon footprint calculations usually suggest.

Internationally, Finnish support to developing countries on research and development for sustainable consumption and production and environmentally sound technologies has dropped.

## SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- Finland has a high level of technical and human capacity, from the private sector to civil society actors, which enables it to grow its positive climate imprint.
- The integration of climate action and measures into national policies, strategies and planning is considered inadequate and without long-term, strategic impact.

Despite the growing possibility of crossing one or multiple tipping points, civil society actors including young people feel that climate measures are not being prioritised sufficiently during the current governmental term. Without additional measures the Government will not meet its national goal of being carbon neutral by 2035 or its [EU-level climate commitments](#).

Civil society actors see that the opportunities provided by the green transition are unevenly distributed across regions in Finland. There was debate about who would possibly be left behind considering different perspectives including the impact of increased flooding on urban environments, the engendered impact of loss of industrial jobs and consideration of people with disabilities in national adaptation plans. There were calls for more quality consultation of the Sámi people and young people. In general, the role and needs of workers in enabling the green transition are not sufficiently recognised. Options for retraining workers in unsustainable carbon-intensive sectors remain inadequate.

Finland has potential to grow its positive climate imprint nationally and internationally. For example, a significant cluster of expertise has been gathering around the issue of loss and damage. Finnish businesses have technological solutions to offer with regard to early warning systems, research institutes have the knowhow to use the data generated by the systems, and civil society actors are well placed to provide access and legitimacy.

In 2022, Finland introduced a long-term plan for international climate finance and integrated the climate finance reporting into its annual climate yearbook. Finland's climate finance increased during 2020–2023 and it strived, albeit [unsuccessfully](#), to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation finance. The Orpo Government reversed these positive trends. Though climate action remains one of the priorities of development cooperation, Finland is cutting its climate finance. Consequently, Finland is not carrying its [fair share](#) in providing new and additional international climate finance, nor is it targeting climate finance to meet the needs of countries and people most vulnerable to the impact of climate change. With no comprehensive qualitative reporting on the results of projects focusing on mitigation or adaptation, the actual impacts of Finnish climate finance cannot be evaluated.

## SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

- There is evidence of measures taken by Finland for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources.
- The status of biological conservation is disappointing and measures for preventing the deterioration of ocean ecosystems, including in the Baltic Sea, have been inadequate.

The Government has in place water management plans and a marine strategy, and commercial fishing is well regulated. A water protection programme was coordinated by the Ministry of Environment under previous governments from 2019 to 2023; information on concrete follow-up is pending. Implementation of the Finnish Inventory Programme for the Underwater Marine Environment (VELMU) has continued. However, some of the data is at risk of becoming outdated. Another issue is that the Programme does not cover all high seas. The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) was updated in 2021, but it is unclear whether there are sufficient human and capital resources for it to be comprehensively implemented.

The focus of the Orpo Government's Programme on the Archipelago Sea and reducing its nutrient load is welcome, but there is concern about a consequent disregard for other areas of the Baltic Sea in need of protection. The deterioration of the Baltic Sea ecosystem impacts not only fishermen but a wide range of industries and commercial and non-commercial activities that rely on a clean and flourishing marine environment. Civil society actors have found long-term, coordinated and cross-sectoral planning to be inadequate, especially between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry at the national and EU levels.

The most concerning change that has occurred is with respect to biological conservation. Though sprat stocks remain just within biologically sustainable levels, the stocks of salmon and herring have dropped to unsustainable levels. Overfishing has had some impact. The main driver, however, is rapid deterioration of the Baltic ecosystem, namely ongoing and worsening eutrophication, sustained nutrient load originating from agriculture and felling, and the warming of sea water. Finland adheres to scientific advice regarding fishing regulations; the challenge is that the scientific advice is not agile enough to take rapid ecosystem changes into account.

There are still significant sea areas for which the research and data available is not sufficient to assert whether Finland's national exclusive economic zones are being managed using ecosystem-based approaches.

Internationally, there is welcome evidence of commitment to the conservation of oceans. Finland has signed the Treaty Convention on the Protection of the High Seas (2023), but ratification is pending. Civil society actors support Finland's decision to support a moratorium on deep-sea mining. Finland has also been actively involved in the international negotiations for a Global Plastic Treaty and has called, together with the European Union, for it to cover all stages of the life cycle of plastics.

## SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- Well-implemented protective measures have had a positive impact on conservation.
- More concrete measures to address biodiversity loss are needed.

Around 30 per cent of endangered species in Finland live primarily in forests, and many endangered species depend on forests at some point in their lives. Several Finnish environmental organisations have raised concerns about the logging practices of some companies and expressed concern for example about their impact on biodiversity.

The spread of invasive species in Finland is a challenge exacerbated by climate change and mild winters. Aquatic habitats [are most at risk](#).

Finland's reformed Nature Conservation Act came into force in June 2023. Thousands of new species sightings, including of some very rare animals and plants, were made in nature reserves last year, which shows that protective measures are having an impact.

The focus of the Orpo Government's Programme on protecting forests and sites with the greatest nature value on a voluntary basis may not be sufficient. In the Programme, the Government also committed to preparing a National Biodiversity Strategy and an action plan in a cross-administrative process, but Finland was unable to do so before the 2024 Convention on Biological Diversity. Of particular concern are the gaps in assigning roles and responsibilities to different actors for halting biodiversity loss in Finland. The Orpo Government's continued commitment to implementing the Helmi Habitats Programme is important for biodiversity.

In terms of global responsibility, Finland pays far less in biodiversity finance to developing countries than other Nordic countries, despite a near-equivalent [ecological footprint](#). Finland consumes many products produced elsewhere without sufficiently tracking the adverse environmental impacts of Finnish production outside our borders. Finland's development policy has not included environmental priorities over the longer term.

## SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- Overall, the civil society actors consulted, including young people, perceive the level of trust in democracy and decision-makers to be high and levels of corruption to be low.
- The increase in polarisation, hate speech and discrimination in Finland is extremely concerning.

Finland has [high democratic performance](#) when measured in terms of representation, rights and the rule of law. There is comparatively high confidence in democracy and multistakeholder dialogue is commonplace. The Corruption Perceptions Index has [increased](#) in Finland since 2020. Civil society actors have felt heard in decision-making processes. However, a comparison between the previous and current governments shows that civic space is narrowing. Trust in the transparency of decision-making is [unimpressive](#). Moreover, decision-making does not adequately represent all population groups, for example people with disabilities.

There is concern about unequal access to justice as a result of the extended time and cost associated with judicial processes. The proportion of prisoners under investigation is increasing, and the capacity of prisons is being stretched. This is putting the human rights of prisoners at risk. The imprisonment of conscientious objectors also remains customary despite numerous recommendations from international human rights bodies urging Finland to abandon the practice.

On the other hand, public investment in identifying and eradicating work-related exploitation, such as human trafficking of restaurant and seasonal workers, has improved. This is evident in the increased number of abuse convictions.

The [incidence](#) of intimate partner and domestic violence reported to the authorities rose by five per cent in 2023. Of particular concern is the gendered nature of violence, the disproportionate occurrence among [people with disabilities](#) and increased [reports](#) of parental violence against children. There is also concern about the [systematic](#), though not comprehensively documented, practice of sending young people with immigrant backgrounds abroad to enforce cultural expectations or as a disciplinary measure. Steps to introduce new legislation on sexual offences are welcome. At the same time, cuts that will reduce access to services provided by civil society organisations are a concern.

Overall, civil society actors are concerned about the increasingly militarised climate of public debate, which has left less room for human security considerations. In addition, there is concern about an erosion in commitments to international human rights obligations and peacebuilding. For example, the 'Turnback Law' (Border Security Act) of 2024 is seen to be in conflict with legally binding human rights obligations as it allows asylum seekers to be turned

back without the right to appeal. Both European and international law mandate that the principle of non-refoulement must always be upheld and allegations of serious human rights violations associated with return must be investigated.

With respect to international obligations, civil society actors, including young people, have expressed their concern about Finland's procurement of military supplies from Israel as counterproductive to the development of effective and accountable global institutions, particularly considering that Israel has been charged with [violation of international law](#).

## SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

- Finland has maintained a policy commitment to multilateralism and development cooperation.
- Changes in approach and significant development funding cuts are a concern.

Finland's continued commitment to the rights and the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, education, and climate measures as development policy priorities is encouraging. Finland's expertise on the rights of people with disabilities is internationally recognised. Equally, Finland's continued participation in the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, originally established at Finland's initiative, is applaudable.

The role of civil society in advancing sustainable development has been recognised by successive governments. Civil society actors were systematically consulted during Finland's membership on the Human Rights Council, for example, and were closely involved in the development of Finland's first National Action Plan on the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (2021) and the fourth national action plan on Women, Peace and Security (2023). However, there is evidence that Orpo's Government is providing [fewer opportunities](#) for civil society actors to participate in policy development processes.

While Finland remains committed to multilateralism, the visibility of Agenda 2030 and policy coherence for sustainable development as guiding policy frameworks has decreased under Orpo's Government. Reducing poverty and inequality is no longer a stated goal, and implementation of the triple nexus has stalled. Sexual and reproductive rights are only narrowly considered in the context of population control. Finnish private sector actors are being supported by ODA without development objectives, and with different requirements than for civil society actors. There is concern that the Orpo government's focus on trade and development, and its emphasis on national interests, will shift the focus away from the welfare of countries in need and leaving no one behind.

The upward trend in ODA was reversed by Orpo's Government. Climate finance has been cut and is no longer specified in the draft budget, nor has Finland taken action to fulfil the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's new funding commitments for developing countries.

Though funding cuts have been implemented in a relatively controlled manner, they have nevertheless had grave impacts. The 2024 OECD Development Co-operation Peer Review recommended that Finland reverse its decrease in ODA and establish a roadmap with intermediary targets to provide 0.7 per cent of GNI as ODA overall and 0.2 per cent of GNI as ODA to Least Developed Countries by 2030. Finland was also urged to adequately resource development communications and awareness work. Recommendations called for Finland to re-establish its ambition and political leadership on policy coherence for development, ensuring that regulatory impact assessments consider transboundary development issues, and in seeking to increase the role of the Finnish private sector in development cooperation, to focus on development impact and a human rights-based approach.

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## SWOT – Civil society perspectives

Inputs and thoughts on the status of sustainable development in Finland, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The inputs have been collated from discussions held during a sustainable development workshop and a consultation held with the [Plan International Finland Children's Board](#), colour-coded accordingly.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Levels of trust are high. People trust democracy and its institutions, especially municipalities.</li> <li>- <a href="#">There is overall trust in administration and the justice system and relative trust in decision-makers and democracy.</a> Relatively low levels of corruption. Openness to respectful, critical debate. Free media.</li> <li>- <a href="#">Feeling of safety and security where kids can walk to school.</a></li> <li>- The welfare state. Relatively high-quality and equitable educational and health systems. <a href="#">Free education.</a> <a href="#">High-quality education.</a> <a href="#">Free school meals.</a> Functioning infrastructure. <a href="#">Public transportation.</a></li> <li>- Overall level of sustainable development.</li> <li>- Low hierarchies. Civil servants committed to their mandates and easy to approach.</li> <li>- High expertise in civil society organisations committed to their work.</li> <li>- <a href="#">High level of technical development and digitalisation.</a> Finnish innovations. Initiatives like <a href="#">Generation Equality</a> that combine Finnish expertise and share it globally.</li> <li>- <a href="#">Legacy of international cooperation including the work of President Ahtisaari</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of policy coherence. Liberal economy which does not consider planetary boundaries. Economic justifications used to weaken social and environmental development. <a href="#">Unsustainable use of natural resources.</a> <a href="#">Finland's material footprint.</a></li> <li>- Political polarisation. Rise of the far-right.</li> <li>- Pressures on and overburdening of civil servants.</li> <li>- Resources for implementation of progressive strategies are inadequate.</li> <li>- Lack of courage in political decision-making.</li> <li>- Tokenistic consultations. Applies particularly to the inclusion of youth. Influence of civil society is being undermined.</li> <li>- Weakening commitment to human rights and fundamental principles of development cooperation. <a href="#">Finland not taking enough action, doing is fair share, promoting global justice including climate justice.</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Increasing inequality.</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Cyberbullying.</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Making schools safe for all, reducing bullying.</a></li> </ul>

<p>in peacebuilding. Participation in the EU and UN.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pressures on young people are growing. Demands on mental strength to survive in society.</li> <li>- Low emotional intelligence and skills to manage emotions.</li> <li>- Inadequate investment into global citizenship education.</li> <li>- Failure to protect biodiversity in Finland.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low population density.</li> <li>- Finnish nature. Clean water and air.</li> <li>- Potential for clean energy expansion.</li> <li>- Self-critical attitude and willingness to identify where there is room to develop.</li> <li>- Good opportunities to play an active role in society. Active civil society. Possibilities to have hobbies which are free.</li> <li>- Overall understanding of climate change among the population facilitates action to counter it.</li> <li>- Opportunities to play a lead role in innovation, science and digitalisation globally, and to share their positive potential.</li> <li>- Finland has a reputation of being a safe and stable country, where people trust each other.</li> <li>- Finland is known for its gender equality. Men and women have almost equal opportunities to participate in political decision-making.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uncertainty. Growing number of conflicts. Militarisation.</li> <li>- Short-terms politics, changes in politics from one government to the next. Sustainable development not pursued in a systematic manner. Loss of biodiversity</li> <li>- Demographic trends in the Finnish population pyramid. Consideration of an ageing population.</li> <li>- Failure at integration of immigrants.</li> <li>- Continued high levels of violence against women.</li> <li>- Growing distance between value base of women and men in Finland.</li> <li>- Threat of some people being left behind: intergenerational poverty, risk of social exclusion, regional disparities in development. Discrimination for example against LGBTIQ+. Racism. Young people with mental health challenges or learning difficulties.</li> </ul>

### **Wishes for other stakeholders:**

- Political leaders need to show the courage needed to make difficult choices to secure environmental and social sustainability.
- Political decision-makers should assess all budgetary decisions from the perspective of social and ecological sustainability. A methodology to do this has to be created. **Decision-making should not be driven by greed.**
- Private sector actors need to show progressive commitment and leadership in advancing sustainability.
- Civil society needs to remain active and vibrant at the grassroots level, advancing local engagement and building community.
- **Finland should shoulder more global responsibility. Failure to shoulder our share of global responsibility makes Finland look like an unwanted global partner.**
- **Finland should make more of an effort to integrate immigrants into society.**
- **Civil society can decrease confrontation and blaming, and act with more gentleness towards other people. We all have room to grow and learn.**