



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2711th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 16 May 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Finland (continued) (CRC/C/FIN/5-6; CRC/C/FIN/Q/5-6; CRC/C/FIN/RQ/5-6)

Initial report submitted by Finland under article 12 (1) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (continued) (CRC/C/OPSC/FIN/1; CRC/C/OPSC/FIN/Q/1; CRC/C/OPSC/FIN/RQ/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Finland joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Finland to the meeting, explained that additional members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that her Government regretted the late submission of the initial report on the Optional Protocol, noting that limited human resources occasionally delayed the finalization of reports.
4. **A representative of Finland** said that children living in internment camps in north-east Syria were exposed to serious violations of their rights, and the Government had been doing everything in its power to repatriate them as quickly as possible, where necessary together with their mothers. While the majority had returned to Finland, 10 remained in Syria, despite the best efforts of the Finnish authorities, as it was not possible to separate children from their mothers or to repatriate individuals against their will. While they lived in the camps, children could not be separated from their parents, as there was no competent authority in the camps to conduct a case assessment and hear from all interested parties, in compliance with the Convention. The Government had, since 2019, implemented secondary measures to protect the rights of the Finnish children remaining in the camps, including providing access to virtual paediatric consultations and online Finnish language classes.
5. **A representative of Finland** said that a number of studies, including the School Health Promotion Study, had examined the issue of violence against children. A survey on child victims of violence conducted by the University of Tampere had noted a rise in the number of children reporting experiences of domestic violence, including emotional abuse. It was possible that the trend reflected the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on families. Online bullying and sexual harassment had also become more prevalent and more young people had been subjected to sexual assault by peers.
6. Interministerial efforts had been undertaken to tackle the problem of violence against children, including the development of joint action plans and strategies such as the Non-Violent Childhoods Action Plan and the action plan relating to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention). The efforts undertaken in the framework of the latter plan aimed to prevent violence in the home and at school, raise awareness of safety skills and prevent sexual abuse. Steps were being taken to mainstream early intervention and prevention measures to tackle violence and harassment, including online violence, and to promote models of child upbringing without violence. Online safety training workshops had been provided in cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The midterm review of the Non-Violent Childhoods Action Plan had indicated that good progress had been made on 88 of the 93 measures included therein.
7. A guide for social welfare officials on investigating violence against children in custody proceedings had been developed, in compliance with the Child Custody Act, as a tool to support decision-making in custody cases. New content had also been added to the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare website on violence against children in cases of parental separation. The *Barnahus* Project also sought to support professionals working in the field of child and family services, including through online training on violence against children. Training had been provided to more than 30 court interpreters on children's participation in legal proceedings, and a model had been developed to promote multidisciplinary cooperation between the police, child welfare and health-care services. The model was currently under evaluation by the University of Tampere. As part of the *Barnahus*

Project, a child advocacy centre was being established to provide specialized support to victims of sexual violence who were over the age of 16.

8. **A representative of Finland** said that municipalities were obliged to work with well-being services counties to establish cooperation structures, exchange information and develop services, as well as to monitor the health and well-being of the population, including children. Municipalities and well-being services counties were responsible for drafting a welfare report and developing a regional action plan on health and well-being. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare published an annual report on social and health services, which was available online. The Government promoted the implementation of child-oriented budgets by municipalities and well-being services counties and had developed training modules on child-oriented budgeting.

9. With regard to the Child and Family Services Reform Programme (LAPE), the associated projects would run until the end of the current year. The final assessment would take place as part of an evaluation of a wider government-funded programme to support the implementation of social and health-care reform.

10. With respect to alternative care for children, in May 2022 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health had launched a reform of child welfare legislation with a view to strengthening the protection of children's rights and improving services for children and their families. In 2021, the total number of children in care outside of the home environment had stood at 17,727. Approximately 1,200 children had been placed in kinship care with relatives. Examples of good practices to assist children with disabilities included a digital platform operated by a Finnish NGO offering online services and advice on issues relating to intellectual disabilities.

11. Measures had been developed to define and assess the best interests of the child in child welfare assessments, which took into account the Committee's general comment No. 14 (2013) and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. An online training course on the best interests of the child had been also developed, as had training programmes at the municipal level.

12. Although Finland had low levels of poverty and social exclusion, the Government was working to further reduce poverty among the families most affected, including single-parent and immigrant families. A working group on social security services for children and families had been established to support the work of the parliamentary Social Security Committee. The provisions of the European Child Guarantee were implemented as part of the National Child Strategy. The Government aimed to reduce the number of people living in poverty or social exclusion, one third of whom were children, by at least 100,000 by 2030.

13. **A representative of Finland** said that the level of social security benefits had increased since 2020, including the child maintenance allowance and allowances for single parents and for families with four or more children. The revised Disability Services Act would enter into force in October 2023. It aimed to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities and ensure their access to high-quality services. Services for persons with disabilities were provided by the well-being services counties. The new Act included a number of provisions to support alternative care solutions. The Government was working to implement a range of measures to support those who, unfortunately, required long-term institutional care. Following the expiration of the current national action plan on the rights of persons with disabilities, a new plan would be drafted later in 2023.

14. Regarding the reported unwillingness of some health-care professionals to treat children with disabilities, national legislation stipulated the rights of patients and the duties and obligations of health-care professionals. In cases where misconduct was suspected, the patient or a third party could file a complaint with the health-care unit in question or the supervisory authorities.

15. The Sami people, including children, had access to the same health-care and social services provided to the rest of the population. However, the Government recognized that challenges existed with regard to the availability and adequacy of services provided in Sami languages and the need to develop culturally appropriate services. To that end, funding for social and health services for the Sami-speaking population had increased and health and

social welfare reforms also aimed to enhance the services provided to that community. The Lapland well-being services county was responsible for developing Sami language health-care support across the country and for monitoring the availability and quality of Sami language health care. The West Uusimaa well-being services county had a similar responsibility for Swedish language health-care services. Social assistance was available to facilitate access to health care for undocumented migrants, and legislation had recently been amended to extend the right of migrants to health-care services other than emergency care.

16. The national mental health strategy included a programme on suicide prevention and measures to improve overall mental health and well-being and enable people to cope with everyday mental health challenges. In 2022, five suicide prevention projects had been implemented in different parts of Finland. Although it was not clear why suicide rates in Finland were high in comparison with other Nordic countries and more data were needed, including on different age and risk groups, measures were being taken to prevent suicide, including through crisis helplines.

17. Measures to prevent and treat eating disorders included health check-ups to discuss well-being, including eating habits. Children were weighed during check-ups and could be referred to other services. Information on healthy eating was disseminated in schools.

18. An action plan had been developed to prevent substance abuse. A working group established under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Welfare had recommended increasing the age limit for tobacco use to 20 years. To combat alcohol abuse, the Government had increased the tax on alcoholic beverages and regulated alcohol advertising. Measures had also been introduced to prevent alcohol abuse by pregnant women, including free, accessible support services.

19. Maternity clinics and school and student health services provided information, guidance and consultations on sexual and reproductive health, and sexual and reproductive health education was included in the school curriculum. With regard to the overprescription of medicines for children and adolescents, the Health-Care Professionals Act stipulated the obligations and duties of health-care staff and provided for supervision and monitoring by regional administrations and national supervisory authorities. Pharmacies had a duty to inform those authorities of any suspected overprescription. In the most severe cases, a doctor's licence could be suspended.

20. **A representative of Finland** said that, in line with the principle of inclusive education, children with disabilities primarily attended mainstream schools and received individual support to successfully complete their studies. However, there was a need to review the system and introduce legislative amendments to guarantee children's rights to general support, remedial instruction and special needs education. Unfortunately, no up-to-date data were available on the supply of teachers for children with disabilities. However, information on teaching staff was collected and analysed regularly. The Student Welfare Act set out minimum ratios of students to student welfare and mental health staff.

21. The School Health Promotion Study had found that 3.7 per cent of students in grades 8 and 9 were absent from school every week as a result of illness and 3.9 per cent were absent for unauthorized reasons. The action plan for the prevention of bullying and harassment included measures to reduce and prevent absenteeism in primary and lower secondary schools. From August 2023, education providers would be required to take measures to prevent absences at the basic education level and to intervene in cases of student absenteeism. Government funds had been allocated to tackle the problem.

22. The right to a safe learning environment included the obligation to protect children from violence. Measures to promote respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and for human rights had included a series of dialogues on migration in different parts of Finland aimed at fostering greater understanding of different perspectives and the changing nature of migration. Education providers were required to draw up equality and non-discrimination plans. The Government allocated some €10 million per year to training staff in the education sector, including on equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, well-being and bullying prevention.

23. To close any education gaps among migrants, a programme had been implemented to strengthen basic and language skills for children from migrant backgrounds. An action plan on learning support would run until 2026 and would focus on ensuring that the education system was equipped to support children arriving in Finland with a low level of education. The Right to Learn Programme also aimed to prevent learning differences related to students' migrant background or socioeconomic status. A steering group established to promote human rights education in schools and provide training on human rights to teachers had conducted a survey on human rights education and provided education materials on the rights of the child. A website launched as part of the National Child Strategy also provided information on children's rights.

24. Comprehensive schools in several municipalities had recently been closed as a result of demographic trends that had changed the population base in those communities and affected their ability to provide services. The Government was aware of the need to continue providing education in those communities and was assessing what approach would be required going forward.

25. **A representative of Finland** said that the Government had the power to grant a registered association or foundation permission to operate a private school providing basic or general secondary education. However, a local need for such services had to be established and the municipality had to provide authorization. Moreover, such schools were not permitted to operate for profit and could not collect fees.

26. A government working group had been established for the development of early childhood education in Sami languages. The working group had produced a report with proposals for action, including with respect to language learning materials, and a review had been carried out to assess needs. The Government had developed, together with the Sami Parliament, a successful distance learning programme for Sami education. Over €1 million had been invested in the project to date, and investment would continue. The Government was supporting the education of Roma children in the Roma language as part of its national Roma policy. A study on the education of Roma children had found that they were performing well in schools but had low participation rates in early childhood education. Measures were being introduced to boost the number of Roma language teachers and improve teaching materials.

27. In 2020, the Government had launched an initiative to promote participation in leisure activities free of charge during the school day for children and young people. Children had been consulted as part of the initiative, to which €10 million had been allocated.

28. **A representative of Finland** said that all parties, including children, had the right to be heard during criminal proceedings. The Imprisonment Act contained specific provisions on children's visits to parents in prison. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, amendments to the Act were planned to ensure that children's visits could continue without restrictions during pandemics or other emergency situations.

29. In 2022, the daily average number of children serving sentences or on remand had stood at five. As a rule, criminal investigations were conducted as quickly as possible, particularly in cases involving minors, in order to avoid placing children in pretrial detention. An alternative approach was the use electronic monitoring, introduced in 2019.

30. There was an action plan in place to combat human trafficking and promote human rights. Child victims of trafficking were afforded special protection. Trafficking in human beings was considered an international crime to which no double criminality requirement applied. The *Barnahus* Project incorporated information on child trafficking into its training modules. The Police University College was working on a model for pretrial investigation of human trafficking offences, with a view to harmonizing measures and promoting cooperation. European Union funding had been obtained to establish a national referral mechanism to identify human trafficking victims, including children, and ensure their access to support. During its presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Finland planned to focus on collating and sharing best practices for preventing and combating trafficking and violence against children, as well as providing assistance and support to victims in the Baltic Sea region. A permanent anti-trafficking coordination unit had been established within the Government.

31. Recent legislative amendments had introduced longer sentences for offences against children, which had been reclassified as more serious crimes. Sexual activity with a child under the age of 16, for example, was now primarily punished as rape. The minimum penalty was 2 years in prison. Provisions on rape also covered aiding and abetting such acts.

32. **A representative of Finland** said that asylum-seekers could access publicly funded legal aid throughout the asylum process and that recent legislative amendments had strengthened their legal protection. Finland could grant an extradition request in the absence of an extradition agreement if the conditions set out in the Extradition Act were met. United Nations treaties could serve as the basis for extradition if no other relevant agreements existed.

33. The human rights indicator framework had been developed by a group of experts following broad consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations. The framework would be further developed on the basis of the first monitoring round, to be conducted in partnership with stakeholders.

34. Custody disputes were always resolved on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the best interests of the child. Domestic violence was a factor considered in decisions on joint or sole custody. The law stressed the importance of contact between children and parents, but if there was a risk of violence, meetings between the child and the parent would be supervised. It was difficult to estimate the average time frame for resolving custody cases, which depended, inter alia, on whether the parties were able to reach an agreement quickly. In 2022, the average time frame for all such cases had been 7.8 months; the average length of court proceedings for contested cases had been 9.4 months. For cases involving court mediation, the time frame had been 6.5 months.

35. In adoption cases, very specific criteria needed to be met and the best interests of the child were assessed at every stage of the process. The best interests of the child were also taken into account in cases to establish paternity, as required by the Parenthood Act. The wishes and views of the child were taken into consideration to the extent possible. In cases where paternity was contested, children over the age of 15 had the right to personally bring an action against the presumed father. For younger children, a guardian could be appointed to exercise that right on their behalf, if that was deemed in the best interests of the child.

36. The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations would organize country-wide dialogues on issues such as racism and harassment of young people in Finland during 2023; its report and recommendations would be published in December. There were also seven regional advisory boards. A range of projects had been implemented in partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders to promote non-discrimination and tackle racism. Measures at the local level had included pilot projects to promote good relations between different population groups in communities. An online reporting tool had been set up to enable people to report hate crimes or incidents.

37. **A representative of Finland** said that the country's arms exports were assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the common position of the European Union on the export of defence technology and equipment and the Arms Trade Treaty. Before granting an export licence, the Government always conducted an assessment that took into account the risk that the product might be used in violation of international humanitarian law or human rights.

38. **A representative of Finland** said that the new asylum procedure for the eastern border, originally intended to have been introduced under an amendment to the Aliens Act, had not been adopted by the previous legislature and was therefore not in operation. In any case, the special needs of vulnerable asylum-seekers were always considered, and the procedure, if adopted, would apply to unaccompanied minors only in certain situations. The decision to detain a foreign national was taken by the police or the border court, in strict accordance with the law. Unaccompanied minors were detained very rarely and only if less extreme measures were not appropriate.

39. The detention of families was very rare. However, children might be placed in detention together with their parents or guardians if necessary to maintain family unity. For

two-parent families, the father might be detained and the other family members placed in a reception centre next to the detention unit.

40. The immigration services had developed techniques for interviewing children and evaluating their best interests. The Asylum Unit followed detailed instructions on processing children's asylum applications, based on recommendations from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A new policy on interviewing applicants under the age of 12 had been put in place, in cooperation with the Department of Child and Adolescent Forensic Psychology of the Hospital District of Helsinki.

41. Psychological support for child soldiers applying for asylum could be provided by specially trained reception centre workers. In addition, social workers and nurses helped ensure that support needs were identified and that service provision was properly maintained. Child soldiers might also be deemed to be victims of forced labour, in which case they might be referred to the assistance system for victims of human trafficking. Long-term support measures for children returning from conflict zones and their families had been developed by the Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in Helsinki.

42. The problem of online sexual offences had grown significantly in the year to date. Training in investigating online crime involving children was being provided by the Police University College. NGOs played an important role in receiving tips about online crimes that could be forwarded to the relevant criminal investigation unit.

43. **A representative of Finland** said that, while there was no specific legislation on influencer marketing by and for children, the Consumer Protection Act regulated marketing targeting children. There were also detailed regulations on children's work: persons under the age of 15, for example, could carry out only light work, such as writing, editing and media communication. As to sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, the action plan for the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention included nationwide campaigns to raise awareness of and combat sexual abuse of children.

44. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** (Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography), referring to the State party's replies to the list of issues in relation to the Optional Protocol ([CRC/C/OPSC/FIN/RQ/1](#), p. 2), said that she would like the delegation to verify the information provided with regard to prison sentences for sexual offences against children. It appeared, for example, that the average prison term for sexual abuse of a child in 2019 had been only 8.5 months and for the purchase of sexual services from a child, 6 months. Did the Government believe that those penalties were sufficient or proportionate to the seriousness of the offences? With regard to the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, she would like to know whether the State party had created a legal framework engaging the responsibility of corporate entities in the travel and tourism sector as a means of combating offences under the Optional Protocol.

45. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that she would like to know when the legislative amendments relating to the reduction and prevention of statelessness were likely to be finalized and implemented. She wondered whether it would be possible to strengthen the protection of stateless persons by accelerating status determination procedures.

46. While it was true that very few children were placed in pretrial detention, there appeared to be no legal provisions that completely ruled out or restricted the length of such detention. She would like to know if such legislation could be put in place. She also wondered if the State party could look into alternatives to detention following conviction, including restorative justice, probation and counselling.

47. She was concerned that audio and video recording of interviews was reportedly not routinely available at police stations, which could cause delays in dealing with children, a situation that could constitute an injustice. It was important to ensure that law enforcement officers interacted with children in a manner consistent with the Convention, for example by ensuring respect for their privacy and informing them of the charges against them. She wondered whether adequate resources had been allocated for child-friendly courts and special training had been provided for judicial personnel who dealt with cases involving children.

48. She would like to know if the State party intended to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). She was curious as to why 75 per cent of Sami children did not live in the Sami homeland, where they would have better access to education and other services.

49. **Mr. Jaffé** (Country Task Force) said that it was unclear whether home schooling was permitted in Finland and, if so, under what circumstances. According to a report he had received, child allowances had recently gone down in real terms by between 5 and 7 per cent. He would welcome the delegation's comments on that, in view of its announcement earlier in the meeting that social security benefits had increased steadily since 2020.

50. **Ms. Correa** (Country Task Force), noting that the figures for children in alternative care provided to the Committee were from 2021, said that she would be grateful if the delegation could provide updated information. She would also be interested to know what the major causes for placement in alternative care were and whether there was a strategy for facilitating children's return to their parents. She was grateful to the delegation for its replies to her questions on children deprived of their liberty, but she wished to draw attention to the situation in Åland, where, according to information submitted to the Committee, some prisons were not properly equipped and did not comply with the relevant regulations.

51. According to her understanding of a recent ECPAT International report on sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Finland, the State party's school health promotion studies did not include a section on violence in the family. If that was the case, it would be an important omission, on which she would appreciate the delegation's comments. Although, under the new Parenthood Act, 15-year-olds could initiate proceedings to establish their paternity, she understood that they also had the right to stop a paternity determination proceeding initiated by the presumed father. It remained unclear how the State party reconciled that right with the right of children to know their biological identity.

52. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** said that he was concerned at the lack of a child rights impact assessment in decisions concerning the State party's budget. It was particularly problematic in the current context of conflict in Europe, in which defence expenditure could be expected to rise, potentially leading to cutbacks elsewhere. He understood that health, social and rescue services were now the responsibility of the well-being services counties and would appreciate an explanation of how the municipal child protection systems interacted with the counties. Did the municipalities refer reports of abuse to the well-being services counties or to a *barnahus* centre, for example? With regard to the testimony of child victims in sexual offence proceedings, he would be interested to know at what point in the procedure the defence was able to exercise the right to cross-examine the child.

The meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m. and resumed at noon.

53. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that the Government considered it important to safeguard Swedish-language cultural production by public agencies such as Yle, the Finnish public service media company, and by theatres, libraries and other entities and to ensure adequate resources were provided to support cultural production in both Finnish and Swedish. There had been no change in Swedish-language programme broadcasts. In fact, investment in Swedish-language children's content had increased.

54. **A representative of Finland** said that researchers, specialist NGOs and young people themselves had worked in partnership with the Ministry of the Environment to design effective, child-friendly consultations with children across the country on climate policy. There had been broad participation at the various stages of climate policy reform. One questionnaire on climate policy, designed by senior high school pupils, had attracted around 2,000 responses by young people. An initiative launched by some 50 NGOs had led to the formation of a youth group for climate and nature issues, which, with funding from the Ministry of the Environment, would organize climate and nature summits for young people.

55. Under the new Climate Act, provision was made for a right of appeal in respect of national climate policy. Anyone, including a child, who had a right, obligation or interest that might be affected by climate change itself, or by climate change adaptation or mitigation measures, had a right of appeal. The Act also placed an obligation on all municipalities to prepare climate plans.

56. Climate change was of particular relevance to the rights of the Sami people. Specific consultations on the Climate Act, designed by and for Sami youth, had been held, partially in the Sami language. A special climate adaptation plan was to be drawn up for the Sami people, which would include specific measures for children.

57. **A representative of Finland** said that amendments made to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care in 2022 had led to improvements in the situation of children with special educational needs and disabilities and reinforced their right to support. The principle of inclusion in early childhood education and care had been incorporated in the amended Act. The law provided that children were entitled to receive adequate support directly as the need arose and without delay, in both public and private early childhood education and care services.

58. The Act contained no explicit provisions on sign language. However, under the amended Act, children in early education and care now had a right to interpretation and assistant services, and sign language interpretation must be arranged if a child was unable to participate fully in school without it. The National Agency for Education was currently updating its guidance for staff on providing support for children with hearing impairments.

59. The Act contained provisions to ensure a safe environment in early education and care, including the obligation to protect children from violence, bullying and harassment. Under the TUIKKU project to strengthen emotional and interaction skills in early childhood education and care, run by the University of Jyväskylä, a model for prevention of bullying had been developed, along with a training module to strengthen staff and parent competence to deal with and prevent bullying. The project had been extended to 2024.

60. The Ministry of Education and Culture funded projects to promote the training of Sami-speaking teachers, including one on remote teaching of Sami languages. It also funded other projects to train Sami-speaking health and social welfare personnel. While there was no provision for regular training of early childhood education and care teachers in the Sami language, the University of Oulu had a quota of places for Sami-speaking students in early childhood studies, although the courses were in Finnish. The University also received grants from the Ministry for bachelor's and master's degree courses in early childhood teacher education in the Sami language, which covered costs for 30 students. In addition, the national Human Rights Centre provided training courses and material for teachers on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

61. **A representative of the province of Åland** said that, in 2021, a working group appointed by the provincial government had highlighted the need for reform of the legislation on upper secondary education in order to facilitate access to education and training leading to at least an upper secondary school diploma. Accordingly, the provincial government had launched a project to review legislative needs, clarify the tasks of the authorities at the various levels and develop operational and cooperation structures. As of the start of the new school year in August 2023, upper secondary education would be free of charge for new students and free upper secondary education would eventually be extended to all students.

62. The new Child Care and Comprehensive School Act for Åland tightened up the regulation of home schooling. Municipalities must test the progress of home-schooled children in relation to the national curriculum at least once every semester and could suspend home schooling if their progress was significantly lower than could reasonably be expected or if the children's guardians were found to be failing to meet their educational obligations. Funds had been allocated in order to implement such supervision evenly across all municipalities. In addition, a working group had produced further proposals on the supervision and regulation of home schooling, although no policy decisions had yet been taken.

63. **A representative of the province of Åland**, replying to a question on poverty put at the previous meeting, said that, in Åland, the single-parent supplement to the child benefit had been increased in 2019 and again in 2022, the second time by 33 per cent to bring it up to €80 per month per child. Around 4 per cent of families, principally single-parent households, were in receipt of an income supplement in Åland, as compared with 10 per cent in mainland Finland.

64. **A representative of the province of Åland** said that primary health care in Åland was free of charge for children and young people up to the age of 20. Although a small fee was levied for specialist health care, it was capped and care was free beyond that threshold. The health authority could decide to waive or reduce the fee, depending on patients' circumstances. The health authority had a special unit to treat children with eating disorders. No referral was needed. In order to ensure the availability of health services for all schoolchildren, school psychologists had been incorporated into school health-care services in 2021.

65. **A representative of Finland** said that home schooling was permitted in Finland. No licence was required, but the child's guardian was held accountable for the child's progress in acquiring knowledge and skills in accordance with the basic syllabus for compulsory education and was also responsible for obtaining learning materials. Municipalities were required by law to monitor home-schooled pupils' progress.

66. **A representative of Finland** said that the training of judges was planned and coordinated by the Judicial Training Board and the National Courts Administration, both of which were independent entities. In the past two years courses had covered a wide range of topics relating to children's rights, including the Convention and its application, relevant national legislation, child custody, child protection, the child's best interests in immigration matters and children's right to be heard.

67. In court cases concerning paternity, the alleged father did not have the right to interrupt or deny action. A forensic genetic paternity test could be carried out against the alleged father's will.

68. With regard to ratification of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), a proposal had been drafted in 2014, under the previous Government, but it had subsequently been withdrawn from Parliament. The next steps would depend on the new Government. Ratification would in any case require negotiations with the Sami Parliament. Many Sami people moved to cities to study or work, but many also eventually moved back to the Sami homeland. Opportunities for study in the homeland included the Sami Education Institute, the only post-secondary vocational education institution for Indigenous Peoples in Finland, which was located above the Arctic Circle and had three campuses in the Sami homeland.

69. **A representative of Finland** said that the information provided in the replies to the list of issues relating to the Optional Protocol ([CRC/C/OPSC/FIN/RQ/1](#)) with regard to the penalties imposed for sexual offences against children referred to sentences handed down under the previous legislation. The new law introduced significant changes, including changes in the range of punishments, but the reforms were too new for their impact on court practice to show up in statistics as yet. Implementation of the new law would be evaluated once it had been in force for some time. With regard to sexual offences related to travel and tourism, Finland had wide-ranging extraterritorial jurisdiction for sexual offences against children without the requirement of double criminality.

70. The law set no limit on the maximum duration of remand detention. However, the grounds for such detention were reviewed every two weeks. Although the basic objective was to avoid pretrial detention for children, in some cases such detention might be needed in order to ensure an appropriate and speedy criminal investigation. As to alternatives to detention after trial, certain sentences combined conditional release with supervision, with the option of a fine if conditional imprisonment was not deemed proportionate to the offence. Another penalty specifically designed for juveniles involved technical surveillance.

71. With regard to the testimony of child victims of sexual offences, in February 2023 Parliament had passed several amendments to the Criminal Investigations Act and the Coercive Measures Act, extending the use of recorded pretrial hearings to cases of human trafficking and sexual offences involving child victims in order to improve the protection of children in criminal proceedings. Such pretrial recordings could be used at all stages of proceedings if the requirements of the law were met.

72. **A representative of Finland**, referring to the question of stateless children, said that any child born in Finland would receive citizenship if no other citizenship was available;

additionally, for children who applied for international protection, citizenship would be possible at a later stage. The largest group of undocumented persons in Finland were former asylum-seekers who had applied for asylum in 2015 and 2016, estimated in 2021 to number fewer than 3,000, a figure that had probably decreased since then. Around 10 per cent of them were children living with their parents; there were no unaccompanied minors in that group. Many families who had sought asylum and had been in Finland for a long time had been granted a residence permit on humanitarian grounds, particularly if they had school-age children.

73. Police investigations always took account of the best interests of the child. All police departments had specially designed facilities where children could be interviewed and recorded on video. The child was not interviewed unless absolutely necessary and then was interviewed by specially trained investigators. The Police University College provided training in investigation methods in cases of suspected sexual offences against children, which could also be attended by prosecutors and health-care personnel. If a child's health or age, for example, prevented the police from interviewing the child, assistance was sought from the centres of excellence in child and adolescent psychiatry and psychology. In criminal matters, the child's defence counsel was involved right from the start, and a guardian was appointed to safeguard the child's best interests, in accordance with the "tandem model" of representation.

74. Family members always had the right to apply for family reunification. While normally they should be part of the nuclear family, if the sponsor was a beneficiary of international protection, residence permits could be issued to other relatives under certain conditions. Residence permits had on occasion been denied to relatives of underage minors in cases where there had been reasonable grounds to suspect that the alien intended to evade the entry requirements. The Finnish immigration service was considering giving more weight to the best interests of the child in exercising its discretion in such matters.

75. **A representative of Finland** said that, as the child allowance was not indexed, increases were not automatic. However, the social security system aimed to maintain an adequate level of financial security in situations such as incapacity for work, unemployment or childbirth. It was possible to combine a number of benefits depending on the individual's or the family's current situation.

76. Substance abuse by pregnant women was a challenging topic, since there was a conflict between the mother's rights and the child's rights. Services had been developed to support women in such situations. Some 3,000 babies, or 6 per cent of the total of 50,000 born each year, were exposed to substance abuse during the pregnancy; around 1,000 pregnant women, or 2 per cent of the total, were under voluntary surveillance during the pregnancy because of substance abuse.

77. **A representative of Finland** said that updated figures for children in alternative care had just been received and showed that the total number of placements for children under the age of 18 stood at 17,885, exactly the same as for the previous year. The reasons for placement were not reported nationally as yet. Emergency placement outside the home could be ordered when the child was in immediate danger. Emergency placement was not the same as taking a child into care. Care orders could be issued either where factors in children's immediate environment threatened their safety or for reasons related to their behaviour, such as violence or substance abuse. Social workers were required under the Child Welfare Act to work towards the reunification of children placed in care with their families, but in practice such reunification rarely happened. It was an issue that needed further work in the context of the reform of child welfare legislation.

78. A working group had been set up by the Prime Minister's Office to look into the development of child-oriented budgeting. Under the National Child Strategy, child-oriented budgeting was currently being piloted in the well-being services counties. Cooperation between the municipal child protection system and the well-being services counties was still under development. For the moment the process had not changed: there was a mandatory child welfare notification system under which the professionals working in different institutions reported cases to the child welfare services in the well-being services counties and in some cases to the police.

79. **A representative of Finland** said that the *barnahus* model permitted a multi-professional approach to child victims of offences that involved specialists who were trained in child-friendly interviewing techniques. The model also made it possible to take account of the overall family situation while keeping the child's best interests at the centre. Prompt assistance and parenting support could be provided if necessary. It also permitted urgent investigations to get under way without delay and scarce resources to be allocated correctly. The five *barnahus* units also provided consultations and offered training for workers in the municipalities.

80. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** said that she was grateful to the Finnish delegation for its cooperation and its comprehensive answers to the Committee's questions. She had no doubt that the State party would work assiduously to bridge any remaining gaps in the implementation of the Convention.

81. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she, too, wished to thank the delegation for its wide-ranging explanations and clarifications. She urged the State party to take full account of the provisions of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and ensure that, on the one hand, it duly distinguished between the concepts of sale and trafficking in its legislation and, on the other, it criminalized child prostitution and child pornography, in order to provide full protection to children against all offences covered under the Optional Protocol.

82. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that she wished to thank the Committee for a genuine dialogue, which she hoped would facilitate its evaluation of the Finnish authorities' implementation of the Convention and the Optional Protocol. The Committee's concluding observations would be translated into Finnish and Swedish and widely disseminated. The Government network of fundamental and human rights contact persons would review the concluding observations, together with representatives from all ministries, and civil society organizations would be invited to participate in round-table discussions and in following up on the concluding observations.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.