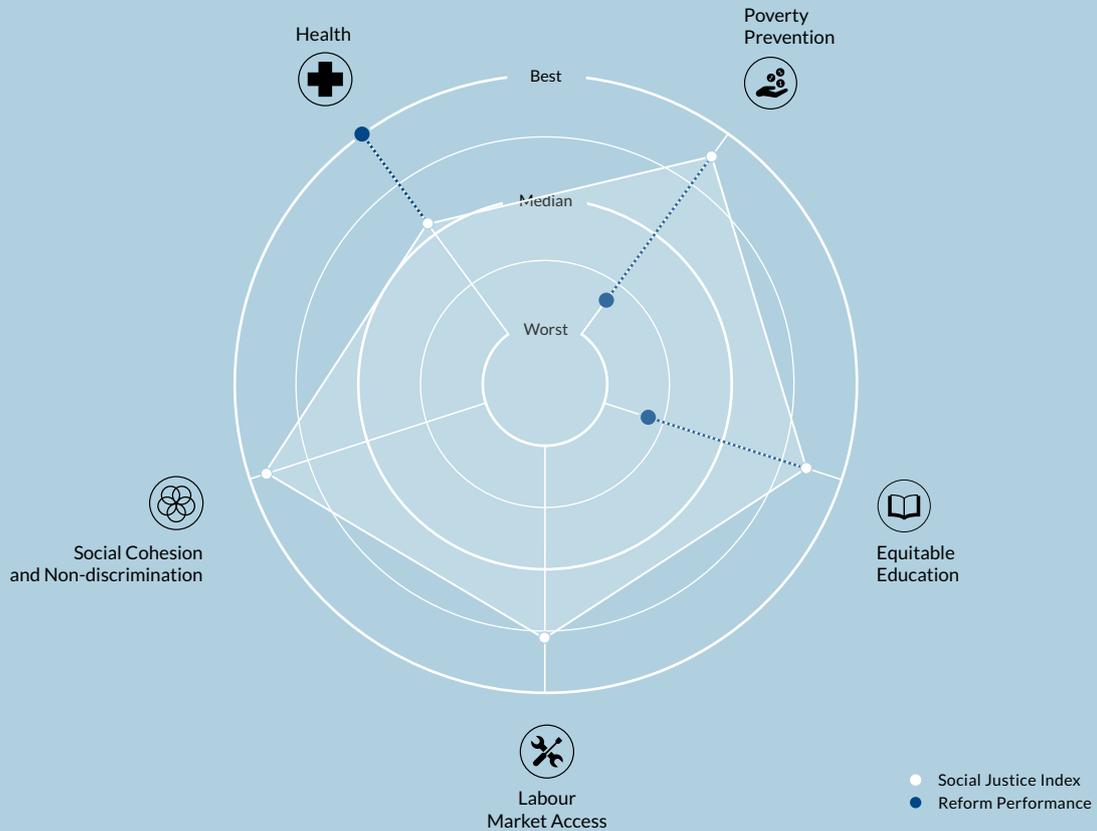


Findings by Country



Finland

How does the country rank in the EU?

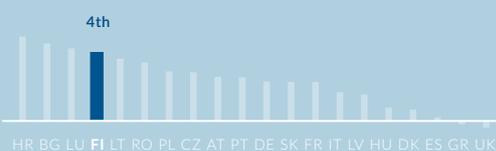


Overall Findings

Need The overall need to improve social inclusion in Finland is the 6th lowest across Europe (1.89). This clearly reflects Finland's respectable performance in the 2015 Social Justice Index (SJI), where the country ranks 3rd among the top five countries in four of the six dimensions. Looking at the different categories of social inclusion, the experts see a relatively low need to improve Poverty Prevention (1.74, rank 5/27) and to safeguard Equitable Education (1.57, rank 3/22). The need to improve Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination is slightly higher (1.98) but still relatively low, as there are only three countries for which the experts see an even lower need for improvement. On the other hand, they see a high need to improve the health system (2.28, rank 12/20) and to increase employment levels (2.3, rank 15/19).

Looking at the individual policy objectives, the picture becomes more differentiated. Especially in the dimension of Labour Market Access, the experts see a very urgent need to improve job opportunities for young people (3.0), refugees (2.67) and the foreign-born population in general (3.0). Equally, they would like to see government action to improve the integration of ref-

Overall Reform Performance Ranking



Overview of Reform Barometer Scores



ugees into the society (2.5). Furthermore, they are not at all satisfied with the outcome performance of the health system, as the need score of 3.0 underlines.

Activity According to the experts, 47 percent of the overall reform need in Finland has been addressed (rank 10/23). Looking at the most pressing dimensions, the reported activity rates differ strongly. While 85 percent of the reform need to improve the health system has been met (rank 1/20), the reported activity rate in increasing employment levels is only 11 percent (rank 22). Equally, the dimensions Poverty Prevention (24%, rank 23/27) and Equitable Education (20%, rank 15/22) reveal government activity at a very low level. For Social Cohesion, the activity rate is 44 percent (rank 8/18).

With regard to the main pressing challenges mentioned above, the relevant activity rates are (very) disappointing on the whole. As for Labour Market Access, the experts report there are no relevant activities at all to improve job prospects for the long-term unemployed, refugees and the foreign-born population in general. The activity rate concerning youth unemployment is

also very low (25%), as is the rate for improving the integration of refugees within society (20%). In contrast, the experts report that a major reform of the health system is underway, and that it aims at addressing all policy objectives in the Health dimension.

Quality The overall quality score of 1.01 (rank 2/20) shows that the experts expect the reforms initiated so far to have quite positive effects on social inclusion in Finland. While the reforms aimed at improving the Health system are expected to have strong positive effects (1.34, rank 1/19), those aimed at reducing Poverty are expected to have only slightly positive effects (0.21, rank 21/24). With regard to Education, the experts think the reforms will not change anything at all (0.0).

Dimension Findings



Poverty Prevention

Need According to the experts, the need to reduce poverty among the total population (1.25) is much lower than for specific societal subgroups. A more pressing need is seen in reducing poverty among single parents (2.19) and refugees (2.08). For children (1.69) and senior citizens (1.5), the need for reforms is modest.

Activity The activity rates concerning the most pressing issues of Poverty Prevention are pretty well disappointing, at just 34 percent (single parents) and 17 percent (refugees). In terms of reducing poverty among the foreign-born population, there is reportedly no activity at all.



Equitable Education

Need Here, the experts see a rather modest need for government action (1.57, rank 3/22). This reflects Finland's good performance in the 2015 SJI, where the country comes in 5th in the Education dimension. Exceptions can be seen with regard to 'safeguarding equal opportunities' at the level of early childhood (2.09) and tertiary education (2.0), 'improving structural conditions regarding finances and human resources' in tertiary education (2.0), and 'improving integration of refugees in the education system' (2.2).

Activity Regarding the above-mentioned challenges, the related activity rates are unpromising. The activity rate in ensuring equal opportunities within early childhood education is 27 percent, and in tertiary education 33 percent. With regard to early childhood education, one expert reports: "Fees will be increased and the right to full-time early childhood education (children under 7) will be cut to only 20 hours per week if one of the parents is at home on parental leave/child home care leave, unemployed or on disability pension. Many municipalities, such as Helsinki and some other big cities, have, however, decided that they will not follow these cuts."

Another expert reports: "While over 90 percent of children aged 6 had already been participating in preschool, in 2015, it was made mandatory to participate. This ensures that all municipalities are obligated to offer preschool education to children aged 6, and all children are obligated to attend."

No expert has seen government action to improve structural conditions within tertiary education. Rather many experts report that the government has (continued to) cut resources at all educational levels.

Quality The experts' written answers give an impression of what they think about the above-mentioned changes. With regard to early childhood education, one expert explains: "I think that making preschool compulsory for all is an important move towards more equality. The removal of the child's right to full-time early education (and basing it once again on the parents' employment status) is a move back 20 years into the past."

The cuts in funding are seen as critical for several reasons. One expert wrote: "Funding cuts in adult, tertiary and early education endanger equity." Another stated: "The financial decreases will have huge social costs in 20 years; the lack of education will be reflected in increased demand for unemployment benefits." And another criticised: "Our conditions in the educational sector were good until the 1990s – and got worse since then."¹

Labour Market Access

Need While the experts see a low need to increase employment levels among women (1.25) and senior citizens (1.25), they see a more or less urgent need to improve labour market access for the 'usual suspects', such as young people (3.0), the long-term unemployed (2.75), the foreign-born population (3.0) and refugees (2.67). The high need to reduce long-term unemployment is somewhat surprising, as Finland ranks 5th in the 2015 SJI in this regard.

Activity As for the policy objective 'increase employment/decrease unemployment', activity rates are extremely low. According to the experts, no reforms have been introduced to increase job chances for refugees, the foreign-born population and the long-term unemployed. For young people, this rate is only slightly higher (25%). One expert reports: "An attempt to increase youth employment was made with the Youth Guarantee Programme. This included various parts, such as officials that help find jobs for young, newly graduated people; benefits for employers if they employ someone in the Youth Guarantee scheme; and various intake-meetings to determine the need for further specific education."

Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination

Need The overall need for improvement with regard to social cohesion is quite high in absolute terms (1.98) but quite low relatively, as there are only three countries in which the experts see a lower need for government action. This reflects Finland's good performance in the SJI, where the country ranks 3rd in this dimension. In contrast, the need scores for the individual policy objectives are not in line with the 2015 SJI results. While the experts report a rather mediocre need to reduce the number of NEETs (1.5, rank 10 in SJI), they see a significantly higher one to tackle income inequality (2.17, rank 6

¹ Arto Ahonen, University of Jyväskylä

in SJI), safeguard gender equality (2.0, rank 2 in SJI) and improve integration policies (rank 1 in SJI) concerning refugees (2.5) and the foreign-born population (2.0).

Activity The highest activity rates in this dimension can be observed with regard to the policy objectives ‘income equality’ (52%), gender equality (55%) and ‘integration of the foreign-born population’ (50%). On the other hand, those aimed at ‘reducing the number of NEETs’ (33%) and ‘integration of refugees’ (20%) are quite low.

With regard to income equality, one expert reports: “A new Non-discrimination Act came into force on 1 January 2015. The purpose of the act is to foster equality and prevent discrimination, as well as enhancing the legal protection of those who have been discriminated against. Authorities, education providers and employers now need to conduct an equality assessment in their organisations. What will be done with the assessments is another thing altogether. It remains to be seen to what extent equality will be actively promoted and victims of discrimination compensated.” Other experts report a reform concerning gender equality adopted at the end of 2014 “by adding more precise provisions on a form of equality planning, so-called pay mapping. Bigger companies must study pay structures to make certain there are no discriminatory elements in them.” Regarding integration policies, the experts report a reform of the Non-Discrimination Act (2014) that improved provisions on ethnic discrimination.

Quality On the integration of refugees, the experts are sceptical, as there are some negative comments. One expert writes: “The policy changes concerning asylum procedure have been negative rather than positive. The policies that are planned aim at more rapid procedures rather than a fairer process. The plans to introduce a lower level of social benefits for the refugees than for general citizens are negative changes of legislation.” Another complains: “The efforts are too weak. Access to language courses, to further education, to work are clearly not what they should be.” A third writes: “The policies aim at keeping refugees away from Finland rather than integrating those who receive residence permits.”

Health

Need Experts see the need for reforms as rather high with regard to all policy objectives in this dimension, as most need scores are about 2.0. A very urgent need is seen in improving the outcome performance of the health system (3.0). One expert explains: “The present organisation of health care is disjointed and inequitable, both socially and regionally. In Finland, primary care is the main problem, whereas the hospital sector functions fairly well. Still, an unequal regional distribution is a problem.”

Activity The experts report that a major reform which will address all policy objectives in this dimension is still ongoing. For this reason, all activity rates are very high, between 80 and even 100 percent. One expert explains: “The government has worked during the whole period on health and social care as well as local government/administration reforms. The objectives of the care reforms are related to improving access to services, a more equita-

ble system, integration of health and social services, sustainable funding etc. The previous government drafted a similar bill, but due to constitutional issues (independent position of the municipalities), the reform failed. The current government continues to prepare a reform with a somewhat different administrative structure based on autonomous counties as a new administrative level organising health and social services.”²

Quality The experts expect the above-mentioned reform to have strong positive effects, as the quality score in this dimension is 1.34, ranking Finland 1st among 19 countries. One expert explains: “If the reform in preparation is successful, the organisation of services would be based on larger administrative units, which may improve sustainability, leadership etc. The integration of services and reform of the funding system may also correct structural imbalances and irrational incentives in the system.” Another one writes: “This is a major reform which is badly needed. The reform as planned is huge, covering not only all activities in social and health services, but also in provincial administration.” One expert thinks the reform should go even further, stating: “Any reform that guarantees better and more just coverage will be an improvement. However, the basic problem of Finnish health care, i.e. an unequal distribution of health (bad situation of the poor and less educated, health problems in old age – we have too few healthy old people), gender differences (women live much longer than men) and problems caused by heavy alcohol use among men and old people are not sufficiently addressed in the reform.”

It is seen positively that the reform “aims to revise the (unequal) quality of primary care services. One of the main sources of inequality in the Finnish system is the division between occupational health services and primary care given by health centres. The quality itself does not differ too much; the main difference lies in the poor access to the latter that serves mainly the economically inactive population.”

² Ilmo Keskimäki, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki, and University of Tampere