

Hannu Uusitalo

Research and Data Infrastructure in Social Policy Making: The Case of Finland

AT A GLANCE

- Social policy making in Finland has a corporatist structure, especially as regards earnings-related benefits. Central labour market organisations and the government are involved in decision-making.
- The state has several research and development organisations which contribute to social policy decision-making with research, databases, and consultancy. Research institutes linked to labour market organisations have similar functions. Social policy research is conducted in universities, and in some third sector organisations. The Academy of Finland, foundations and the EU provide project financing.
- Developed data infrastructures are available. There are advanced databases utilising both register data and sample surveys, which are often linked together. Macro-level and microsimulation models are used in forecasting future developments and in examining the effects of planned reforms.
- There are various ways to organise the link between decision-making and research and more and less successful solutions.

GERMAN ABSTRACT

Die vorliegende Studie beschreibt, wie Wissenschaft und Forschung zur Gestaltung der Sozialpolitik in Finnland beitragen. Forschung findet in sozial- und wirtschaftspolitischen Institutionen mit politischer Ausrichtung und an Universitäten statt. Die Dateninfrastrukturen für die sozialpolitische Forschung wurden über viele Jahre aufgebaut und befinden sich in einem guten Zustand. Dies liegt an den Verwaltungsregistern, die aufgrund einer persönlichen Identifikationsnummer miteinander verknüpft werden können. Umfragedaten für die Forschung werden ebenfalls unterstützt und können mit Registerdaten verknüpft werden, wenn zuvor die Zustimmung der Befragten eingeholt wurde. Statistische Modelle auf Mikro- und Makroebene werden bei der langfristigen Planung und bei der Analyse der Ergebnisse politischer Vorhaben eingesetzt. Zur Veranschaulichung des Zusammenspiels von Forschung und Entscheidungsfindung werden vier Fälle von kürzlich abgeschlossenen oder noch laufenden sozialpolitischen Reformen vorgestellt. Sie zeigen sowohl erfolgreiche als auch weniger erfolgreiche Wege, wie wissenschaftliche Befunde für die Entwicklung sozialpolitischer Maßnahmen genutzt werden. Für die Verbindung von Entscheidungsfindung und Forschung gibt es nicht die eine beste Lösung.

ABSTRACT ENGLISH

This paper describes the role of research in social policy making in Finland. Research takes place in social and economic policy institutions with a policy orientation and in academia. Data infrastructures in social policy research have developed over the years, and they are in good shape. This is due to administrative registers, which can be linked together because of personal identification numbers. Survey data services are available, and they also can be linked to register data, if permission has been obtained from the interviewees in advance. Statistical micro- and macro-level models are used in long-term planning and in the analysis of expected results of planned policy reforms. Four cases of recent or ongoing social policy reform are described to illustrate the use and interplay of research and decision-making. They reveal both successful and less successful ways of using and utilising research in developing social policy. There is no single best solution to link decision-making and research.

1 Introduction

This paper describes how social policy reforms are made in Finland, how research to support these reforms is arranged, and what kind of data and research tools are utilised. The focus is on the current situation up to 2022, but, when necessary, developments over recent decades are described. After the parliamentary elections in 2023, Finland got a new right-wing government, which plans curtailments in social and labour market policies.

Section 2 sets the general framework of social policy decision-making in Finland. It focuses on the role of central labour market organisations and outlines the main features of the Finnish political structure. It continues by describing the central role of government programmes and outlines various ways in which social policy reforms are prepared.

Section 3 describes the main social policy consulting organisations: public and semi-public organisations in the third sector, and the role of academic research. It also introduces the major organisations financing social policy research.

Section 4 focuses on the main data infrastructures, and on macro-, micro- and hybrid models used in social policy research. Section 5 includes four concise case studies of recent and ongoing social policy reforms, the focus being on the ways in which research is used. Section 6 draws together the main conclusions.

2 Social Corporatist Social Policy Making

The Nordic countries, Sweden as a prototype (Furniss and Tilton 1977), followed by Denmark and Norway, and the latecomer, Finland, have been identified as a particular type of society among advanced democratic nations. In his influential book, Gøsta Esping-Andersen developed three ideal types of 'welfare capitalism', one of the types being the social democratic welfare state, prevailing in Scandinavia (1990). Indeed, there is a broad consensus that public and social policies in these countries share a strong family resemblance. Terminology varies, but labels such as 'The Nordic model' or 'The Scandinavian welfare state' are widely used. The exact characteristics of the model vary in different interpretations, but the core elements include broad public participation in economic and social life, universalism of social policies, and a strong emphasis on egalitarianism, both as a value and as a principle of public services and institutions (Erikson et. al 1987).

From the perspective of political sciences and decision-making, this model has also been labelled as social corporatism. This refers to tripartite decision-making structures, involving

collective bargaining between representatives of employers, labour, and government. These structures involve decision-making on a broad range of issues, including many social policies.

This kind of social corporatism developed after World War II, influenced by Christian democrats and social democrats in Western European countries such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The Nordic countries have the most comprehensive form of collective bargaining. In recent decades, collective bargaining features of this model have been weakened (see Götz 2019).

In Finland, the corporatist structure had its culmination in 1969–2006, when comprehensive income policy agreements were made. These were tripartite agreements between the central organisations of trade unions, employers' organisations, and the government. They included a wide range of economic and political issues: salaries, taxation, pensions, unemployment benefits, and housing costs, etc. After this period, labour market agreements have been made in various forms. In recent years, the employers have decentralised their negotiation practices to industry-based associations and even to the firm level. The membership rates of employers' and employees' organisations are high, although partly in decline. The self-employed in the agricultural sector are highly organised, while the self-employed in other sectors are much less so. However, social corporatist features in social policy decision-making in Finland are still prominent, as even this report demonstrates.

The corporatist structure is very important, especially in earnings-related benefits, while so called basic benefits (where entitlement is based on residency in Finland) are more clearly in the realm of parliamentary politics. However, in the Finnish case, social security benefits (both earnings-related and flat rate) are legislated and always necessitate the participation of the government and parliament.

2.1. POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Currently there are nine political parties in the Finnish parliament, called Eduskunta in Finnish. Until the recent election in 2023, the Social Democrats had 40 seats, Finns Party (right-wing populists) 39, National Coalition (conservatives) 37, Centre Party 31, Greens 20, Left Alliance 16, and The Swedish People's Party of Finland 10. These six parties have 192 seats out of 200. The Parliament has 16 permanent special committees and the Grand Committee, which focuses mainly on EU affairs. From the social policy perspective, the most important committee is The Social Affairs and Health Committee which deals with matters relating to social welfare and health care, social insurance, fees for social welfare and health care services, pension legislation, and environmental health care.

In recent decades, Finland has been ruled by majority governments, often overcoming the left–right division in broad coalitions. The government of Prime Minister Sanna Marin took office in 2019, and is often labelled a red-green coalition, including the Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party, the Greens, the Left Alliance, and the Swedish People's Party. In the previous electoral period, the government was a right-centre coalition.

The Marin cabinet had 19 ministers. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSAH) includes ministers, and it manages the preparation and implementation of social welfare and health care policy, gender equality policy and occupational safety and health policy. Three independent research and development agencies provide expert services in social policy under the auspices of the ministry (see Section 3).

The new Parliament was elected in April 2023. Two main opposition parties, National Coalition (48 seats), Finns Party (46 seats) and the main government party, Marin's Social Democrats (43 seats), won new seats. After seven weeks of negotiations led by Petteri Orpo, the chairperson of the National Coalition, the new government was appointed in June 2023. This right-wing government is formed by the National Coalition, Finns Party, The Swedish People's Party, and the Christian Democrats. Its government programme aims at significant reforms in social and labour market policies to diminish the growth of public deficit by cutting the growth of social expenditures and by increasing labour market participation. It means a radical departure of the programmes of Marin's government. However, it is too early to say to what extent it will be realised.

2.2. THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME

The government programme, agreed by the parties forming the government, is a key political document for the upcoming years. It documents the major goals and means of the government. The programme is a detailed one. For example, the programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government has more than 200 pages. From the social policy point of view, its most important section is a 15-page long section headed "Fair, equal and inclusive Finland", setting general goals for social policies, and describing aims and means of restructuring health and social services, and of reforming social security (Finnish Government 2019).

From the viewpoint of research, development, and innovation (RDI), it is noteworthy that the government programme included a plan to develop RDI infrastructure. The background was the fall in RDI funding in the 2010s (mainly due to Nokia's decreased input), and the goal to achieve a level of four percent of GDP in 2030 (Lemola and Lovio 2022). To advance this plan, Marin's cabinet has set up a parliamentary working group. The funding level in 2021 was somewhat below three percent of GDP, about 7.5 billion euros. The share of the social sciences (including economics, political science, educational sciences, social studies etc.) is less than seven percent (Niemi 2022).

Outside of the government programme, Marin's cabinet faced the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These unforeseen events led to important decisions on managing the pandemic, and to an extremely rapid application to join NATO, decided in a broad consensus between the government, the president, and parliament in a situation where opinion polls showed that this was the will of an exceptionally large majority of the population. In the programme of Marin's government, NATO membership was mentioned as an open option. Despite these unforeseen events, the government programme had not been changed.

Before parliamentary elections, suggestions for the government programme are prepared by political parties, by state administrations such as ministries and regional and municipal organisations, by interest organisations such as central labour market organisations, and by various civil society organisations. Since the economic crisis in the 1990s, the reports by the Ministry of Finance have been particularly important agenda-setters for election debates, because they emphasise concerns about the public deficit and discuss the need for austerity measures. The parties participating in negotiations to form a government mix their favourite cocktail from these suggestions. The programme is made more operational in the action plan, which in Marin's cabinet case includes about 200 measures, which are scheduled for the four-year period, are monitored monthly, and published on the government's website.

Recent governments have introduced several measures to improve the use of research in public policy decision-making. These have focused on the development and quality of information resources, on flexible targeting research, on impact assessment and using systematic information in reform planning and legislation. The Prime Minister's Office coordinates the government's analysis, assessment, and research activities, which aim to generate information to support decision-making, operations and knowledge management (Harnessing knowledge 2023). These efforts apply to all public policies and thus concern social policy reforms as well.

2.3. THE PREPARATION OF SOCIAL POLICY REFORMS

Social policy reforms take place in various organisational contexts. Parliamentary committees consisting of members of all parliamentary parties have been relatively rare, but the Marin government uses them in preparing both major structural reforms and other long-lasting reforms which will continue in the next legislative period. In addition to MPs, these committees may include representatives of central interest groups and non-governmental organisations (Finnish Government (2019). Marin's cabinet has set up five parliamentary committees, two of which concern social policy: the committees on child strategy and social security (Valtioneuvosto 2020).

More typical are committees consisting of representatives of the cabinet parties, and representatives of interest organisations and experts. Occasionally, groups consisting only of high-level experts are used. Such groups conduct preliminary work, develop, and analyse alternatives, which are presented to decision-makers. Sometimes even a single expert is given the mandate to examine a specific problem and to make suggestions for future action. All these preparatory organs can order reports from research as well as from other organisations.

3 The Main Social Policy Consulting Organisations

Several research and development organisations are involved in Finland's social policy infrastructure to varying degrees. These include state authorities with research as one of their functions, semi-public institutions, research institutes of labour market organisations, universities, and institutions financing scientific and applied research. The development and maintenance of statistical models is partly a joint effort, partly organisations have their own methodological tools (see Section 4).

3.1. PUBLIC AND SEMI-PUBLIC RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) was founded in 2009 by the merger of two R&D institutions, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health

(STAKES) and the National Public Health Institute. THL is a state-owned independent expert and research institute, operating under the administrative umbrella of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Its duties are established in legislation: to carry out research and expert work to prevent illnesses and social problems, to develop the welfare society, and to support the social welfare and health care system, and the social security system. THL is also a statistical authority and maintains and develops statistics and registers in its field. It steers national information management in social welfare and health care services, including health and welfare data on Finnish citizens. In addition to the government, THL also provides services to municipal and provincial decision-makers, actors in the social welfare and health sector, organisations, the research community, and the public. Furthermore, it provides social and health care services and forensic medicine services for which the state is responsible (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2022a). THL's role in the governance of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–22 was of utmost importance both because of its duties as an authority and as a research institute producing and providing up-to-date scientific knowledge to decision-makers and the public.

The number of THL staff is equivalent to 1,000 person-years, of which 20 per cent have research qualifications and 57 per cent have a higher education degree (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2022c). THL's funding is based on the state budget, co-funded activities, and services subject to a fee. In 2022, budget funding was € 85.9m, € 41.2m has been budgeted for co-funded activities. Of these co-funded activities, the share of the three largest external financiers, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Academy of Finland, and the European Union, was approximately 84 percent in 2021.

THL is the main producer of social welfare and health statistics. These statistics are crucial for both decision-making and research and development. THL's statistics refer to alcohol, drugs and addiction, disability, health and welfare promotion, health care services, morbidity, sexual and reproductive health, social and health care resources, social services for adults, children, adolescents, and families, and for older people.

Most of THL's statistics, materials and databases are available for use as open, machine-readable data. There are several statistical databases usable at national, regional, and municipal levels. THL regularly publishes several database reports, such as summaries and data cubes, in order to enable users to search information and choose the appropriate sections in the register data.

Within THL operates Findata, which is the authority that grants permits for the secondary use of social and health data in those cases where data from separate public social and health sector organisations are needed. Findata is responsible for combining and pre-processing data subject to a permit, such as the production of pseudonymised and anonymised statistical data (Findata 2022).

Research at THL is solution-oriented and provides evidence-based information to support decision-makers and experts at various levels of government and the health and social welfare sectors. Currently, THL has four research programmes: Equal Society and Inequality, Changing Social and Health Care Services and the Social Security System, Challenges and Solutions to Population Health and Welfare, and Safe and Health Promoting Environment. There are over 60 EU-funded ongoing research projects at THL, and 30 projects funded by the Academy of Finland. The results from the research projects are published in international peer-reviewed journals, and in THL's own publications. The number of peer-reviewed articles

is approximately 700 annually. Counted together, THL has several hundred ongoing RDI projects, often involving national and international collaboration.

THL manages several extensive research data resources from register studies and population-based surveys to sample collections of the THL Biobank. THL offers external investigators access to THL data for various health and biomedical research purposes.

THL's register data includes national individual-level data that has been collected for the past 50 years from the Finnish health care and social services. It provides access to statistical information on a wide range of diseases, treatments, and services, which can be combined with data from other sources. The most used THL registers currently include the Care Register for Health Care, the Cancer Registry, and the Medical Birth Register.

Population-based surveys are based on longitudinal follow-up random samples of research participants from the population. They include information obtained from questionnaires (typically covering various health, diet, and lifestyle factors), from objective health examinations, and from a collection of biological samples.

The THL Biobank hosts a collection of population- and disease-specific samples for research purposes. Biobanking ensures access to samples and data, sample management and supply services, databases for samples and data availability and standardised information management of the sample collections.

As a kind of quality assurance, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has commissioned several international evaluations of RDI institutions in its field. Currently, there is an ongoing evaluation process of THL, which will be finished in 2023. The latest evaluation, published in 2014, covered the years 2009–2013 with a future perspective until 2020. The summary of the report concludes that “THL is an extraordinary institution that any country would be very proud to have as a government agency for public health and welfare and as a source of expertise, evidence, counsel for policymaking and the capacity to address Finland's current challenges in health, welfare, inequalities therein, health threats and health and social care delivery as well as unanticipated future challenges.” The evaluation group presented nine general recommendations, which focused on the need to sharpen top priorities, to upgrade management processes and organisation, to develop performance measures further, and to improve communication with MSAH and other stakeholders (International Evaluation Group 2014).

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH)

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) is a multidisciplinary research and specialist organisation that focuses on health and wellbeing at work, research, advisory services, and training. Its goal is to develop good work communities and safe work environments. Like THL, FIOH operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, but is an independent institution governed by law. FIOH has over 500 employees, its budget being about € 50m. About half of its activities are funded by the state's budget. In 2021, approximately a third of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health's funding was received from the clients of its business activities, and a sixth from research financiers. It provides laboratory services, occupational hygiene services, development and consultation, training and online coaching, and patient services related to occupational medicine. It has about 120 research and development projects, its research budget being about € 11m (Finnish Institute for Occupational Health 2022).

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland Kela

Kela provides social security for Finnish residents. It administers and grants residence-based flat-rate or means-tested benefits: family benefits, health insurance, rehabilitation, basic unemployment security, basic social assistance, housing benefits, financial aid for students, disability benefits and basic pensions. Kela operates under the supervision of parliament but is independent in its operations (Kela 2022a).

Kela has a research unit which conducts topical and interdisciplinary research, with the aim of contributing to developing social and health security. It utilises Kela's benefit registers in combination with other register data and uses questionnaire and interview studies, as well as microsimulation models. Kela's research focuses on its benefits and services and their impact on clients, but it also deals with broader issues of social and health policies and social welfare (Kela 2022c).

Kela's research unit has around 50 researchers, representing various sciences such as pharmacy, medicine and public health, rehabilitation, economics, and social sciences. Its research budget is currently about € 4.5m. One important example of Kela's topical research, the basic income experiment, is described in Section 5. Kela also finances research on social and health insurance and rehabilitation at universities and research institutes.

Kela's administrative tasks produce data, which are maintained and developed in registers, databases, and statistics. In addition to social policy research, these data sources form an important part of the information services in social policy, especially as regards basic social and health security benefits.

Finnish Centre for Pensions ETK

The earnings-related pension system is an example par excellence of corporatist social policies in Finland. It was established in the 1960s and 1970s in negotiations between the central organisations of the labour market and the state. The earnings-related schemes are agreed between these parties, planned in detail in tripartite committees and work groups, and legislated by parliament. They cover basically all employees in both the private and the public sector, and the self-employed in agriculture and other industries. The operations of the pension system and related legislation are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and in the case of public sector pensions, also of the Ministry of Finance. The administration of the earnings-related pension system is decentralised to earnings-related pension providers. Currently, there are 25 earnings-related pension providers. Their number has considerably decreased from more than 200 in the late 1960s.

Because of the decentralisation of the system, there is a need for a body that takes care of its common operations. This is handled by the Finnish Centre for Pensions (ETK). ETK promotes and coordinates the implementation and development of earnings-related pension schemes, promotes cooperation between pension institutions and with the authorities, and makes recommendations to pension institutions on the application of the laws. It has a duty to communicate about earnings-related pension issues to the population. ETK also determines whether a worker is covered by Finnish social security while working abroad, and it is an international liaison body which forwards pension applications filed in Finland to pension providers abroad and responds to various pension queries.

ETK's costs are covered by the pension contributions of employers, employees and the self-employed. The representatives of labour market organisations play a key role on ETK's board, which also has a representative of MSAH. In 2021 ETK had about 300 employees, its total costs being € 38m (Eläketurvakeskus 2022).

One of ETK's legally established duties is to carry out research, produce statistics and maintain registers (Finnish Centre for Pensions 2022d). It conducts independent empirical research in the social and economic sciences. Its current research programme defines the focal areas of research: working lives and their development, retirement patterns, the adequacy of pension provision and the financial sustainability of the pension system. The programme addresses key pension policy issues in Finland. Special attention is focused on pension reform evaluations (Finnish Centre for Pensions 2022e).

As in the case of Kela, ETK's administrative tasks produce a large quantity of data about earnings-related pensions and their financing. These are the basis for official statistics that describe the Finnish pensions, partly produced together with Kela. The statistics describe pension recipients, persons insured under the earnings-related pension acts, pension expenditure, effective retirement ages, rehabilitation under the earnings-related pension scheme, and the financing of earnings-related pensions.

ETK's services for pension policy decision-makers include assessments of the effects of planned reforms, and calculations and projections on the future of the pension system. The time frame varies from short-term to long-term projections extending to 60–70 years ahead. These functions form an important tool for the planning of the Finnish pension system. Section 5 includes a case to illustrate the use of these services. ETK's research, statistics, projections, and planning functions employ 50 persons and costs amount to € 4m (2021).

VATT Institute for Economic Research

VATT operates in the administrative domain of the Ministry of Finance. It conducts scientific research to promote evidence-based policymaking and evaluates the effects of policy measures on individuals, households, and firms. It also acts as an expert in supporting decision-making and evaluating economic policy. Two thirds of its financing come from the state budget and one third is tendered research funding. VATT's operating expenditure is about € 7m. It has a staff of around 50 persons. Most of the researchers have a doctoral degree in various subfields of economics. One of its strategic focuses concerns social security, taxation, and inequality, and one of its five key research areas is social security and employment (VATT 2022).

The Economic Policy Council is administratively linked to VATT, but is an independent institution. It was established in 2014 to provide independent evaluations of the objectives of economic policy and the effectiveness of the chosen policy measures. Through its work, the Council aims to improve the quality of economic policy decision-making and preparatory work, and to bring an independent and research-based perspective to the public discussion on economic policy. The members of the Council are appointed from the people suggested by the economics departments of universities and the Academy of Finland. Its reports concern social policy in relation to public economy issues (Economic Policy Council 2022).

3.2. THIRD SECTOR RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

The main central bodies of the labour market organisations have their own research institutes. They mainly focus on economic research. These organisations contribute to economic and social policy discussions and planning by lending their expertise to various committees and working groups set up by government departments, by appearing at parliamentary committee hearings, and by giving presentations at scientific conferences as well as in public discussions, interviews, and hearings. Like public research organisations, their research is independent and conforms to scientific standards.

Etla Economic Research

Etla is an independent, private, non-profit economic research institute. It conducts applied economic research on key issues for Finnish business and the national economy. It is supported by Finnish employers' organisations. These covered less than a third of the expenses in 2021, which in toto were about € 4m. The remaining two thirds is obtained as project funding for various research projects. Etla's personnel comprise over 40 employees, most of the research staff have a doctoral degree in economics. Research activities focus on two thematic areas. Impact of Economic Policy aims to provide information on how economic policy can promote competition between and business conditions for companies in Finland and improve the competitiveness of Finnish production on the world market. Impact of Driving Forces focuses on the effects of megatrends on the business sector and on the preconditions of economic policies (Etla 2022). Etla's research has been particularly important in pension policy reforms (see Section 5).

The Labour Institute for Economic Research LABORE

LABORE is an independent and non-profit research organisation, conducting applied economic research. It is supported by central and other organisations of labour unions, representing both blue-collar and white-collar employees. Expenses in 2021 were € 2.3m, and the number of employees was about 30. The focus of LABORE's research is on labour economics, including education research, public finances, and macroeconomics. Its research on the labour market, education, taxation, and macroeconomic research often comes relatively close to social policies. LABORE also conducts research projects on the economic aspects of social policy (LABORE 2022).

Pellervo Economic Research PTT

Pellervo Economic Research is an independent applied economics research institute and a non-profit organisation. PTT's members consist of organisations in the agrifood and forest management sectors, including the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners. PTT's annual budget is about € 2.2m, half of which comes from project financing by external sources. PTT's research is policy-oriented and focuses on five key themes: Globalisation and regional development, Food, Forestry, Housing, and Welfare. The research staff is comprised of about 20 economists (Pellervo Economic Research 2022). Social policy issues, excluding regional problems, are less pronounced in its research profile than in that of Etla and LABORE.

Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health SOSTE

SOSTE is a Finnish umbrella organisation for two hundred social affairs and health NGO members and dozens of partner members. It is a lobbying organisation aiming to increase the impact of social and health care organisations and thereby to ensure the preconditions for a good life for all. It works locally, nationally, and internationally, especially within the EU. Among other things, it has developed and launched the concept of the wellbeing economy, aiming to integrate economic and social goals into public policy (Soste 2023).

SOSTE conducts research on social policy issues. Recently, it has produced a report focusing on the development of residence-based social transfers (Honkanen 2020) and on the pitfalls of indexation of residence-based income transfers (Honkanen 2021). These studies aim to influence the work of the social security committee (see Section 5).

Since 1991 SOSTE has monitored and regularly produced reports on the state and development of social and health services. This so-called social barometer is based on questionnaire surveys conducted among experts in the social, health, and employment fields and in Kela. Social barometers aim to produce reliable information for public discussion and to influence decision-makers (Sosiaalibarometri 2023).

Think tanks and lobby organisations

In Finland, a relatively new phenomenon is the emergence of various kinds of think tanks. They can request financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture to produce research on social issues. According to a recent study, these think tanks are in the middle ground of research and decision-making, some being close to political parties, some emphasising their independence. Their aim is to bring new ideas to societal and political discussion and to suggest directions which decision-makers can use in their work. So far, their impact has been minor and they have gained most impact through their publications (Kannisto 2019).

3.3. ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON SOCIAL POLICY

Finland has 14 universities and 24 universities of applied sciences. Six universities offer doctoral schools in social policy and carry out social policy research. The boundaries between sociology, social policy, and social sciences are vague and varying, and it is difficult to portray the situation accurately. In addition, disciplines such as economics, regional science, and history occasionally research social policy issues.

Social policy research at the universities is financed by their own budgets, by the Academy of Finland and other research foundations, and by the EU, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, THL, and Kela. Often these projects are carried out in joint coalitions. Universities are increasingly dependent on external project financing.

Because much social policy research is conducted in the context of applied research and is financed by institutions that often have vested interests in social policy, it is of crucial importance that social policy research is carried out in universities. They can conduct critical research on issues that may be taken for granted in a more applied research context.

3.4 THE ACADEMY OF FINLAND AND OTHER RESEARCH FINANCERS

The Academy of Finland is an expert organisation in science and research that funds high-quality scientific research, provides expertise in science and science policy, and strengthens the position of science and research. It is a government agency within the administrative domain of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The Academy grants funding in open competitive calls for scientific research, for researcher training and for improving framework conditions for research. It provides expertise to Finnish and international collaborative networks, collects and analyses data on science and scientific research, and works as a science policy expert. The Academy has three research councils: Biosciences, Health and the Environment; Culture and Society; Natural Sciences and Engineering. In 2022, funding for research amounted to € 468m, contributing to the work of some 3,000 employees at universities and research institutes.

The Academy uses international peer-review panels to identify the best and most promising research projects, most talented researchers, and most attractive research environments. The decision-making research councils recruit members from the Finnish scientific community.

The Research Council for Culture and Society grants funding to many social and cultural sciences, including social policy. Funding granted by the Academy accounts for a considerable part of the universities' external research funding for humanities and social sciences. In 2015–2022, the council financed 195 projects in social sciences, sociology, and demography with € 48.4m (annual average being about € 6m). Only a handful of these had an explicit social policy orientation, but many projects may have relevance for social policies (Suomen Akatemia 2022).

Within the Academy, the Research Infrastructure Committee monitors and develops Finnish and international research infrastructure activity, provides funding to infrastructure projects and monitors funded projects. Its major social science infrastructure funding goes to The European Social Survey (ESS) which is an academically driven comparative social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing societies and the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. The ESS covers 38 countries (Academy of Finland 2022a).

The Strategic Research Council (SRC)

The Strategic Research Council, established in 2014, is an independent research funding body. It works within the Academy of Finland. It aims to fund high-quality research with great societal relevance and impact. The Government of Finland determines the research needs and decides the final themes, which the SRC elaborates into research programmes. An important element of SRC-funded research is active collaboration between knowledge producers and users. Each year, the SRC prepares a proposal on key strategic research themes and priorities to be approved by the Finnish Government. SRC programmes run for 3–6 years. The SRC's annual funding budget is about € 55m (Academy of Finland 2022b).

From the viewpoint of social policy, the most important programmes financed by SRC are Equal Society, Demographic Changes – Causes, Consequences and Solutions, and Children and Young People – healthy, thriving and capable makers of the future (Academy of Finland 2022c).

Research programmes are typically broad consortiums involving participants from several universities and representing various academic disciplines. SRC is responsible for assessing the impact of the research it has funded. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the current or prospective scientific and societal impact of the programmes and to produce information to support the development of strategic research programmes. Being a new instrument in efforts to utilise research in public policies, the overall impact of SRC is yet to be seen.

Other research financing organisations

In Finland, there are about 800 private grant providers, the oldest dating from the 18th century. The first foundations supporting humanities and social sciences appeared after World War II. After the 1990s, support to sciences has increased rapidly (Tiitta 2018, pp. 177, 202, 225). These organisations support art, research, and societal development annually with nearly € 500m (Association of Finnish Foundations 2022). Some of these also support social sciences and social policy. Support for social and economic sciences amounts to € 60m (Säätiötuki lukuina 2021).

4 Main Data Infrastructures

Statistics Finland

As described in the previous section, THL, Kela and ETK, partly because of their duties as social security authorities, produce essential parts of the social policy data infrastructure. The main data infrastructure producer is Statistics Finland, whose role goes far beyond social policies to all spheres of social life.

Statistics Finland produces approximately 160 sets of statistics. Its website makes around 600 new releases every year. The statistics are grouped in 26 topics, the most important topics from the viewpoint of social policy being health, housing, income, and consumption, living conditions and social protection.

Statistics Finland plays a key role in maintaining registers and databases for many public and social policy purposes, and for commercial use. Every person permanently living in Finland has a personal identity number. Personal identity numbers make it possible to combine individual data from various registers and thus to produce data sets for statistical and research purposes. The use of such data is controlled to safeguard anonymity. Anonymised research data can also be used via publicly maintained data “cubes”, from which anybody can create their own data sets. Statistics Finland assumes a key role in this business, but in social policy research THL and Kela also have an important role, as has ETK in pension policy. One very prominent data set is income distribution statistics, which is partly based on large samples of the population and partly includes the whole population. The latter data are based on register data on incomes of individuals and households. It allows the use of very detailed classifications and dates back to 1995 (Laatuseloste: tulonjakotilasto 2019). Statistics Finland utilises other data collection methods, such as population surveys, which are often linked to register data. All these data sets are available to everyone (with limitations relating to purpose and integrity), and usable with statistical tools.

International co-operation in the coordination and development of statistics is extremely important and useful for all countries. Statistics Finland uses internationally developed and agreed standards, and co-operates with international agencies such as Eurostat, the OECD, the UN, and others. Statistics Finland participates and implements joint statistical actions in the EU. This covers a very large share of statistics production in Finland.

As regards social statistics, Statistics Finland plans to continue reforms and harmonisation within the integrated European Social Statistics regulatory framework. This concerns, for example, the production and data content of statistics related the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, the Labour Force Survey, the Adult Education Survey and the Household Budget Survey. In 2023, data on health, perceived wellbeing, and social and cultural participation will be published in the statistics on living conditions based on the EU-SILC survey (Tilastokeskus 2022).

The Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) provides access to a wide range of digital research data. It archives and disseminates research data for reuse. In 2021, 114 research data sets were archived, and its data sets were downloaded about 45 000 times (Tietoarkisto 2021). The most important data sets for social policy research are available at FSD.

4.1. MACRO-LEVEL MODELS AND FORECASTS

The Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Finland, and several private sector organisations including the above mentioned economic research institutes have macroeconomic models for short-term economic and fiscal policies in particular. These models include employment and taxes, but typically no social policy variables. Some of these models are also used in longer term forecasts, in which case they utilise population forecasts.

In addition to the UN and Eurostat, Statistics Finland regularly makes population projections for Finland. The current projection runs to 2070. Methodologically, it is based on a demographic component model in which the future population numbers and structures are calculated by means of age-specific birth rates, mortality, and migration coefficients. The coefficients are based on demographic statistics for the last few years (Official Statistics of Finland 2021). Several municipalities make their own population forecasts, as does Kela for its own purposes.

Populations forecasts form the basis for long-term forecasts of economic and social developments. THL makes long-term forecasts for social expenditures, Kela for residence-based expenditures and ETK for earnings-related pensions expenditures, contributions and benefit levels. These models are also used to estimate the likely effects of planned policy changes. Section 5 describes one such example.

4.2. MICROSIMULATION MODELS

Microsimulation models offer an efficient tool for economic and social policy research and planning. The first models were based on example households and grounded in statistics of household economies and characteristics. Earlier there were three microsimulation models using the same data, based on income distribution statistics (VATT 2004), but now there is one major simulation model called SISU. Since 2011 this model has been maintained by Statistics Finland. It is used to estimate tax revenues in the public sector, to examine the financial positions of individuals and households, and to study effects of planned legislative changes on income differences and economic incentives.

SISU is a static microsimulation model. It does not include possible behavioural effects caused by reforms. The model can be used for both data simulation and fictional data simulation. Fictional data simulation can be used to make simulations for certain types of persons or households generated by the user by calculating taxes, benefits, and disposable income for them. In the data simulation the results can be generalised to the defined population. SISU models includes the legislation on taxation and social policy cash benefits. This can be changed for planning purposes, and the results of this exercise can be compared to the outcomes caused by the prevailing legislation. The basic data typically has one- or two-year lag, but it can be updated to the level of the current year and to five to six years ahead.

The SISU microsimulation model can be used for scientific studies and statistical surveys within the framework of the Statistics Act. The restriction concerns model data, but the actual model code is available freely. The model operates via remote access connection (Statistics Finland (2022)). The model is widely used. For example, parliament's information service uses the model and conducts modelling for MPs at their request (Grönberg et al. 2016).

While the SISU-model is the main simulation model nationally, EUROMOD can be used for comparative analyses. EUROMOD is a tax-benefit microsimulation model for the European Union. It is maintained, developed, and managed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, in collaboration with Eurostat and national teams from the EU countries. It is an open access service that enables researchers and policy analysts to calculate, in a comparable manner, the effects of taxes and benefits on household incomes and work incentives for the population of each country and for the EU. Cross-country comparability is enabled by coding the policy systems of the EU Member States according to a common framework based on a standard set of modelling conventions (European Commission 2022).

ETK has a microsimulation model ELSI used to forecast the long-term development of Finnish earnings-related pensions and national and guaranteed pensions. It supplements ETK's long-term planning model. ELSI employs individual-level microdata to simulate the life course of individuals. The population modelled by ELSI comprises all adults who are covered by the Finnish social security system and those who have previously accrued earnings-related pension benefits under the Finnish pension system. The input data is based on administrative registers (ETK 2022).

4.3. HYBRID MODELS AND EXPERIMENTS

The above-mentioned tools for social policy analysis are also used in combination. For example, ETK's forecasting model builds on the population forecast made by Statistics Finland and is combined with the macroeconomic model of the Ministry of Finance.

In addition to modelling and special studies, experiments are seldom used in social policy reform work, although the first study using an experimental design was published already in 1950s. It examined the effect of the supply of alcohol beverages on consumption in sparsely populated areas in Finland (Kuusi 1956). Especially in social and health services, new methods are often implemented in an experimental mode, but these do not typically fit the strict requirements of a scientific experiment. A recent example of a social policy experimental design is the basic income experiment, which is described in Section 5.

5 The Role of Research in Four Recent Social Policy Reforms

This section examines how the above-described institutional framework and data infrastructures have been used in recent and ongoing social policy reforms and reform efforts. First, it describes earnings-related pensions reforms, which in two major phases brought considerable changes in pension security. The second case is the basic income experiment, which led to only minor changes. The third case focuses on the ongoing setup of social security reform. The fourth case describes the reform of health and social services, which started in 2021 and aims to reorganise and rationalise the supply of these services, and achieve savings in the longer run.

5.1. EARNINGS-RELATED PENSION REFORMS

Pension security in Finland consists of two systems, earnings-related pensions and national (plus guarantee) pensions, which together ensure income in old age, in the case of disability or the death of a breadwinner. The aim of the earnings-related pension is to ensure a reasonable standard of living in retirement. It accrues based on incomes from paid work and self-employment, which are insured in the earnings-related pension system. The national and the guarantee pensions ensure a minimum income. Being resident in Finland is a precondition for receiving a national and a guarantee pension. The national pension system is managed by Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Finnish Centre for Pensions 2022f.). The earnings-related part of the pension system has a hybrid financing mechanism including both PAYG and funding, while the national pensions are financed via the public budget.

In the Finnish corporatist model, earnings-related pension reforms are prepared by the social partners (central labour market organisations) and the state. Since the 1990s, the social partners have been involved the so-called Pension Negotiation Group. When an agreement on pension reform has been reached, and after discussions with the government, a detailed legislation process starts in the working group(s) within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Labour market organisations participate in this work as well.

The deep recession in the early 1990s, together with the forecast of a rapidly aging population and the subsequent forecasts for pension contributions and expenditures, changed the tune of pension policy from improving pension rights and benefits to tightening criteria to receive a pension and to raising retirement age. This perspective underpinned policy changes during the 1990s and the major pension reforms in 2005 and 2017. Using the terminology of Hacker (2005) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010), Finland's 1990 pension system has been gradually replaced by a new system. Fundamentals such as changing the calculation of the pension-crediting wage (from the final wage to the average wage of the employment career),

introducing a life expectancy coefficient (reducing the pension and the growth in pension expenditure because of changing life expectancy), phasing out many forms of early retirement pensions (except disability pensions) are important 'systemic' changes. These have been accompanied by parametric changes such as indexing of wages (when adjusting annual earnings to the year of retirement and pensions in payment). (See Finnish Centre for Pensions 2022b, 2022c).

Research and planning in the 2005 and 2017 pension reforms

Since the 1990s, and between the 2005 and 2017 reforms, research support for reforms has improved considerably, as has the use of research by decision-makers. The following description is mainly based on a study by Uusitalo (2020).

In 2001 and 2002 the Pension Negotiation Group agreed on the main principles of the pension reform and the agreement was accepted by the major central labour market organisations. The legislative work started in the Ministry of Social Affairs with the participation of central labour market organisations, and parliament passed the law, which took effect in 2005.

In preparing the 2005 reform, the Pension Negotiation Group requested dozens of alternative calculations and reports for their work from ETK. These included a report on early retirement pensions and the effective proven ways to postpone retirement, evaluations of the long-term development of pension contributions and expenditures, the development of pensions in different occupational groups, all done according to different stipulations of delineated reforms. The chairperson of the Pension Negotiation Group noted that ETK's services in the planning of the reform were of utmost importance. Moreover, ETK had proactively studied techniques for how increased longevity could be automatically considered in the rules of the pension system (Lindell 1999). ETK also made the first ever evaluation of the gender effects of this reform. It concluded that different features of the reform had different impacts on women's and men's pensions, but taken together, the reform would diminish the gender gap in pensions (Tuominen 2002).

When doing this research, ETK realised that its database left much to be desired. Individual employment career and earnings data were not satisfactory and could not be linked to the macro-level forecasting model for pension contributions and expenditures. These pitfalls were removed when work started on the 2017 reform.

Despite these data problems, the effects of the reform which ETK forecasted have been proven to be on the right track. Etla examined the effects of the 2005 reform by using its dynamic general equilibrium FOG-model (Finnish overlapping generations model). The results were similar to those of ETK (Lassila & Valkonen 2006).

Together with The Finnish Economic Society, ETK asked Professor Axel Börsch-Supan (University of Mannheim) to evaluate the 2005 reform. He concluded that it had increased the employment rate of older workers, reduced early retirement, improved economic sustainability and is fairer because the pension is based on earnings over the whole working life. Like Etla, Börsch-Supan noted that pension contributions are still likely to rise, threatening the competitiveness of the Finnish economy. (Börsch-Supan 2005).

In 2011 ETK asked two top pension experts to evaluate the Finnish pension system. Keith Ambachtsheer (professor of finance at the University of Toronto) evaluated the institutional structure and governance (Ambachtsheer 2013), and Nicholas Barr (professor of public

economy at the London School of Economics) evaluated pension adequacy, sustainability and system design (Barr 2013).

Barr saw many strengths in the Finnish pension system. It provides adequate pensions for most people, it covers practically the whole population, it is unified, built consensually, and compatible with labour mobility. He made some suggestions for the next pension reform: linking pensionable age to life expectancy; allowing an option to withdraw a partial pension; reviewing benefits for single pensioners and couples in the national pension; and considering transferring earnings-related pension rights between partners at divorce or retirement. Some features of the 2017 reform were in line with Barr's recommendations.

New plans to reform pensions were already suggested in 2009, and in 2011 the programme of Jyrki Katainen's government (a coalition comprised of conservatives, social democrats, and four smaller parties) mentioned starting preparations for a new reform. In the following year, the Pension Negotiation Group, supplemented by representatives of the Ministries of Finance and Social Affairs and Health and Keva (the pension insurance institution for public sector employees), reached an agreement on a new reform and the agenda for further negotiations. This agenda including almost all pension parameters, such as life expectancy, age limits, and pension accruals. It was also agreed that the reform will take effect in 2017.

A new work model to design this reform emerged gradually. A high-level expert group was set up to evaluate the effects of the 2005 reform and the need for additional measures in order to guarantee that the pension system can be maintained economically and remains socially sustainable even when life expectancy increases. The members were nominated because of their expertise, not as spokespeople for their background organisations, but they brought the expertise of their organisations to their work. During the work, extra pressure was put on the negotiations by Katainen's government by stating that the reform should contribute to lowering the public deficit.

The group's report was published in 2013 (Eläketurvakeskus 2013). It outlined three basic alternatives for tackling increasing longevity: further developing the life expectancy coefficient from the 2005 reform; raising pensionable age; a hybrid of these two models. The group favoured the third alternative.

The main central labour market organisations signed an agreement in 2014 based on the hybrid model. Before agreement was reached, ETK provided more than one hundred calculations and several memorandums. After the detailed legislative work within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the government sent the reform package to parliament, which accepted it almost unanimously.

ETK's role as a provider of research and planning services was crucial in the 2005 and 2017 reforms. Between these reforms ETK made considerable improvements to its databases and forecasting models, including a novel employee-level model compatible with the macro-model. ETK's model was also used as an input to the Ministry of Finance's macro-model, improving forecasts for the development of public finances and taxation.

Etlä's role has also been important in these reforms. Its economists were called upon as top experts in pension policy issues, and its overlapping generations model proved to be very useful, especially when analysing employment effects of suggested policy changes, particularly in the 2017 reform.

Etla's pension research has also had another important role, which also illustrates ETK's role. ETK has been relatively shy in making suggestions to develop the earnings-related pension system. Its governance structure, where the labour market organisations have a strong position, has not encouraged suggesting new initiatives in pension policy. In contrast, Etla, as an economic research institute financed by Finnish industry, has been active in suggesting pension policy initiatives. Their common concern has been to curb rising pension contributions and to increase employment. Many of Etla's initiatives have been realised if not immediately, then in the long run.

ETK has continued to utilise international expert evaluations of the Finnish pension system. The latest was conducted by Professor Torben M. Andersen (Aarhus University) in 2021, thus referring to the years after the 2017 reform. In line with the previous international evaluators, Andersen saw several strengths and some long-term challenges, for example that the adjustments to balance contributions and expenditures are not strong enough, or that the projected widening gap between pensioners and those active in the labour market is worrying, as is the tendency towards widening inequality among pensioners. Andersen also asked whether the regulatory framework for pension providers' investment policies is adequately calibrated to achieve an appropriate return-risk balance (Andersen 2021).

In recent years a further discussion on a new pension reform has started. It is motivated by low fertility rates, which endanger the balance of expenditures and contributions in the long run. Another theme in this discussion is concern about the returns of pension investments. In the 2017 reform it was agreed that a thorough examination of the system will be conducted in 2025.

5.2. THE BASIC INCOME EXPERIMENT

The Basic Income Experiment was conducted in 2017–2018. The primary objective of the experiment was to examine the effects of a basic income on employment, income, and use of social benefits. The secondary objective was to acquire information on the wellbeing of the basic income recipients. The experiment has been thoroughly described and analysed in an official report published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Kangas et al. 2020), and in a more critical scientific report (Kangas et al. 2022). This section is based on these two reports.

The government programme of Prime Minister Sipilä's centre-right coalition cabinet (2015–2019) included a decision to conduct a basic income experiment. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health had the main responsibility for planning and implementation. The experiment required legislation, which was passed in 2016 by parliament. The parliamentary debates revealed differences in opinion between the political parties. Social democrats were critical and so were conservatives, despite being in government. Some criticism also came from the Green Party and the Left Alliance, although they were positive towards basic income ideas. The most positive views were expressed by the Prime Minister's Centre Party and the Finns Party, the third party in the Sipilä coalition government. Despite the criticisms, all members of parliament voted for the experiment apart from the five members of the Christian Democratic Party.

A multi-disciplinary research consortium led by the Research Department of Kela was chosen to plan and execute the experiment. The multidisciplinary consortium included researchers from Kela, VATT, LABORE, University of Tampere, and the think tank organisation Tänk. As

a first step, the research group provided an exploratory study of the pros and cons of various basic income models. Based on this analysis, the government selected the model for the experiment.

In the experiment, 2000 people aged 25–58 receiving unemployment benefit from Kela were randomly selected to form the treatment group. Others receiving unemployment benefit formed the control group. Basic income, which was somewhat higher than unemployment benefit, was paid to the treatment group unconditionally for two years and was not affected by any income from employment or self-employment.

The results of the register data analysis showed that employment in the treatment group increased somewhat more than in the control group. However, in the middle of the experiment the government introduced a confounding factor, the so called ‘activation model’ for the unemployed. The evaluation report of the experiment concluded that this confounding factor was actually responsible for the employment effects, not the experiment (Kangas et al. 2021). However, the results indicated that the wellbeing of the basic income recipients was better than that of the control group.

The basic income experiment is a case in point of the tension between the short cycles in politics and the long perspective of reform research. While the government had started, legislated, and financed the experiment, the same government two years later made policy changes which undermined the experiment. Several other caveats applied to the experiment as well: In practice, some deviations from the ideal experiment design were made; the time frame for planning was tight; and some choices were a compromise between practical and scientific arguments. Finally, constitutional preconditions caused problems for the design, and budgetary constraints limited the study.

Despite these problems, the Finnish basic income experiment was unique in several respects. The experiment was a large-scale, national, randomised experiment. Participation in the experiment was obligatory to avoid selection bias. The intervention and control groups were identical at the beginning of the experiment. This research setting and good registers permitted causal conclusions concerning the effects of basic income on employment to be drawn.

The experiment attracted exceptionally broad public interest both within Finland and around the world. Although universal basic income has been widely discussed in academic, popular, and policy circles for decades, Finland was the first country to give universal basic income a nationwide, controlled, randomised trial.

However, the experiment did not lead to any noteworthy steps towards basic income. Politically, basic income remains a controversial idea. Institutionally, it fits poorly to the framework of Finnish social policy. As described in the next section, the ongoing social security reform took a different approach.

5.3. THE SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

The reform of basic social policy cash benefits has been on the Finnish political agenda for years. Matti Vanhanen’s centre-right government (2007–2010) set up a committee to prepare a comprehensive reform of social security (Sata Committee) in 2007. The committee consisted of representatives of ministries, and non-governmental and central labour

market organisations. Based on the government programme, the task was to prepare a total reform of social protection: a proposal for adequate basic protection, earnings-related security with a focus on activation measures, improved incentives, clarification of social security, and ensuring the sustainability of social protection. In 2009 the blue- and white-collar employee organisations left the committee because of their distrust towards the government. In the same year, the committee submitted its final report to the Minister of Social Affairs and Health. It included many proposals, some of which led to legislative reforms. The most important was the establishment of a new pension benefit: the guarantee pension improved the smallest pensions (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2009). Given the committee's high ambitions, the outcome has been regarded as a disappointment. There were distrust and disagreements between the centre-right government and the central employee labour market organisations, the main dispute being the roles of citizenship-based and earnings-based benefits. In 2017, Sipilä's government made another effort to reform basic social security and employment (VNK 2017). It did not lead to any reforms.

Sanna Marin's left-centre government (2019–2023) made a fresh start in several respects. It established a parliamentary committee to prepare the reform. The term of the committee is exceptionally long, 2020–2027, extending into the term of the next parliament. Other novel features of its work are the operative principles defined at the start. These are openness (all its working papers and memorandums are immediately available on the committee's internet pages), constructive dialogue, a research-based approach and independence. It also stated that resources for the reform should be secured at the very beginning, that major reforms need their own 'in-house' research and research team, and that the roles and division of labour in policymaking and preparatory legislative work should be clear.

The chairpersons of the committee are civil servants, the first chairperson being a research professor of THL. It is assumed that MPs in the committee keep their parliamentary groups informed and bring their views to the committee, as well as ensure their support for the reform work.

The reform's objectives are presented at a relatively abstract level: a clearer and more functional system for people; securing social justice and ensuring income security for people who are facing social risks; supporting employment, entrepreneurship, self-employment, social participation and lifelong learning; balancing individual rights and obligations; raising awareness and knowledge of social security; and generating public debate on the values and principles of social security.

So far, the committee has identified key starting points and disagreements. The task is not to build a new system, but reform and develop existing structures and activities as demographic change puts pressures on financial sustainability. It is also seeking a new narrative for the reform of the welfare state (Moisio 2022; Social Security Reform 2022).

The interim report of the committee presented in 2023 proposes the unification and consolidation of cause-based basic security benefits, considering earnings security. The purpose is to clarify and simplify the benefit system. The committee's proposals for future governments include many new projects. They concern, e.g., social security for children and families, benefits related to working ability and incapacity for work, unemployment insurance, study and skills development, housing subsidies, income support, and social security implementation and digitalisation. In addition, the committee has agreed on the guidelines for the basis of its second season's work (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2023).

The committee represents a new approach, and so far it seems that the research capacities at its disposal are adequate and represent high expertise from different institutions. It remains to be seen whether the work will lead to significant reforms and whether the promise of a close link between reform work and research is realised.

5.4. THE REFORM OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE SERVICES

The Constitution of Finland decrees that everyone is entitled to adequate social and health care services. Until 2022, social and health care services were arranged at three levels. At the national level, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is the highest decision-making authority. At the second level, the municipal system was responsible for primary care. Municipalities could form joint authorities to run more specialised services. At the third level there were 21 health care districts that are responsible for specialised, extensive, and demanding care.

The problems of the service delivery system have been known for a long time. There are over 300 municipalities and their resources for providing social and health services to their residents vary greatly. Municipal health care centres often have long queues and are overcrowded, as are care services for the elderly, whereas employment-related health care and specialised health care function much better. This creates inequalities of access and leads to socio-economic and regional differences. Finland belongs to the countries with the largest socio-economic health differences in the OECD (OECD 2014). Population aging is increasing costs in health and long-term care (Kangas and Kallioma-Puha 2015).

Several governments have tried to reform the system without success. The present government has succeeded in making a reform, which passed parliament in 2021. The new system is the largest single reform of social and health services in decades. The goals of this reform are ambitious: “The central objectives of the health and social services reform will be to reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing, safeguard equal and quality health and social services for all, improve the availability and accessibility of services, ensure the availability of skilled labour, respond to the challenges of changes in society, and curb the growth of costs.” (Finnish Government 2019).

The reform restructures the organisation of public health care and social welfare. Rescue services will also be restructured as part of the reform. From 2023 onwards, new wellbeing service counties, of which there are 21 plus the capital city Helsinki, are responsible for social and health services (and rescue services) rather than over 300 municipalities. The municipalities will continue to organise certain services, including child day-care, basic education, sports, and cultural services (Finnish Government 2022).

This reform and the preceding efforts highlight lessons for understanding the relations between policies and research. First, research and planning services in the various phases of the reform efforts have been intensive. The main research and planning support has been provided by THL. Its research programmes, its monitoring, and its evaluations of the organisation of social welfare and health care services in different areas of the country have been crucial for understanding the situation (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2022d; Hetemaa et al. 2021). Even more importantly, THL has supported the reform work with numerous reports, analyses, and expert statements.

It is generally accepted that this reform is just a beginning, and many concerns remain. There are doubts that some wellbeing service counties have too small a population and therefore are economically and otherwise vulnerable in their service provision. Other major concerns foresee difficulties in controlling the regional service structure because of the complexity of the system, in strengthening basic services because of the parallel resource-demanding occupational health services, in managing the possibilities of patient selection, and in controlling costs. Politically, these were not the main issues, but political parties disagreed about the role of private health care providers, the division of authority between the state and the counties, and the financing of the counties delayed the reform.

It is clear for both politicians and experts that the reform is only an initial step. The 2023 organisational reform will be followed by other reforms, which at least so far have not been clearly defined.

6 Conclusions

The forms of political consultancy in social policy are varied, and many kinds of institutional arrangements have been utilised. Parliamentary and non-parliamentary committees, working groups with or without scientists have been used. Relevant interest organisations and public administration are often represented in working groups. Groups comprising only scientists or experts have been rare, a successful example of the use of such a group is the earnings-related pension reform in 2017.

Self-evidently, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSAH) is the key institution in preparing social policy reforms. However, in recent decades the role of the Ministry of Finance has become more prominent, because of problems in the public economy. The social corporatist aspects of social policy decision-making have weakened, but still remain strong, especially in pension policy, but also in other earnings-related benefits.

Many research institutes are involved in supporting social policy decision-making. The research institutes under the umbrella of MSAH, particularly the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) have a prominent role. In pension policy and in earnings-related social benefits, the role of the Finnish Centre for Pensions (ETK) in research support is essential. Kela (The Social Insurance Institution) also provides research, particularly on basic social security arrangements. In addition, there are several research institutes which participate in the preparation of social policy reforms. These include the economic research institutes ETLA, VATT and LABORE.

Databases which can be combined at the individual level based on personal identification numbers are relatively well developed, at least when compared to many countries. They can, and often are linked to sample survey data. Statistics Finland, THL and Kela are key institutions maintaining social policy databases, as is ETK in the case of pension policy data. Such data are available for all, after permission has been granted by the relevant authority. Relevant survey data is available in the Finnish Data Archive. The data sets needed in research are often developed jointly by researchers and the owners of these data.

The institutions and tools to provide adequate research-based support for social policy decision-making in Finland are in relatively good shape. Adequate quantitative models are

available in evaluating suggested policy reforms. This development is likely to continue in the future. As welcome as this is, it includes a problem. Unless you can quantify the effect, it is easily ignored. Similarly, longer term effects may receive less weight in reform work than they deserve. This emphasises the many-sided use of information in decision-making and requires that ministries and other decision-preparing institutions have experts with a background in research. When this is the case, they can give research-based advice to decision-makers even in cases where topical research results are not available.

A more easily solvable problem is the time lag of relevant registers and statistics, often being more than a year. This is especially acute in times of rapid change, such as the currently high inflation, or increasing unemployment during economic recessions. However, there are ways to tackle this problem. For example, a topical picture of poverty in Finland in 2022 has been presented based on actual data from 2019 and updated with a simulation model. Not surprisingly, the results show that poverty rates have increased during the period of high inflation particularly among one-person and single-parent households (Kela 2022). These findings also indicate that the existing income support arrangements are not suitable for handling this kind of acute and rapidly appearing problem.

A persistent problem is the relationship between decision-making and R&D. The ways that research and planning have been integrated into making social policy reforms have varied. Reforms have been prepared by using different organisational forms, from one-person groups to parliamentary committees. All these forms can utilise research in a variety of ways and to different degrees. The most promising case presented in this report is the earnings-related pension reform of 2017. The decision-makers defined the goals of the reforms, and pension experts with the best available research resources at their disposal analysed various alternatives. The decision-makers continued from this basis by utilising mainly ETK's planning services. Similarly, the ongoing social security reform is promising, because of its integration of parliamentary political guidance and both administrative and scientific expertise into the committee work. However, there is no one-size-fits-all model for all situations. Solutions have varied, and probably will also vary in the future.

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About the Author

Hannu Uusitalo

Ph.D. Professor emeritus (sociology). Former deputy director general of Stakes (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health), and former director of The Finnish Centre for Pensions. Researched welfare state, social policy, social and economic inequality in the context of social structure.

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