



ALTERNATIVE REPORT TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

from NGOs and other stakeholders
on Åland to Finland's combined fifth
and sixth periodic report

Save the Children on Åland; Finnish Red Cross, Åland district; Åland Disability Association; Åland's Autism Spectrum Association; Regnbågsfyren – LGBTIQ Rights on Åland; SKUNK - Young Voices in the Archipelago; The 4H Association of Åland; Ung Resurs - Young Resource; Förbundet Hem och Skola - the Swedish Parent Association in Finland; Talentia Union of Professional Social Workers Åland; Fältarna på Åland – Social Youth Workers on Åland; Åland's Feminist Umbrella - YOUNG - Equal School and Leisure; Ålands Idrott - Umbrella Organisation for Sports on Åland; Victim Support Finland, Åland Office; Folkhälsan Åland; Parish of Lemland-Lumparland; Parish of Jomala as well as other authorities and other actors.

ÅLAND
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The report is available also in Swedish and as a longer working report on children's rights on Åland, published in Swedish in March 2021.

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INTRODUCTION

In the combined fifth and sixth periodic report for Finland, Åland is mentioned for the first time. The Government of Åland has produced its own report for the state's periodic report, but the state's report does not reproduce Åland's report in its entirety. The state's report highlights individual things from Åland but does not provide an overall picture of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on Åland. Åland's civil society therefore wants to take the opportunity to highlight Åland and the differences that exist between the autonomous province and the state in the first alternative report from Åland.

We focus on issues where Åland has legislative competence or where we see differences between Åland and Finland.

We want to highlight that vulnerable groups of children should be particularly considered when reading and working with the recommendations in this report.

THE PROCESS ON ÅLAND

The work on the alternative report began in the spring of 2020 through discussions with the Central Union for Child Welfare in Finland, which coordinates alternative reporting in Finland. As it became clear that Åland could not be part of the Finnish alternative report, Save the Children on Åland (SCÅ) took on the coordination responsibility and gathered information from various organizations and actors via theme meetings. SKUNK, the archipelago youth's interest organization, produced its own report on children's rights with a special focus on children in the archipelago. SKUNK's report was sent to decision-makers on Åland and has been considered in this alternative report.

Due to the changed date for submission of the alternative reports, civil society decided to publish a longer working report on children's rights on Åland in March 2021. The working report was discussed with politicians, civil society representatives and other actors during several different events. During the autumn of 2021 and the spring of 2022, the dialogue between civil society representatives continued and the working report was updated and formalized into an alternative report in the spring of 2022.



ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTORS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED

- Save the Children on Åland
- Finnish Red Cross, Åland district
- Åland Disability Association
- Åland's Autism Spectrum Association
- Regnbågsfyren – LGBTIQ Rights on Åland
- SKUNK - Young Voices in the Archipelago
- The 4H Association of Åland
- Ung Resurs - Young Resource
- Förbundet Hem och Skola Åland - the Swedish Parent Association in Finland
- Talentia Union of Professional Social Workers Åland
- Fältarna på Åland – Social Youth Workers on Åland
- Åland's Feminist Umbrella - YOUNG - Equal School and Leisure
- Ålands Idrott - Umbrella Organisation for Sports on Åland
- Victim Support Finland, Åland Office
- Folkhälsan Åland
- Parish of Lemland-Lumparland
- Parish of Jomala
- Authorities and other actors have also contributed information



FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRC

AUTONOMY AND LANGUAGE

Åland is an autonomous island province in Finland with about 30,000 inhabitants, of which 6004 (19.8%) are minors (2021). The province is divided into 16 municipalities, which in terms of population vary from 11,742 inhabitants (2012 children) in Mariehamn to 105 inhabitants (17 children) in the archipelago municipality of Sottunga, which is the smallest municipality in Finland.¹

Åland's autonomy gives Ålanders the right to legislate on internal affairs.²

Åland is monolingually Swedish and few speak Finnish. Available Swedish-language services and the language climate in the country affect children on Åland in terms of study opportunities, access to care, service and to public information.³

Åland's geographical location between Sweden and Finland makes the province a border region where historical, cultural, and geographical proximity to Sweden affects practical everyday life which leads to the effect that Åland differs from the rest of Finland



¹ More information about Åland: <https://www.aland.ax/en/facts-about-aland>

² <https://um.fi/the-special-status-of-the-aland-islands#parliament>

³ <https://um.fi/the-special-status-of-the-aland-islands#language>

1. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

1.1. LEGISLATION

Åland's own legislation requires competence and sufficient resources for drafting laws and revising legislation.

The shared legislative competence between the state and Åland means that in matters concerning children, Åland and Finnish legislation are often applied simultaneously.

Legislation in Finland must be equivalent, but there are examples where the national legal text in Finnish and Swedish differs. Despite this, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has stated that the Finnish-language text shall apply when interpreting the law. Resources and knowledge of Swedish among law examiners and legislators in the country are lacking.

When national legislation applies on Åland, it is a problem that instructions, application guides and precedents are often missing or published later in Swedish, which has consequences for all Swedish speakers in Finland.

There are no routines for child impact assessments in the work with Åland bills.

Compared with Finnish discrimination legislation, Åland's discrimination legislation is more limited. It does not cover all grounds for discrimination, lacks writings on the promotion of equal treatment and the definition of discrimination including the refusal to undertake reasonable accommodation to achieve equal treatment for people with disabilities, as well as writings on an obligation for the relevant Åland authorities and education providers to establish equal treatment plans. In March 2022, the Parliament of Åland decided to adopt a new provincial law on the application of the national discrimination law. The law will enter into force 1.1.2023.

The new Child Care and Comprehensive School Act on Åland entered into force in 2021 and with it, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is now part of the education system.

From 2021, social care for the whole of Åland is managed by one single municipal authority, the Municipal Social Services (KST), instead of individual municipalities. Unified child welfare service for Åland provides opportunities for a more equal realization of children's rights for children who are clients of child welfare services.

The new Social Welfare Act from 2021 clarifies the right of children and families with children to early support when needed. In the rest of Finland, similar legislation has existed since 2015.

Åland lacks a youth act that correspond to the national Youth Act.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Legislate on requirements for child impact assessments and ensure further training, tools and routines for civil servants and politicians.

Ensure that relevant information and application instructions for legislation are available in Swedish and that the legal texts in both national languages are consistent.

Develop an Åland Youth Act.

1.2. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

When Finland enters into international agreements in areas that fall under Åland's jurisdiction, the approval of the Parliament of Åland is required for the agreement for the parts over which Åland has jurisdiction. The international human rights instruments mentioned in the state's report (paragraph 360) also came into force on Åland. Regarding the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the Parliament of Åland, to the extent that falls within the province's jurisdiction, gave its approval as late as in February 2021 (see Chapter 9).

Reporting and follow-up of the recommendations given by the Committee on the Rights of the Child has not been systematic on Åland.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that reporting and follow-up of international agreements and the recommendations given by the Committee on the Rights of the Child are systematized on Åland.

Guarantee conditions for Åland's participation in Finland's entire reporting process through good cooperation between the state and the Autonomy.

1.3. COORDINATION AND NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

There is a lack of central coordination for the implementation of the CRC on Åland. An Åland child strategy has been in the Government of Åland's budget since 2021, but no work has begun.

The language is an obstacle to the application of project results, materials, or knowledge from Finland on Åland. Åland, for example, has not had a clear role in the LAPE project and the extensive work done for children and families with children within the project.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Allocate resources for the development and implementation of an Åland child strategy.

Appoint a minister who is responsible for child rights on Åland.

Ensure that the various programs, agendas, and action plans concerning children on Åland are implemented.

Ensure that the project results, models, and tools produced in Finland are also published in Swedish.



1.4. INDEPENDENT MONITORING

Securing and promoting the child's rights requires an active Children's Ombudsman on Åland with knowledge of the Åland children's situation and Åland's law. The Åland Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and Children's Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Patients and Clients who work at The Office of the Åland Ombudsman (ÅOM) conduct active work for children's rights even though the assignment is greater than the authority's resources.¹

Åland's Children's Ombudsman, like the national Children's Ombudsman, cannot act in matters concerning individual children or change authorities' decisions. The Parliamentary Ombudsman monitors children's rights also on Åland. Children on Åland can appeal to the Parliamentary Ombudsman with complaints and the Ombudsman can also carry out inspections at, for example, schools and care institutions on Åland.

The Ombudsman for Patients and Clients has an important role to play in informing about patients' and clients' rights and offering help in submitting remarks and complaints in healthcare and social care, including children.

Åland's Environmental and Health Protection Authority (ÅMHM) is the supervisory authority for public social care, including childcare, for private social services and for public health and medical care, within the province's legislative competence. The new Social Welfare Act and the Child Care Act also provide the opportunity to carry out inspections without good reason. The supervisory authority is divided between ÅMHM, the Government of Åland and the State Department of Åland. The shared competence leads to lack of clarity as to where a case belongs, and the same case can be handled by different parties. The supervisory structure on Åland deviates from that of the mainland. There is extensive legislation that must be monitored, but the staff resources are scarce and there is no access to expertise such as the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira).

Information about the possibility for children to submit complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is available on the Åland Children's Ombudsman's website, but the information is probably unknown to most children and adults.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase awareness and provide child-friendly information about the possibility of contacting supervisory authorities and submitting complaints to actors at different levels.

Ensure that ÅOM and supervisory authorities can fulfil their mission in accordance with the law by providing authorities with sufficient resources.



¹More information about the assignments: <https://www.ombudsman.ax/summary-english/summary-english>

1.5. ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The Parliament of Åland establishes an annual budget for Åland.

Child budgeting has not been applied at the province level or at the municipal level, so it is unclear how much of the budget goes to children.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Implement child budgeting on Åland.



1.6. DATA COLLECTION

Åland's Statistics and Investigation Bureau (ÅSUB) is Åland's official statistics authority. Within the area of statistics, the authority is divided between Åland and Finland. Åland has legislative competence regarding statistics on conditions in the province.

Åland's autonomy offers the opportunity to participate in Nordic research projects where Åland can be put in context.¹

The Children's Ombudsman at ÅOM shall submit an annual report on how the children's and young people's welfare and rights have been met, on the development of the child's welfare and any shortcomings in the legislation. The work is done as far as the resources allow.

No separate compilation of child statistics and children's conditions on Åland has been published since 2003. A dialogue between ÅSUB and ÅOM has made it clear that the work of compiling and making relevant statistics on children and groups of children easily accessible would require more resources than are currently available.

Statistics on different groups of children and their living conditions are partly missing on Åland. The small population is sometimes challenging as the number of cases can be so few that due to confidentiality it is not possible to publish certain statistics. Where statistics on Åland are lacking, it is presumed that the statistics from Finland, Sweden or the rest of the Nordic countries may provide a picture of the probable situation.

The language can be an obstacle for Ålanders to participate in national research studies and to learn about the results. Even if Åland children have participated in a survey, it is not guaranteed that the results will be published in Swedish.

Åland children participate in the national School Health Promotion study and results from Åland can be compared with the rest of the country. In 2020, the Government of Åland commissioned an analysis of the Åland results from the School Health Promotion study with focus areas on sexual harassment, mental health, and violence in the family.

¹For example, Nordic Council of Ministers project [NABO – Social Inclusion of Youth in the Nordic Region](#)

A national child victim survey was also distributed to Åland schools in 2022, but the research permit had not been applied for from the Government of Åland. Without this, the Government of Åland cannot inform the schools that they support the research, which for several schools can be a prerequisite for participating in surveys.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that relevant national surveys and surveys are carried out in collaboration with the Government of Åland / ÅSUB / other relevant actor and are published in Swedish with the possibility of regional comparison.

Secure resources for ÅSUB and ÅOM to compile relevant and current child statistics and make information available to decision-makers and other relevant actors.

Ensure that analyses of Åland's results from School Health Promotion study are introduced as a routine.

1.7 DISSEMINATION, AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING

The CRC has a clearer role in the new compulsory school curriculum and its subject areas. NGO employees who meet children report that children are aware of certain rights, but that more concrete information about specific rights in matters concerning them is lacking. Information on adults' knowledge of the CRC is lacking.

National information campaigns do not always include material in Swedish. Åland has limited resources to produce its own material. Most material about children's rights used on Åland comes from Sweden but is not fully suited to Åland as the legislation differs.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that all adults who meet children, receive education about the CRC in relation to their mission.

Ensure that there is child-friendly information available about what specific rights children on Åland have according to the legislation.



2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

2.1. NON-DISCRIMINATION

The new Child Care and Comprehensive School Act has clearer provisions on pupils' right to equal childcare and comprehensive school education without harassment and bullying regardless of gender, sexual orientation, transgender identity or expression, disability, ethnicity, religion or other belief or other reason.

Finland's Non-Discrimination Ombudsman has a mandate to deal with discrimination cases on Åland that affect state authorities and other areas where the state has jurisdiction. ÅOM has a statutory mandate to counteract and prevent discrimination within the province's jurisdiction.

In the autumn of 2020, ÅSUB conducted a survey on experiences of discrimination among people aged 16 and older. One third of the respondents have experienced discrimination on Åland. The most common causes of perceived discrimination are gender, age, language and national origin or ethnicity. 18% of those who experienced discrimination answered that it was during education or at school. Talking openly about perceived discrimination can be difficult in a small community as there is a fear that those who report discrimination are branded as troublemakers.¹

Åland probably has the same problems for Roma children as in Finland but lacks compiled information. It is difficult to highlight individual cases due to Åland's small size and the risk of jeopardising anonymity. NGOs lack information on specific measures to improve the situation for Roma children. Educational material about Roma children published in Finland is not available in Swedish.

According to the Government of Åland's program for integration promotion 2020–2023, Åland Health Care (ÅHS) has experienced that there are groups of immigrants that risk being excluded from health care. Especially younger children who do not have a place in childcare, who are not enrolled in child health clinics as well as pregnant women. The parents-to-be with a mother tongue other than Swedish are largely absent from the parent preparation courses.

The National Gender Equality Act is applicable to Åland through a Provincial Act. The law obliges educational institutions to actively promote gender equality and that gender equality plans are drawn up for each individual school. ÅOM's report from 2020 showed that no Åland primary school had a gender equality plan that met the requirements of the law.

The Government of Åland has produced an Action Plan for equal terms for LGBTQIA people on Åland society 2019–2025, which includes children. Regnbågsfyren (NGO for LGBTQIA Rights on Åland) works with LGBTQIA certification of businesses and visits schools on Åland. Trans issues have not been included in the previous curriculum for comprehensive school, but now LGBTQIA+ issues are dealt with in the years 5–6 and up under the Health syllabus. Åland's young people say that more education and knowledge is needed about LGBTQIA issues and treatment among professionals in schools, health care, student health, and among guardians and politicians. Children who contact Regnbågsfyren state that they are not taken seriously, that adults do not recognize their identity and gender them incorrectly.

¹A total of 63% of respondents believe that a report of discrimination can lead to the complainant being branded as troublemaker, 44% believe that the person reporting discrimination is ostracised or harassed and 40% believe that one of the consequences is that the cause of discrimination becomes known in a wider circle. One in three respondents believes that others distance themselves from the person who reported. Only 8% answer that there are no negative consequences.



OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure continuing education and clear application materials on discrimination and effective equality and equal treatment planning for all who encounter children.

2.2. BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD

When revising or drafting new laws, there are increased mentions about the best interest of the child in the legal text.¹

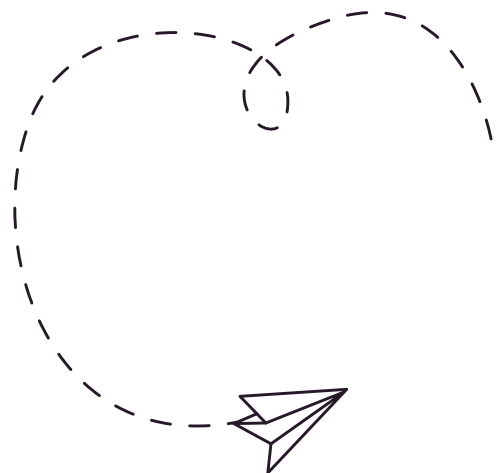
Materials and training regarding the implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child are needed. ÅOM and SCÅ have arranged training on the CRC in practice with the help of the General Comments.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Increase knowledge about the implementation and compliance with the principle of the best interests of the child.

2.3. RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT

The Government of Åland has a programme for suicide prevention from 2019 where there are measures and observations that are relevant to children. According to the government program 2019, it will be realized gradually during the term of office to achieve the zero vision against suicide.



¹For example, Act on the promotion of integration, Act on childcare and compulsory school as well as Social Welfare Act.

2.4. RESPECT FOR THE VIEWS OF THE CHILD

When revising or drafting new laws, there is an increased awareness of children's right to participation.¹ Several Åland and Finnish laws still have age limits regarding children's right to be heard.²

Åland lacks formal meeting places for children and decision-makers as well as a statutory requirement for municipalities to set up a youth council. Some municipalities have tried to form youth councils.

According to the Compulsory School Act, all pupils have the right to participate in issues that directly affect the pupil's everyday life and to participate in the development of education. There must be a student council for grades 7–9 and the municipality must consult the student council on issues that affect students. The structures make the law difficult to follow as not all municipalities have a school for grades 7-9. According to SKUNK, student councils have limited support and skills are often lacking to guide them in democratic processes and opportunities.

In 2021, the education agency at Government of Åland, SCÅ and the Children's Ombudsman began a collaboration to ensure that children are heard in the process of developing a new curriculum for childcare.

SCÅ, SKUNK and other NGOs work actively to enable dialogue between young people and decision-makers. The Åland Disability Association has started its own youth council in 2021. There are plans to start a youth group for sustainability linked to the Development and Sustainability Council on Åland.

According to the Nabo-project report clearer routines, systematic support and feedback from decision-makers are needed to increase children's influence on Åland.

The age limit for taking the initiative for a referendum in the municipality is 15 years on Åland. The right to bring initiatives to the municipality has no age limit, but child-friendly information and available channels are lacking.

In 2017, the Parliament of Åland passed a resolution that the voting age in municipal elections and advisory municipal referendums should be reduced to 16 years, but the bill was rejected by the Supreme Court because it meant a deviation from the Finnish constitution.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure the right of all children to participate through legislation (without age limits), further education and by developing routines and methods at authorities.

Establish a special expert for children in the Government of Åland and officials in municipalities who ensure the right of all children to be heard.

Create formal meeting places for children and decision-makers, both at provincial and municipal level, ensure space for children to participate and influence in existing structures.

¹Such as the Child Custody Act, Act on the promotion of integration, and the Child Welfare Act

²Such as the Act on the promotion of integration

3. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS



Public information in Finland must be available in Swedish, however, it is lacking, especially information adapted for children. A positive example is the Finnish government's corona info for children in the spring of 2020, which was simultaneously interpreted into Swedish and sign language.

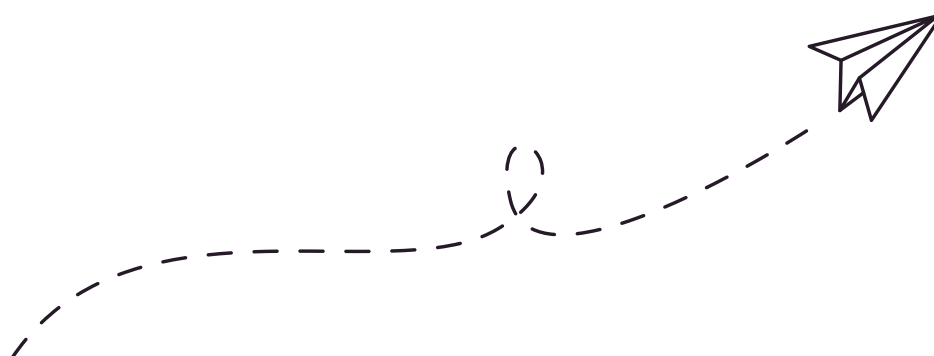
In recent years, the media on Åland and the Swedish-language media in Finland have increased information on societal issues aimed at children. According to ÅOM's report, children are not interviewed or heard in local newspapers in news that touches on societal issues.

SCÅ works to secure children's everyday lives in digital environments and in collaboration with the Social Youth Workers has had a project #talkaboutporn with the goal that children will grow up in a safe and secure environment free from pornography and violence.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that national information aimed at children is available in Swedish and ensure the dissemination on Åland in collaboration with relevant Åland actors.

Use technical solutions, information, and dialogue to protect children from harmful material online.



4. VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



4.1 VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

In 2021, the number of cases of assault offences against children reported to the police was 27.¹

According to the School Health Promotion study, almost a fifth of pupils in grades 4-5 and 8-9 say that they have been subjected to physical violence by their parents during the year.²

The figures from the School Health Promotion study from Åland regarding psychological violence from parents are significantly higher than in the rest of Finland. Over a third of the pupils in years 4-5 and almost half (47%) of the pupils in years 8-9 state that they have been subjected to psychological violence by their parents during the year.³

According to the report that analysed the Åland results in the School Health Promotion study 2019, young people who are not in school and young people in foster care are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence as well as psychological or physical violence from care givers. Belonging to a gender minority or a sexual minority, having a foreign background or a disability, or coming from families with poor finances or with other difficulties (e.g. single parenthood, mental illness, or substance abuse) increases the risk of vulnerability.

4 of the 17 children with disabilities (under 16 years) participating in the Åland Disability Association's survey answered that they had experienced violence. The National Act on the Investigation of the Criminal History of Volunteers Working with Children entered into force on Åland in 2020. Previously, there was no law that gave the right to ask volunteers for records.

On Åland the Act on Checking the Criminal Background of Persons Working with Children is in force. The law does not apply to work that lasts a total of less than three months during a one-year period.

The Government of Åland has appointed a committee for the implementation and follow-up of the Istanbul Convention.

Since 2007, various authorities have been cooperating according to the Barnahus Model (Child-friendly centre for abuse victims) when a child is suspected of being a victim of crime. The model should help to investigate whether a crime has been committed and support the child so that s/he suffers as little harm as possible. The Government of Åland commissioned an evaluation of the Barnahus Model in 2015. Since 2019, development work of the model has been underway in Finland. The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) has published a Swedish-language online training that increases the knowledge of professionally trained people about various forms of violence against children. In 2022, KST, together with Helsinki University Hospital, was granted funding to update the structure of Barnahus on Åland.

¹ [Statistics Finland, Statistics on offences and coercive measures, Assault offences, total 21:5-7,34a:1§/6 in total](#)

² 19% of pupils in grades 4-5 and 17% of pupils in grades 8-9.

³ For Finland the numbers are 26% in grades 4-5 and 31% in grades 8-9.

When a child is a plaintiff in a violent crime or sexual crime and the perpetrator is a related adult, the police authority applies for a guardian for the child. The child is also entitled to a plaintiff's counsel. There is a lack of training for guardians in Swedish in Finland. The law does not require guardians to receive training for the assignment, but education provides better conditions for children's equal treatment.

The Victim Support Finland has been present on Åland since 2018 and supports crime victims locally in Swedish.

The Social Youth Workers work preventively with young people aged 13–17 on Åland and collaborate with various actors who work with young people. The Social Youth Workers can support both young crime victims and young people who have committed crimes.

The survey *Violence in close relationships on Åland 2017* shows that a total of 34 percent of the adults who have been exposed to violence in close relationships during the past twelve months report that they live in a household where there are children. Calculations from the results of the investigation show that more than 360 children (just over 6%) were in households where at least one person was exposed to violence in a close relationship.

The Government of Åland has developed a Strategy for zero tolerance of violence in close relationships 2020–2030, which will be implemented through annual action programs that are followed up and evaluated.

In the work regarding violence in close relationships, the focus is mainly on adult relationships. There are no statistics on violence in young relationships. This can mean that young people who are exposed to violence do not feel included in the support measures offered.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Develop a strategy to prevent and remedy all forms of violence against children on Åland.

Ensure support and education as well as clear routines for everyone who works with children, to address and deal with issues regarding various forms of violence.

Conduct a study on Åland on how common violence in young relationships is.

Increase knowledge about various forms of violence, identify the obstacles children encounter in contacting various institutions for help, and ensure easily accessible and child-friendly information about available help efforts.

4.2. HARMFUL PRACTICES

In the Government of Åland's *Strategy for Zero Tolerance of Violence in Close Relationships* the concept of violence in close relationships is used as a collective concept which includes also honour-related violence and oppression, including forced marriage, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Information about intergender children and how their right to bodily integrity is respected on Åland is lacking.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that measures against honour-related violence against children are included in the government's annual action program for Strategy for zero tolerance against violence in close relationships and ensure knowledge and routines regarding honour-related violence in health care and in schools on Åland.

Ensure clear guidelines regarding intergender children's right to physical integrity as well as support and care according to the needs of the children and guardians.

4.3. HELPLINES

Children on Åland lack a local helpline. In Swedish-speaking Finland, there are chats and helplines that can be used for children on Åland, even if they do not correspond to the width available for Finnish-speaking children. Children on Åland probably use chats and helplines in Sweden partly thanks to collaborations and partly the cultural and linguistic proximity, for example, BRIS and NGO Maskrosbarn's chat for young people who are having a hard time at home. There are no statistics on how many children turn to helplines.

Young people that NGOs meet have said that they want the person whom they contact, to know Åland and what applies here. Åland's legislation and organization for support differs from Sweden's and that of continental Finland.



OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Evaluate the collaboration with BRIS and enable anonymous helplines and chats that have a clear connection to Åland.

5. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

5.1. SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

There are no statistics on how many children live in families with substance abuse on Åland. Research from Sweden shows that just over 20 percent of all children in Sweden grow up in such families.

Based on the children and adults that SCÅ has met, there is a lack of sufficient knowledge to react to the children's situation in the authorities' practical activities (health and medical care, school, kindergarten). The range of preventive activities and early interventions aimed directly at these children is very limited on Åland.

SCÅ organizes camps together with Folkhälsan and the Support Association for Swedish-language Substance Abuse Care (USM) for children in families with addiction or mental illness. For the same target group, SCÅ has been developing group activities since 2019. SCÅ and ÅHS are implementing a project to support the staff at ÅHS in their work to draw attention to children who are family members of adults who receive health care and whose parenting or caring ability can be considered as weakened.

Folkhälsan's family counselling is produced on behalf of the KST and is a free service for all families with minor children. Counselling in upbringing and family issues is a statutory activity according to the Social Welfare Act. Family counselling helps with challenges that come with family life. In 2021, the family counselling had 253 client families.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that adults who meet children in their profession receive sufficient further training to identify and seek support for the children who are relatives of adults with ill health.

Increase resources and strengthen the social services that provide family counselling and early support to parents.

Ensure resources for prevention and early intervention aimed directly at children in vulnerable situations, individually and in groups.



5.2. CHILD CUSTODY DISPUTES

According to the Report from Children on Åland to the UN 50% answered that their parents' separation has affected the well-being of the child negatively.¹

KST is responsible for arranging mediation of family issues on Åland. Åland, like Finland, has long and difficult custody and contact conflicts. In 2018, based on the project Children in Family Conflict and the introduction of the working model Co-operation Talks on Åland, SCÅ was able to state that the authorities lacked sufficient methods and routines to support adults and children in difficult family conflicts.

There are no continuous opportunities for peer support in groups for children with separated / divorced parents on Åland.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure sufficient resources for counselling and mediation of family issues.

Adapt legislation so that children living in two homes have a functioning everyday life and that the basis for financial support does not cause conflicts in families with separated parents.



¹Options included in the category negatively affected: I have often been sad; I have sometimes been sad; I'm worried sometimes; I am often worried; I feel bad all the time; I cannot relax.

5.3. CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT

Children on Åland are primarily placed in a family close to the child or in another trained family care home.

The Government of Åland adopted the Family Care Act in 2015.

Children on Åland who are placed outside the home are in a particularly vulnerable situation due to the language and geographical location of the province. If there are no good quality and suitable alternatives for placing children on Åland, the alternative is placement outside Åland, even if it would not otherwise be necessary or in the best interest of the children.

On Åland, there is a need for different placement alternatives. Short-term family care (emergency family) is currently not used in a systematic way and training for short-term family homes has so far not been arranged.

Regarding placements in the rest of Finland, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to find Swedish-speaking family homes or get a place in institutions where the Swedish language is guaranteed. As for placement in Sweden, the language issue is secured, but placement in another country is complicated in terms of legislation and monitoring. In addition, this can only be done on a voluntary basis, which can exclude children who have been cared for against their or the guardians' wishes. Finland's Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has issued instructions regarding the placement of children from Finland in another country. It is unclear how the instructions are followed on Åland and whether Swedish-speaking children who are placed voluntarily in Sweden have access to e.g. monitoring and reviewing of the quality of the placement and whether the duration the children are placed is in accordance with stipulations in the legislation.

SCÅ has continued the work of developing Swedish-language family care on Åland and in Swedish-speaking Finland, even after the Government of Åland's funding of the project has ceased. The work has included arranging voluntary peer support in the form of network meetings and camps, further training activities in the area, cooperation with organizations in Finland regarding translation of educational and other materials, and work for children's increased participation and more.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Update Åland legislation (in accordance with the Finland's Family Care Act)

Develop routines that guarantee children in placement and young people the opportunity to evaluate and contribute to the development of child welfare work and initiatives.

Develop aftercare. Ensure that placed children receive information about such care early enough and to a sufficient extent.

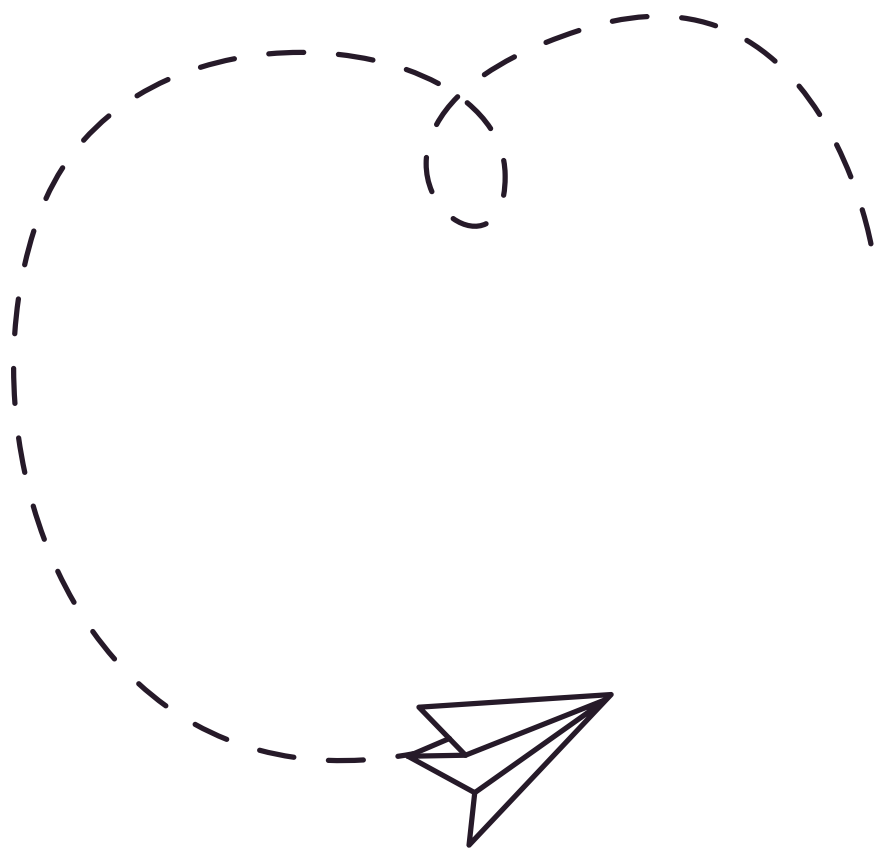
Develop short-term family care as part of care outside the home on Åland.

Ensure adequate institutional care in Swedish in Finland.

5.4. PRISONERS' CHILDREN

USM works with parents deprived of their liberty in Finland in Swedish, but according to USM, there is the possibility of family work in prison only in Finnish.

For Åland children, there are challenges when it comes to spending time with a parent in prison because there is no prison on Åland and the institutions that exist are far from Åland.



6. DISABILITY, HEALTH, AND WELFARE



6.1. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Åland's small size means that competence in education is lacking and children with disabilities may need to move away to receive the support they are entitled to. For example, it can apply to children who are deaf and need to go to school where sign language is used.

In 2018, the Government of Åland adopted its first report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which includes information on children.¹ As part of the reporting process, the Åland Disability Association conducted its own survey of perceived situation on Åland. More than 200 responses were given, of which 17 respondents were children under 16 and 10 were 16–24. Two children under the age of 16 answered that they feel that they are a burden to society.

In 2019, ÅOM conducted the study "Time to wake up perhaps" which is about experiences of accessibility and treatment among children with disabilities and their guardians.

ÅSUB has produced a report on children, pupils and students with neuropsychiatric functional variations and the education system on Åland. The report shows the need for rapid support upon diagnosis, early interventions, flexible and individual forms of support, interventions for cooperation between home and school, knowledge about mental illness in school, more special teachers, opportunities for adaptations and small group teaching in upper secondary school.

In 2021, the Åland Disability Association started a youth council and has since met other young people also to be able to ensure that young people with disabilities have their voices heard.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure support for the whole family.

Ensure basic education and further training on disabilities for school staff and for everyone who meets children.

¹[Åland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, CRPD - Reporting prior to Finland's initial report Year 2018](#)

6.2. HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICES

6.2.1. ACCESS TO CARE FOR TRANSGENDER YOUTH

Laws and regulation regarding transgender matters belong to the competence of the state. There are only two gender identity clinics in Finland that are authorised to treat transgender people (from 13 years upwards). According to those who contact Regnbågsfyren on Åland, many people get stuck at the ÅHS in the process. The examination can take 1-3 years, even though health care on Åland cannot perform investigations or establish diagnoses.

Information about the process of investigating gender identity and gender affirming interventions in Finland is not readily available in Swedish. The answers from gender identity clinics on the mainland can be sent to Åland in Finnish. According to Regnbågsfyren, several people on Åland have been referred to Sweden due to the language issues.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure that ÅHS has the competence to deal with issues concerning gender identity and that all young transgender people be referred without delay.

6.2.2. UNDOCUMENTED CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO HEALTHCARE

According to the Provincial Act on Health and Medical Care, emergency medical care, which also includes psychiatric care, substance abuse care and psychosocial support, must be given to the patient regardless of place of residence. If the patient resides outside the EU or other contracting countries, the patient pays full cost compensation for emergency care. According to the law, ÅHS can decide that a fee should be waived or reduced if it jeopardizes the patient's or his family's support. Civil society is not aware of how frequently this opportunity has been used.

According to the new Child Care and Comprehensive School Act the municipality must in special situations provide childcare and arrange compulsory school education for all children staying in the municipality. The provision is new and refers, for example, to situations where the child stays with his or her guardians in the municipality, although the right of residence might not be at hand. According to the law, all children and pupils must have equal access to child and pupil health services, including undocumented pupils.

On Åland, undocumented children are not entitled to other planned care. For health care other than emergency care, they can instead be referred to the free Global Clinic, which is available in some cities in mainland Finland.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Legislate so that all children staying on Åland have the right to the health care they need.

6.2.3. MENTAL HEALTH

Of students in grades 8-9, 23% answer that they have had moderate or severe anxiety during the past two weeks and 30% that they have felt depressed for at least two weeks. The corresponding figures for the whole of Finland are lower.¹

Åland's small size means that there are no support groups for different groups of children and the language can be an obstacle to participating in group activities in Finland.²

On Åland, there is no position for primary mental health care for children and young people aged 7–17. The statutory waiting time for specialist medical care in child psychiatry is three months. According to the latest information, the waiting times for the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinic are within legal requirements (2-8 weeks), but queues are perceived as long. For investigations of neuropsychiatric disorders, the waiting time is 52 weeks.

The use of rehabilitative psychotherapy for people between the ages of 16 and 24 has increased in recent years, but Åland has a slightly lower use than the rest of Finland.³ There is a shortage of Swedish-speaking psychotherapists in Finland.

There is no low-threshold youth clinic on Åland that is open to all young people.⁴ A digital youth clinic has been investigated and according to the working group's final report (2022), a digital youth clinic can reach more young people, but it needs a physical clinic to support it in terms of staff resources and skills.

According to the Comprehensive School Act, there must be access to a school counsellor and school psychologist in day care centres and in comprehensive school and the pupil has the right to receive sufficient support for problems related to learning and development. To the question "Had needed but not received support and help to feel good from different adults in the school (teacher, school health care, counsellor, psychologist)", students in grades 8-9 on Åland answer yes to a much greater extent in all categories compared to the whole of Finland. More than half of the young people who had needed help with their well-being by a school doctor during the school year have not received it.⁵

To ensure equal psychological help for all children and to improve the opportunity for psychologists to acquire special skills, school psychologists have founded a common organisation on Åland in 2021.

In 2022, the Government of Åland initiated a three-year development project for children's and young people's health and well-being. The project aims to identify structural obstacles to children's and young people's health and well-being, as well as to propose and implement long-term solutions and goal-oriented collaboration between different actors on Åland. The work has not yet started.

The Government of Åland plans to develop a public health strategy for Åland.

¹19% and 24% respectively.

²For example, children with immigrant background and children in placement

³Persons aged 16 - 24 years who have received rehabilitative psychotherapy / 1,000 of the same age. The figure on Åland has increased from 7.2 (2019) to 13.1 (2021, of which 6% for men and 21.6% for women). The average in the whole of Finland is 17%. Statistics are not available regarding children on Åland who are 16 or 17 years old who receive rehabilitative psychotherapy in 2021.

⁴Youth clinics contain services that young people need (health care providers, contraceptive counsellors, psychologists, counselors and doctors). A youth clinic can be a complement to existing school and student health care and then also available to young people who are outside the school world.

⁵The corresponding figure for the whole of Finland is 22,5%.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Access to school counsellors, school psychologists, care services and psychosocial services at various levels is ensured and waiting times are shortened.

Ensure opportunities for support groups and peer support for different groups of children in vulnerable situations.

Ensure education in children's mental health for adults who encounter children.

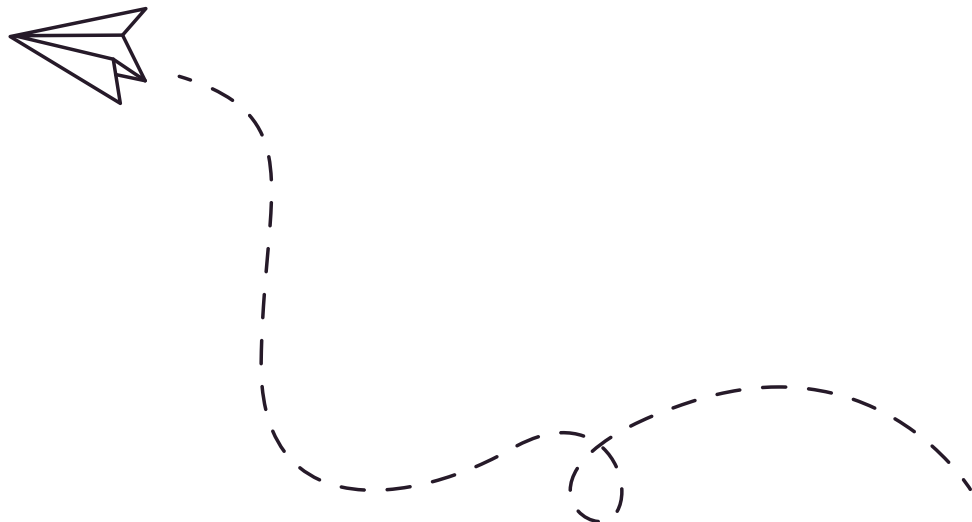
Ensure a low-threshold youth clinic in physical form, which can be supplemented with a digital clinic

6.2.4. ADOLESCENT HEALTH

Snus (oral tobacco) use among upper secondary school students has increased on Åland, and the figures are significantly higher than in Finland. The proportion of upper secondary school students who are properly intoxicated at least once a month decreased from 2019 to 2021 in both Finland and Åland, but the figures are higher on Åland than in Finland.

According to the Nabo-project report, adolescents (16–24 years) on Åland experience that spending time with friends is sometimes burdened by excessive alcohol use. Non-alcoholic meeting places and contexts are requested by young people.

Children and parents, or actors who meet this target group, have been the focus during previous ANDTS work (alcohol, narcotics, doping, tobacco, and gambling) and is also in focus for the period 2022–2024.



6.3 STANDARD OF LIVING

According to ÅSUB's report from 2018, 1,175 people lived in economically disadvantaged households and 290 of these people are children. The greatest risk of falling below the poverty line are single parents with two children.

Since 2015, families with children have lived with a greater risk of poverty in relation to people on Åland in general.

In 2019, 27% of children in grades 8–9 on Åland estimated that their family's financial situation was moderate or worse, which corresponds to the figure in the rest of Finland.

KST and the new Social Welfare Act provide new opportunities for early and equal income support regardless of municipality. KST handles basic, preventive, and supplementary income support. In 2020, 3.9% of families with children on Åland received income support. The proportion is lower than in Finland as a whole (11%).

During the corona pandemic, the national government has made special financial efforts for children and young people. Some of these support measures have benefited Åland families with children, such as temporary epidemic compensation for those who receive basic income support. The Government of Åland set aside EUR 1.5 million for the municipalities for preventive income support. Only a small part of the sum was used for that by the municipalities.¹

NGOs and parishes support families with children living in financial vulnerability.

The child allowance is slightly higher on Åland than in Finland. Families with children who are granted income support receive a slightly higher total amount because in the calculation basis for income support, 80% of the child allowance is considered as income and the single parent supplement is not considered as income.

Between 2008 and 2016, child allowances and the single parent supplement lost just over 11 per cent of their value.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure a clear child rights-perspective in the initiatives granted in adult social work and in economic family policy.

Focus especially on parents and strengthen the opportunity to enter the labour market (rehabilitation, education, language) to reduce the risk of the social heritage continuing to the next generation.

Change the calculation basis for income support so that child allowance is not counted as income.

¹According to the municipalities' accounts during the period 1.7-30.11.2020, the municipalities had used only about 24,500 euros of the support for preventive income support.

7. EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

7.1. EDUCATION, INCLUDING VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND GUIDANCE

7.1.1. COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

The new Comprehensive School Act and a new curriculum for comprehensive school include improvements regarding the rights of the child. There is now a special section on the best interests of the child and the right to a safe learning environment has been strengthened. The right to childcare and schooling for children and students who are temporarily staying on Åland has been regulated by law. It is further clarified that students shall have free access to teaching materials, school accessories, work tools and work materials needed for up-to-date teaching and education. Religious Education and Life Stance Education became one subject that is common to all students.

About 40 percent of the students go to primary school in Mariehamn. The archipelago municipalities have their own schools, where the number of students varies between 9–35 students in total in the grades 1–9 (grades 1-6 in Vårdö). In Sottunga municipality, there is no teaching in primary school, but a few children are home-schooled.

According to SKUNK, it is often not possible for the small archipelago schools to have special competence for all different support needs. It is also impossible for a small school to have subject competence in all areas. The teachers' opportunities to create relationships with the few students is a positive thing and extra focus needs to be placed on the opportunity for children to meet others and build networks outside their own island.

The Government of Åland has both supervisory and development responsibility for comprehensive school. There is a need for clear information on how dissatisfaction with the school's actions can be raised for supervision.

Approximately a quarter of the pupils in comprehensive school received planned support in 2021. Planned support is more common among boys and the difference between the sexes is particularly clear among those who receive multi-professional support or extended compulsory education (training instruction). It is more common to receive some form of support among those who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue.

On Åland there is an opportunity to obtain the compulsory school course through home-schooling. Since 2012, the number of children receiving home-schooling has increased from eight to 100 students in the autumn term of 2021. Over 80 percent of those who receive home-schooling on Åland were born in Sweden, where compulsory school attendance applies.

The municipality has supervisory responsibility for home-schooling and can interrupt home-schooling if the child's compulsory education is not fulfilled. The municipal supervision means that it can look different for children depending on in which municipality the child is enrolled. The municipalities shall ensure that home-schooled children have access to child and school health nurses, psychologist, and counsellor services. In 2021, the Government of Åland appointed a working group to investigate the need for clarification and support regarding home education on Åland.

In the autumn of 2021, almost 12 per cent of all pupils in comprehensive school have a mother tongue other than Swedish, triple that of the autumn of 2010. Second to Swedish, most pupils have Romanian as their mother tongue, then Latvian and then Finnish.

Of students with other mother tongues, 60 percent of the girls and 47 percent of the boys received support instruction in Swedish in 2019.

Pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish do not yet have the right to receive home language instruction. NGOs have met families with a home language other than Swedish who plan to move from Åland so that the children will have the opportunity to study their home language.

On Åland, primary and lower secondary education for people who have passed comprehensive school age has been lacking. The new comprehensive school law gives children who have moved to Åland in the final stages of comprehensive school and lacked a graduation certificate the right to receive free comprehensive school education even after passing the compulsory school age.

SCÅ ended the activities within the Open preschool in 2020 when similar activities already had come into existence.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Introduce an independent supervisory authority for comprehensive school and ensure child-friendly information about the supervisory process.

Ensure innovative digital collaboration between schools to ensure that students in small schools have access to subject-competent teachers, high-quality teaching, and exchanges between students.

Coordinate the supervision of home-schooling on Åland and ensure that minimum standards for education are followed.

Introduce the right to the subject home language in compulsory school, by enabling digital solutions and financial support for schools teaching in the student's home language.





7.1.2. BULLYING AND WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

Åland lacks an action program of the kind that exists in Finland for the prevention of bullying, violence and harassment in preschools, schools, and other educational institutions.

According to the School Health Promotion study, perceived bullying among children and young people on Åland corresponds to the national average but is higher when it comes to vocational high school.¹ There are no statistics for how children in vulnerable groups feel at school on Åland.

Åland's mediation bureau has initiated contact with the schools to introduce peer mediation on Åland according to the Verso program.

More than a third of students in grades 8–9 experience school burnout symptoms. The proportion on Åland is like that in the whole country but has increased in recent years.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that school has sufficient resources to work to prevent bullying and all forms of abusive treatment.

Promoting initiatives such as recess activities should be part of the school's mission.



¹According to School Health Promotion study, 5-6% of pupils in compulsory school, 1.6% of general upper secondary school pupils and 5.5% students at vocational education institute have been bullied at least once a week on Åland. Corresponding figures throughout all of Finland are 8%, 6%, 1%, and 3% respectively.



7.1.3. UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

In Finland, the compulsory education reform made the upper secondary school free of charge and compulsory until the age of 18. On Åland there are no indications of producing a similar reform. Tuition is free of charge, but students must buy textbooks and work materials themselves, which means a cost of at least 2,500 euros.

The Government of Åland produced a bill in 2022 on the introduction of a monthly allowance for students between the ages of 15–17 who need financial support, but it is unclear whether the amount is sufficient. The education provider and social authorities have a certain readiness to support students if brought to their attention.

Children living in the archipelago municipalities must move away from home to continue their studies after primary school. There are no student homes, so the children must live in their own apartment on mainland Åland. According to SKUNK's study from 2004, children talk about problems with loneliness, housework, and school motivation. The study-related move can also be difficult from an economic perspective.

In the upper secondary school, it is more common for students who have Swedish as a second language to interrupt their studies. Among these, men interrupt their studies to a greater extent than women.¹

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Studies at the upper secondary school must be free of charge.

Particular attention should be paid to children who must move away from home to study at upper secondary school.

7.1.4. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The childcare staffing dimension on Åland corresponds to the current dimensioning in Finland.

In May 2022, the Government of Åland presented a new bill to extend the subjective right to childcare also on Åland. Currently, if a parent on Åland is on leave with younger siblings, a child under the age of three is not entitled to childcare and when the child is over three years old only 25 hours a week.

A new curriculum for childcare on Åland was established in the spring of 2022 and children in childcare have been heard in the process.

According to the new Child Care Act, childcare activities must support children with a mother tongue other than Swedish and give them a good foundation for their cultural and linguistic identity. The municipalities can apply for special support for the child's Swedish language learning from the Government of Åland.

¹Of the students with a mother tongue other than Swedish, 19 percent of the women and 23 percent of the men interrupt their studies. The corresponding figures for students with Swedish as their mother tongue are 16 and 13 percent, respectively.

7.1.5. YOUNG PEOPLE WHO NEITHER WORK NOR STUDY

The proportion of young people (aged 15–24) who do not work, study for a degree, participate in course training or are conscripts or in civil service (NEETs) in 2018 was about 8%.

According to the new Compulsory School Act, pupils who have completed comprehensive school but have not been granted a place at upper secondary school are entitled to individual guidance from their comprehensive school for one year after the compulsory education has ended.

On Åland, the association Ung resurs has been formed with the aim of helping children and young people aged 15–29 to find a place to study, work, or other meaningful employment. They also have outreach activities in the form of the Youth Pilots. This includes children who have not completed compulsory school, which is a major obstacle to being able to live an independent life.

On Åland, there is no formal structure for capturing NEETs as there is no youth act corresponding to the national act.

Kela's (the Social Insurance Institution) NUOTTI coaches provide individual coaching for young persons who have experienced a significant decline in their functional capacity, without the requirement for a medical certificate from 16 years and up.

Young people who neither study nor work are not heard in society.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Early and cross-sectoral support measures for children to complete compulsory school and continue to further studies.

7.2. LEISURE AND RECREATION

Åland has a lively association life that is supported through Paf funds (contributions from a gambling enterprise) for sports, culture, social activities and youth work, as well as through the central government transfers to municipalities. Åland's Music Institute is owned by the Government of Åland and teaches children music and dance. It is the responsibility of each municipality to maintain a library.

The conditions for children to participate in leisure activities differ for different groups of children. Rural or archipelago municipalities have fewer choices regarding leisure activities, their quality and the leaders' training. Children in the archipelago find it more difficult to take part in special facilities, courses, activities, and other cultural and sports activities. Children who live in financial vulnerability have a limited opportunity for meaningful leisure time because of fees and costs. Children with disabilities are limited due to lack of accessibility.

The opportunity for children living in financial vulnerability to participate in the sports associations has been discussed both within the umbrella organisation for sports, Ålands Idrott, and with decision-makers.

Safe and inclusive sports are part of Ålands Idrott's basic training for coaches since 2019.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure that all children can participate in at least one leisure activity according to their own interest.



8. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

8.1. ASYLUM-SEEKING AND REFUGEE CHILDREN

Refugee and asylum reception is regulated by national legislation. Åland municipalities can offer municipal placements to quota refugees and other people who have sought and received protection in Finland. Åland has received quota refugees since the 1990s.

More than 200 refugees from Ukraine have come to Åland. In June 2022, the Finnish Immigration Service opened Åland's first reception centre in collaboration with the Red Cross. In the past, refugees and other immigrants have been referred to the Immigration Service on the mainland, which has had negative financial consequences for the family and the children have had to take time off from school.

In May 2022, the Åland Government, ÅHS and the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, in collaboration, arranged information and guidance opportunities for people who in their professional role may meet refugees.

An EU project Safe Harbour (2018–2021) was implemented to increase integration on Åland for quota refugees with a focus on developing knowledge and services in health care. The project has produced easily accessible information materials aimed at professionals, decision-makers, municipal residents, and quota refugees.¹

¹E.g. Model for municipal program for promoting integration, with information about children and families with children.

8.2. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

The number of children who have been subjected to sexual abuse who have come to the attention of the police is partly classified information due to few cases. At least 8 cases of sexual or aggravated sexual abuse of a child came to the attention of the police in 2020.¹

In 2019 more than a fifth of the girls in the upper secondary schools on Åland answered that they had experienced sexual violence during the past year, which was the highest in the whole country. In 2021, the figure was almost the same for girls in vocational education institutes, but for girls in general upper secondary school, the figure had halved to 11%. For students in grades 8–9, the figures were higher for both boys and girls on Åland than in the rest of Finland, and over a fifth of the girls answered that they had experienced sexual violence during the year.²

10% of students in grades 8-9 have experienced sexual harassment at school during the year, which is by far the highest in Finland.³

According to the report that analysed the Åland results in the School Health Promotion Study of 2019, it could be argued as a hypothesis that a major explanation for the increase in reporting of sexual violence is largely due to the fact that people on the Åland Islands, especially young people, mostly consume Swedish media and thus took part in the Swedish #metoo uprising, to a greater extent than in the rest of Finland. However, it cannot be ruled out that part of the increase is due to a higher degree of actual vulnerability. As a possible explanation for this, the interviewees mention that the Åland community is small and characterised by strong social control, which makes it difficult to break taboos and report vulnerability.

There is a great need for knowledge about harassment, consent and sexual rights and obligations among children.

The project to counteract sexual harassment on Åland's upper secondary schools and in the leisure sector during 2019–2023, organised by the Åland Feminist Umbrella increases knowledge about harassment on Åland.

According to SKUNK, the downside of the small community is that smallness strengthens the culture of silence that exists in society around sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

The implementation plan for the Lanzarote Convention is lacking on Åland, even though the Parliament of Åland ratified the convention in 2011.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure that all children and young people gain increased knowledge about legislation, harassment, consent and sexual rights and obligations.

¹Statistics Finland

223% of the girls and 9% of the boys in grades 8-9 on Åland. For the whole country the figures were 13% and 5% respectively.

35.5% nationwide. 14% of the girls in grades 8-9 on Åland have experienced sexual harassment at school during the year (the whole country 7%).

9. THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

When Finland ratified the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the approval of the Parliament of Åland of the Protocol's provisions was not obtained as the protocol was deemed not to fall under Åland's jurisdiction. When the Government of Åland submitted a statement to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2019 regarding Finland's draft report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, the Government of Åland noted that Article 6.3 of the Optional Protocol contains provisions on health care.

The Parliament of Åland considered ratification of the optional protocol for Åland in 2021. The Government of Åland did not know then if there are children / persons on Åland who have been involved in armed conflicts, but according to the minister in charge, Åland already has good conditions to ensure the implementation of Article 6.3 of the Optional Protocol. During the plenary discussion, the concern was expressed that Åland does not have structures to ensure mental and physical rehabilitation and reintegration into society, especially since the integration project, A Safe Harbour, ended in 2021.

The Parliament of Åland gave, to the parts that fall within the province's competence, its approval of the protocol in 2021.

