

Scottish Universities Insight Institute project



From competition to collaboration: the interface between informal and formal carers

Partner country profile: Finland

Context

Carer Policy

The Act on Support for Informal Care defines the conditions for granting support and the minimum care allowance. Wellbeing services counties determine their own, more detailed criteria and care allowance classes which can vary across counties. Support for informal care is a form of aid consisting of services to the care receiver and care allowance, leave and support services to the carer. Support for informal care is not a so-called subjective or absolute right, but the wellbeing services county reserves an annual allocation for it.

Government program (2023-2027) writes about informal care:

“Informal caregivers are an important resource in our society. Equality among informal caregivers and their ability to cope will be strengthened. Work to standardise the criteria for informal care will continue. Actions will be promoted to enable the wellbeing services counties and municipalities to provide better opportunities for people to engage in informal care. It will be examined what kind of situations cause people to fall through the cracks in the informal care support system, and what kind of needs there are for guidance and training to be targeted at the wellbeing services counties.”

“It will be ensured that informal caregivers have the chance to take time off, relying on service vouchers, the home care service, institutional respite care and family care...Reconciliation of informal care and paid employment of those informal caregivers who go to work will be promoted. Opportunities will be created for part-time jobs and remote working in changing family circumstances. Informal caregivers’ opportunities to take a temporary care leave will also be promoted. The issue of support for temporary care leave will be examined on the basis of the Swedish model and its costs.”

“In an ageing society, the contribution of informal care is increasing, and the Government considers informal care a valuable part of a Finnish welfare service. Informal care significantly strengthens general government finances. By the mid-term policy review session, the Government will complete an overall reform of the Act on Support for Informal Care, taking into account aspects such as the individual needs of informal caregivers of working and retirement age. The Government will look into making the taxation of informal care support more reasonable. The Government will look into transferring the payment of informal care support to Kela (social security). The

harmonisation of criteria for informal care support will be continued. Efforts should be made to provide informal care support if it replaces institutional care.”

Implementation

There are many good plans to support informal carers, but unfortunately it doesn't work in practice.

In Finland we had a huge social and health care reform early in 2023. The responsibility for organising healthcare, social welfare and rescue services was transferred from municipalities and joint municipal authorities to wellbeing services counties. The transition is still in process in some parts.

We had hundreds of different criteria for informal care support before 2023. Now we have only 22. But still informal carers are in an unequal position depending on where they live. Although the organisation of support has been unified, it has unfortunately put an end to some regional good practices.

Informal carers, who don't get support by The Act on Support for Informal Care, should also be recognised and supported.

The lack of professional staff prevents good plans from being realized. There are also discussions about money. New wellbeing services counties are facing financial difficulties and people don't get the services they need.

What could help

We need a reform of the Act on Support for Informal Care. Informal care should be considered more individually in the Finnish discussion and system.

Care needs to be discussed as whole, not just focus on parts like informal care, homecare or long-term care. They all effect each other. The same is true of relationships. Co-operation is the key.

Stories from Finland

Workshop one (October 2023) Researcher

Over recent months there is discussion in Finland about comparing informal caring to work. So one unspoken reason why politicians are so keen on developing informal caring is to keep people at home as long as possible. Informal caring is not a profession but at the same time we assume informal carers to do similar activities as formal carers. In Finland we have our carer allowance system. So the informal carers make a contract with the public sector. They get financial support, days off and support services; for example, training. And I will tell you one example of the training. We concentrate quite a lot for income and the level of income that carers receive. This is NGO based training, especially for those informal carers without carer allowance. So we have these unpaid informal carers and paid informal carers in Finland. This is the idea of the structure of the training. Peer support is a big role. What about outcomes of the

training? This is feedback. The academic research is on the way. Feedback so far is good. After training, they know better who to ask for help, how the system works and they take care of themselves. There is also criticism of training. Is it trying to make carers do more professional care. But to be able to be partners with professionals, they need support for mental wellbeing and the relationship with the person they look after. The training is one way to support collaboration.

Workshop two (December 2023) Unpaid carer

I think that picture does say a lot about how we're feeling at this very moment. and basically mine was about a magical moment, something that again, I'll just go back to the whole Covid thing that people do not understand just how small things can really make a big difference in our lives.

One of them was a moment that I shared with our occupational therapist, because, Alexis has no sense of danger. As you, most of you can probably relate to that. And so it's a struggle as a single parent to be able to do anything with him that he does not want.

So I was going on about how his current stroller was really small, and I was not managing. and she volunteered that. You know, with the referral we could get a bigger stroller. and I looked at it, and I was really surprised because I had no idea that this was possible. so that that was really magical, because just by her doing that, it allows us for a little bit of a normal life! A moment where we can actually go out and be in public, and I not having to be tense all the time that my son will be in danger, or that others will be endangered. You know, because of certain behaviors that he could have, you know, you know, if he gets a trigger. So, being seen and being acknowledged that we do have a right to participate, and it's not because of the situation we are in. That we should be cut out of life is really important, and not a lot of people see that. And this is when again we speak about the formal carers. Most of them just want to do their job and not go beyond.

And I've been fortunate with this lady and the other some of the ladies in our lives that this has been the case. Again, when you speak about friendships, this is it. because I believe that if all these people are going to be my son's life, if they gonna make a difference, we have to have a connection. They have to be able to connect not only with him but with me.

I have to be seen. I have to be acknowledged, and my needs also need to be taken to account. Cause? A lot of people would say, Yeah, but he can't walk. Yes, he can. However, it is reckless you know. So by him walking, and not in a way that is acceptable or in a way that is functional for us. It would mean that then we cannot do anything that we like. It means that it limits the amount of things that we can do unless we have company with us, which, living in Finland is rare.

I loved hearing that you get feedback from your community because we don't have that. We live in little silos, and it's up to you to look for the community. You gotta get out of

your house before you get that community. Nobody's gonna call on you to say that they saw your son down the street. That doesn't happen.

So it is amazing to be able to share these things and to also reflect on what is this normal and what normal, I would see normal. Does it mean the same thing to you? And this is one thing that I've been trying to get people to question more when you say this, what do you really mean? Because that's really mean the same thing for me? And we've got to find a common ground so that there has to be, a diminished amount of miscommunication, and that people can be seen for exactly what they feel based on the experiences that they're having questions or comments.

Workshop three (February 2024) Social worker

So this is a story from Finland. I have had many magic moments with informal carers during the years. The magic moment is always when I know that I have done my best for them. It's important as a worker to know that the informal receiver as well as the informal carer. It's important to ask what their needs and hopes are.

It's important to support the informal carer with their caring, and let them feel that the work they do is the best, and to make them stronger in the individual situation. Considering the resources also, it's important to let the care receiver feel that she or he is still a valuable human being, and it's always important for us to try to find their resources.

Everyone needs to feel that their life is significant, too. This kind of work approach as a social instruction to me is absolute and useful. To start cooperation with the informal care families.

My magic moment includes the example told above. I was at home visit with an informal care family. There was a retired informal carer with her spouse and the spouse, who had somehow lost himself because of his sickness in that individual situation. The informal carer didn't believe in her skills to handle that situation, and also felt guilty about her tiredness for her spouse and caring. The informal care receiver used to be a very active person. but now he felt himself purposeless. and it had made him very quiet. We talked together about how they can handle those feelings. and how they can get more good feelings from every day. There are many services and things which can support, but it's a worker's responsibility to estimate and help to find the appropriate services. When I left I could be proud of my work approach. because the couple said that they got more light, and now they can have the power to go on. I think that often less is more in informal care.