

Annual Report

Itla Children's Foundation

2021

Itla Children's Foundation promotes and supports the wellbeing, equality and position of children and families with children living in Finland. We build a child-friendly Finland by producing and refining knowledge and innovation and organising training to support decision-making and development of services. Itla is an independent bridgemaker between research, practice and decision making.



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It is the duty of us adults to protect our growing children from the shadows and various threats.



Mirka Soinikoski
Itla Children's Foundation
Chairperson of the Delegation
Member of Parliament, anesthesiologist



From the Chairperson of the Delegation

Making children and youth visible at all levels of decision-making

AT THE TIME OF WRITING, it's been two months of war in Ukraine. Just when it began to look like the corona pandemic was easing up and light was visible at the end of the tunnel, the shadow of war spread over Europe.

It is the duty of us adults to protect our growing children from the shadows and various threats. Amid all this, we must nurture hope for a better future. Parenting support is more important than ever, and adequate resources must be secured for it. Tackling child poverty, lowering the threshold for family services and building a safe childhood are the most important issues.

At the beginning of 2023, a significant proportion of services for children and families will be transferred to wellbeing services counties. Going forward, maternity and child health clinics, mental health services for children and child welfare will be handled by the wellbeing services counties. The councils of the wellbeing services counties will decide on how these services will be produced in the future.

The National Child Strategy was adopted in spring 2021 and is now being implemented. For the first

time, municipalities and wellbeing services counties have a nationwide strategy to push through children's rights at all levels of government at their disposal.

Decision-making requires a strong understanding of what proportion of public money is spent on children and the impact they will have. It is important that child budgeting and child impact assessment are integrated in the operations of the wellbeing services counties from the start. Our common mission is to ensure that children and young people are made visible at all levels of decision-making.

To ensure that the right assistance reaches as many children, adolescents and families with children, decision-makers and managers of family services must have access to the latest, evidence-based information. The central focus should be on knowledge-based management, measuring the social impact of services and the inclusivity of children.





“The foundation has achieved the status of a reliable and competent actor in research activities related to the wellbeing of children, as proved by the fact that the Foundation is often invited to join various consortiums.

– CEO, Professor Petri Virtanen

Iitla's Year

Iitla's vision is to make Finland the best place in the world for children by building a child-friendly society. It will benefit not only the approximately one million children of today but also future generations.

2021

IN A CHILD-FRIENDLY SOCIETY, the best interests of the child are taken into consideration in all decision-making and the rights of the child are realised for every child. The National Child Strategy and its implementation programme were completed in Finland in early 2021 and have increased awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For its part, Iitla has been involved in building and promoting the implementation of the child strategy and wants to continue building a future where children's rights and child-oriented actions are the mainstream in decision-making and service activities.

Iitla's social impact objectives:

1. The wellbeing and resilience of children, youth and families with children living in Finland are strengthened and children have a good future in Finland.
2. The nature of child-friendly society is advancing – greater equality and respect for the rights of the child.
3. The service system for children and families conforms to their service requirements, in cooperation with the professionals involved in everyday growth environments.

The realisation of social impact objectives requires child welfare professionals and decision-makers to succeed in their work. Iitla's activities primarily target professionals and decision-makers: by influencing their evidence base, working practices and cross-sectoral cooperation, we can improve the living conditions of children and youth where decisions concerning them are made and where services are planned and implemented.

Iitla's social impact objectives are directed at large-scale social change. Such a transformation occurs little by little, but choosing the most impactful parts is pivotal.

Iitla's activities focus on evidence-based wellbeing information, innovating children's and family services and developing leadership competences that promote child wellbeing as well as communication. During 2021, Iitla also launched a research and development programme on child poverty called An Equal Start for Everyone – Solutions to Family and Child Poverty (Samalta viivalta – ratkaisuja lapsiperheköyhyyteen).

“Iitla aims for change through these particular activities because they can impact known critical

Itla's activities focus on evidence-based wellbeing information, innovating children's and family services and developing leadership competences that promote child wellbeing as well as communication.

points in services for children, adolescents and families, as well as their status and future in Finnish society", says **Petri Virtanen**, CEO of Itla.

We produce and refine knowledge to develop services

Itla's work is centred around research-based knowledge to strengthen the social impact of measures to promote the wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Itla conducts research both on its own and in collaborative projects with other actors. The foundation has also endowed three professorships at Finnish universities. The research themes are all relevant to child wellbeing.

We review research on the social impact of psychosocial interventions to help children and families with children through services. The Samalta viivalta programme tackles child poverty as a phenomenon and look for new research-based solutions to reduce poverty.

In 2021, we opened Itlasto, a data bank for the wellbeing of children and adolescents, and launched the Kasvun tuki journal, which aims to broaden the knowledge base on the wellbeing of children, adolescents and families.

The Nordic cooperation of Early Intervention continued through the NordicDataPrev network and The First 1,000 Days in the Nordic Countries project.

"The foundation has achieved the status of a reliable and competent actor in research activities related to the wellbeing of children, as proved by

the fact that the Foundation is often invited to join various consortiums", explains Virtanen.

One of the research projects launched in 2021 is a study funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture on the impact of population changes on early childhood education and pre-school and primary education. The research project will be carried out during 2022–2024 in cooperation with the University of Helsinki and MDI, a regional development consultancy.

Leadership to enable child-oriented approaches

We promote change by providing training both in leadership and in adopting and instilling research-based methods. Management has the opportunity to influence decision-making and services so that they are built with the needs of children, adolescents and families in mind. We provide long-term leadership training for leaders and decision-makers in child wellbeing services that reinforces leadership competency, systemic agency and people-focused and child-oriented management philosophy. Supporting leadership competence contributes to the transition from sectoral activities to child-oriented approaches at local, regional and national levels.

Bridges from research to practice and decision-making

In addition to research knowledge, we also need practical experiments and a dialogue between the knowledge and the people who use it. We strengthen learning, social impact and broad resil-

ience-oriented everyday wellbeing related to child wellbeing.

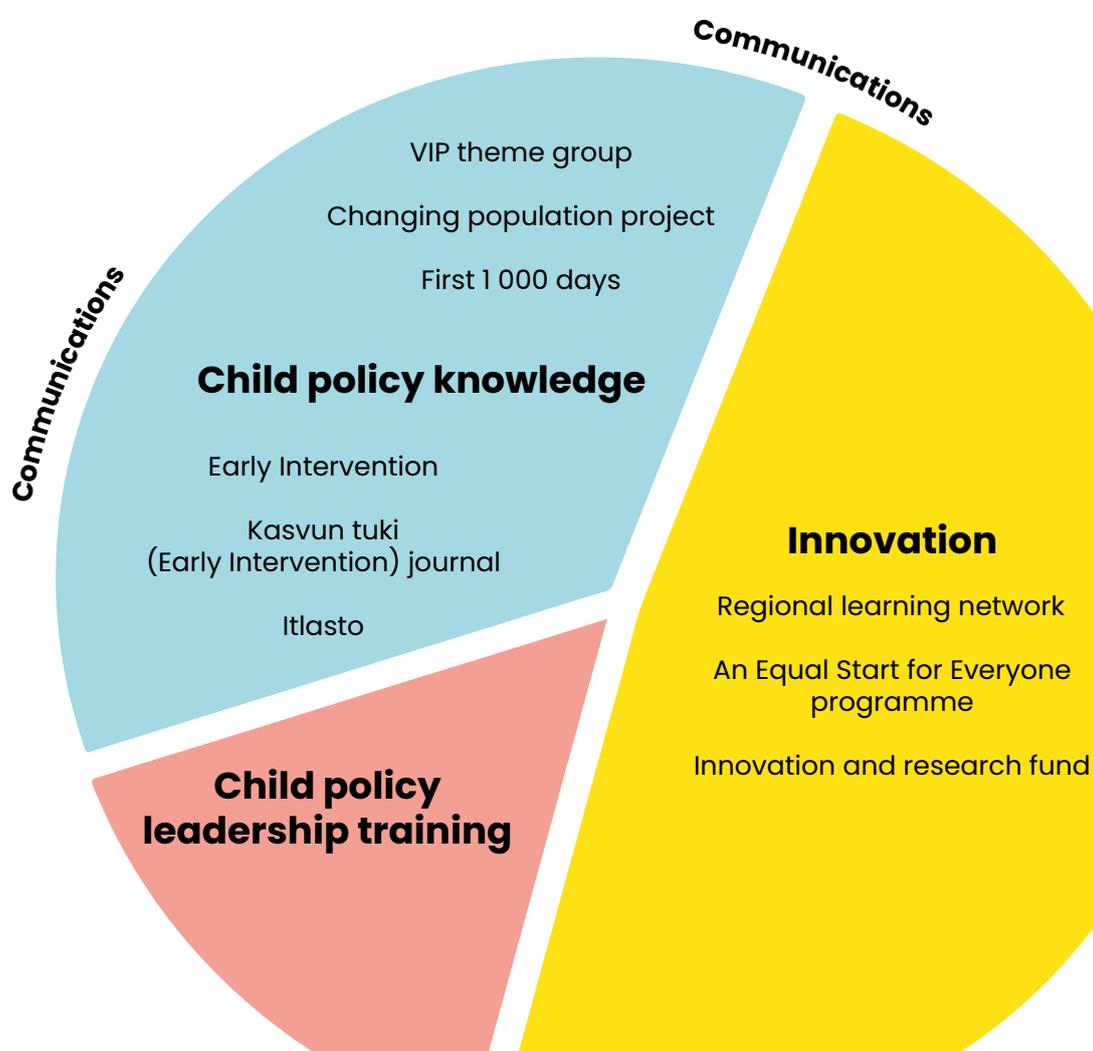
The regional learning network Childhood Builders (Lapsuuden rakentajat), run by Itla and the University of Oulu, brings together different bodies and helps improve services to function better together. The regional learning network has a population base of more than half a million people, of which 100,000 are children. The activities of the regional learning network are based on the principles of social impact, which Itla has actively promoted in Finland in recent years.

“The importance of Itla, like many other foundations, is particularly reflected in the fact that we can promote cooperation that other actors may not have the opportunity to. In complex issues, cross-sectoral cooperation is often a prerequisite for success,” Virtanen continues.

We have collaborated on implementing the child strategy , mental health strategy, the Child and Family Services transformation programme, the Child Advisory Board and OECD’s OPSI (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation).

Itla’s international approach was also well supported by the work of a three-person international panel of experts launched in 2021. We have continued our international cooperation with, among others, the Norwegian University of Tromsø, the Canadian McMaster University and the Dutch University of Vrije. Itla also launched a collaboration with the University of Canberra, Australia.

In spring 2021, the Foundation carried out a stakeholder survey for a mid-term review of its strategy. According to the survey, several responders considered Itla a “high-profile” actor and a valuable partner. Bridgemaking and cooperation are important principles and objectives for Itla. The only way to build a child friendly society is through cooperation.



Operations

Child Policy Knowledge – Towards Effective Action

The Itla Child Policy Knowledge package uses research data to impact activities promoting the wellbeing of children and adolescents.

In 2021, we launched **Itlasto**, a database on the wellbeing of children and adolescents, which compiles national indicators describing the wellbeing of children and adolescents. Itlasto aims to facilitate the search for child policy information and the identification of knowledge gaps and biases in information about the wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Early Intervention (Kasvun tuki) consists of the information resource kasvuntuki.fi and the Kasvun tuki journal. The Early Intervention reviews the evidence for the social impact of psychosocial interventions and promotes the adoption of research-based interventions in services impacting children, adolescents and families. The Early Intervention resource has 31 reviewed interventions.

From the beginning, the reviews in the Early Intervention have been done in cooperation with similar Nordic actors. In 2021, further development of the review system and the reform of the review manual continued in cooperation with the Norwegian Ungsinn journal.

The Kasvun tuki journal is a scientific peer-reviewed publication that was launched in 2021 and is published twice a year on the website. The jour-

nal broadens the knowledge base on the wellbeing of children, adolescents and families and promotes research-based decision-making and evidence-based activities by professionals. Beginning in 2022, the journal publishes methodological reviews as systematic reviews.

In the Kasvun tuki journal's Triangeli discussion and podcast a researcher, decision-maker and professional meet around the same theme. The themes for 2021 were prevention of school bullying and the life account model.

Implementation competence is an essential part of promoting the use of research-based methods. Implementation ensures the use of methods that benefit target groups. Itla organises training and transmits information on international research-based implementation tools in Finland. In 2021, Itla translated the Nomad tool, validated in the Netherlands and the UK, into Finnish. In 2022, the validation of the instrument will begin in Finland.

Innovation – Towards Functioning Services

Challenge-driven and data-intensive innovation in child and family services aim to support the reform of public sector services. The objective of Itla's innovative activities is to support reform from within the service systems for children and families.

The Itla Regional Learning Network and the social

impact reference framework integrated into it, and the implementation of its reference framework, attracted interest during the planning of the health and social services reform and the new wellbeing services counties. During 2021, joint events were held for the preparers of the wellbeing services counties as well as for sparring on social impact and resiliency-oriented development of services for families with children.

In 2021, the development of the Situation Room (Tilannehuone) tool for anticipating service needs and the application of the SenseMaker® tool were important new initiatives. The tools are used to produce new research information, develop new methods of research and data collection as well as create digital tools to support cross-sectoral management.

In autumn 2020, Itla's **Regional Learning Network** launched as a pilot project in four regions of Finland. The Regional Learning Network consists of three key elements: 1) developing collaborative development environments and services through the use of the Let's Talk about Children method, (2) strengthening local communities that promote activities and inclusivity, and 3) development of the situation room tool for the support of the anticipation and channelling of preventive services. The work has also expanded within the cities and joint municipal authorities that are part of the learning network. The work has also expanded within the cities and joint municipal authorities that are part of the learning network.

The City of Oulu, which is part of the Regional Learning Network, received an award at the Kunta2030 Gala for developing a service model based on community impact.

In December 2021, the prototype of the Situation Room tool for anticipating the service needs of families with children was finished. The idea behind leadership in the Situation Room tool is to collect and highlight the findings of professionals who encounter children and families, which allows for the identification of key phenomena affecting wellbeing, and to take measures for promoting the wellbeing of the residents of the region.

The SenseMaker® pilot study launched in October 2021 in Oulu. The study evaluates the SenseMaker survey tool as a means to describe the experience of inclusion among children and adolescents in Finland. The study will be carried out during 2021 and 2022 and aims to deepen the understanding of how experiences of inclusion are built up and the factors related to these as described by children, parents, teachers and adults who guide activities in school. In addition, we will find out how the activities offered at school under the Finnish model are linked to the experience of inclusion among children and adolescents.

The theme of Itla's third **Childhood Builders Challenge Competition** was digital solutions for work done with families with children during the corona pandemic. The challenge competition was organised together with Save the Children. The challenge competition was won by the Stepapp mobile app developed by the Stepfamily Association of Finland as part of coaching stepfamilies.

The Digital Shelter created by the Red Cross Youth Shelters received an honourable mention.

In 2021, Itla and the Tiina and Antti Herlin Foundation set up a joint **innovation and research fund** to accelerate the reform of services for families with children in Finland. In 2021, the fund provided funding for three entities.

The Innovation and Research Fund supports experimentation and research activities in the Regional Learning Network.

Itla's first dedicated **research grant funding call** was launched in April 2021. The foundation awarded two personal working grants.

Leadership competence – towards child-oriented management

In 2021 Itla made a push to improve the competency of leaders to promote people-oriented wellbeing leadership and making change possible. As the corona pandemic continued, leadership training activities focused on virtual training. In spring 2021, an online wellbeing leadership workshop series open to all continued in collaboration with or-

organisations such as Children England and the City of Leeds. The workshops addressed opportunities to bring the deep inclusion of young people into policy planning as well as the transformative journey of the City of Leeds to become child-oriented through relationship-based leadership change.

A half-year leadership training course was undertaken for leaders in Itla's Regional Learning Network. The training supported regions in the conscious construction of a common goal, utilising the expertise of different actors, supporting responsible self-direction, and maintaining the strong linkage between end-user feedback and organizational learning.

The co-creation training modules of Itla's long-term Childhood Builders leadership training were on hiatus due to the spring 2021 corona outbreak, but small groups of participants continued to work together. The second Childhood Builders course started in virtual format in December 2021.

The experimental activities complement the knowledge gained through research and practice, boosting anticipatory governance reform of child wellbeing issues. In conjunction with the government's Centre for Learning and Consulting Valteri, an experiment was launched in autumn 2021 with

Insights into the connection between the wellbeing of children and ecological sustainability and their relationship to nature was accumulated through a series of seven dialogues.

the goal of modelling the implementation of rehabilitation that supports learning in the neighbourhood school and thus develop methods of communal pupil care.

Sustainability experts from public administration, organizations, foundations and corporations held dialogues on supporting the wellbeing of children and adolescents as part of promoting planetary welfare and sustainable development.

Programs and Projects

Itla carries out both operational and research projects either by itself or in cooperation with other actors. In 2021, the most significant initiative was Itla's own three-year programme addressing poverty in families with children and solutions to the problem.

The aim of the **Equal Start for Everyone - Solutions to Family and Child Poverty** (Samalta viivalta)



programme is to identify the state of poverty in Finland among families with children, identify effective measures to reduce such poverty and accelerate research and advocacy on the topic.

The first phase of the programme synthesized previous research data on the subject and surveyed research gaps using the phenomenon map model developed by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters. Itla organized two phenomenon tables on the connection between family background and education.

The Poverty in Families with Children programme also includes a three-year endowed professorship at the University of Tampere.

Since 2019, Itla has coordinated in Finland **The First 1000 Days in the Nordic Countries project** of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The project explores how the Nordic countries promote mental health in healthcare during pregnancy, support the formation of a secure attachment relationship as part of the health care of infants and young children, and support emotional wellbeing in early childhood education. In 2021, the project published the report *The First 1000 Days in the Nordic Countries: Psychosocial Interventions and Psychological Tests: A Review of the Evidence*. The project's policy recommendations will be published in 2022 as a separate report and presented to the Nordic Council of Ministers at the final conference of the project in summer 2022.

According to a study published by Itla on **the wellbeing of children and families with children as election themes in Finland 2015–2021**, children and child wellbeing were rarely seen in the debates and election programmes of the elections.

The project on **support in pre-primary and primary education and early childhood education for children and adolescents who respond through their behaviour** aims to increase research-based knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon. The project of the Finnish National Agency for Education and Itla (2020–2022) started as part of a theme group at the National VIP Network (Demanding Special Support Network).

The **Yhteisillä ruokailuilla elämänvoimaa (Life Force Through Eating Together)** project supports daily dining for baby families and identifies if it makes the lives of families healthier and emphasizes common moments in their lives. The project is carried out in cooperation with The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters and the social enterprise Venner.

A systematic **literature review on how children's relationship to nature impacts wellbeing and health** will be published in 2022. It is carried out in cooperation with the Alli Paasikivi Foundation and a research group at the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE. Read more in the article *A relationship with nature boosts child wellbeing*.

In 2020–2021, **The Vamos service impact study was conducted for the Deaconess Institute**. The Vamos youth service was awarded the Impact Act of the Year 2021 in the category Social Impact. The impact study received a special mention.

A study conducted in 2021 for **the Northern Centre of expertise and support on the Hoito syytteen sijaan (Care instead of Charges) model**. The aim of the study was to describe the implemented action model and its results, and to compare the results against other similar operating models.

Muuttuva väestö (Changing Population) - Effects of Population Changes on Early Childhood Education and Teaching is a research project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and conducted in collaboration with the University of Helsinki and MDI from 2022 to 2024.

Endowment professorships

Itla has endowed professorships in intervention and implementation research to the Universities of Oulu and Turku in 2019. The professorships focus on the study of interventions and their implementation to promote the wellbeing of children, adolescents and families.

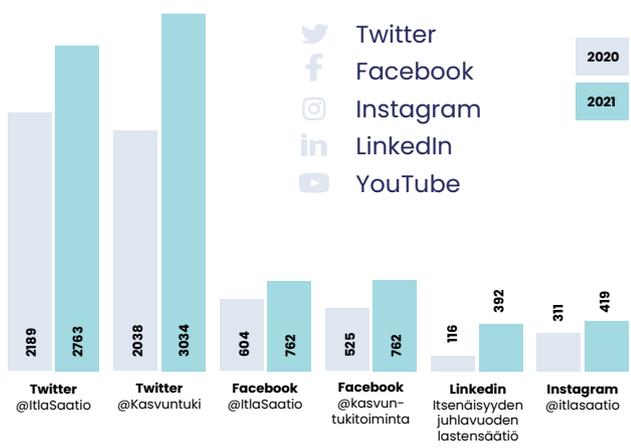
In 2021, a professorship in the study of poverty in families with children was endowed to the University of Tampere. The aim of the Endowment Professorship is to promote phenomenon-oriented and

interdisciplinary teaching, research and impact related to poverty in families with children.

Communication and Events

Communication increases recognition of Itla and what the foundation does and contributes to achieving the objectives of its activities. During 2021, Itla will publish completely new pathways to knowledge and improve already existing channels.

Itla has five websites or online services, five social media channels, a podcast and a newsletter. Itla publishes studies, reports and policy recommendations as their own series as well as the Kasvun tuki journal. Among Itla's publication series appeared *Pointti: Selkeästi tutkimuksesta (The Point: Clearly on Research)* summarising the essence of studies.



In 2021, we published four reports and studies as well as one policy recommendation and a research abstract. Two issues of the journal Kasvun tuki were published.

The most popular topics in the Itla channels were the studies on the stress factors behind adolescent payment default entries and the wellbeing of children and families with children as election themes in Finland 2015–2021. The public was also interested in the Childhood Builders Challenge Competition, the Samalta viivalta programme and the endowment professorship as well as the publication of Itlasto and the journal Kasvun tuki.

The Childhood Builders podcast, which started in April 2020, published ten more episodes. In addition, the first episode of the Triangeli podcast for Kasvun tuki was released. By the end of 2021, a total of 21 episodes had been released and they had been listened to 2,554 times.

11 blog posts and 10 guest posts were published on Itla's website.

Year of Research-based Knowledge

Itla was a participant in the 2021 Year of Research-based Knowledge organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Academy of Finland and The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies.

The purpose of the Year of research-based knowledge was to support the understanding of the transformation of modern society and how to address that change, as well as how to make the knowledge even more accessible and its relevance more visible in everyday life.

Itla organized four events during the Year of Research-based Knowledge. In addition, the journal Kasvun tuki and Itlasto were published as part of the Year of Research-based Knowledge.

Administration

Bodies and Staff

The **bodies** of the Itla Children's Foundation are the Delegation, Board of Trustees, Asset Management Committee and CEO. In 2021, the editorial board of the journal *Kasvun tuki* and an international panel of experts were also active within Itla. The Foundation adheres to good governance and is a member of The Association of Finnish Foundations.

DSocSci, Docent Petri Virtanen has been the **CEO of the foundation** since February 2019. CEO Petri Virtanen serves as a part-time Professor in the School of Management, Social and Health Management at the University of Vaasa.

The mission of the Children's Foundation **Delegation** is to monitor, support and promote the activities of the foundation. The appointment, composition and term of office of the Delegation are

regulated by law (1004/2017). The Delegation met three times in 2021. The Chairperson of the Delegation is Mirka Soinikoski (Greens) and Eeva-Johanna Eloranta (SDP) is the Vice Chairperson.

The Foundation's **Board of Trustees** is responsible for the administration of the Foundation and the appropriate organisation of its activities. The board is responsible for the appropriate monitoring of the Foundation's accounting and asset management. In accordance with the Foundation's by-laws, the Board of Trustees prepares matters for the Delegation, apart from selecting the members of the Board. The Board of Trustees also decides on strategy, resource planning and policy outlines.

The Chairperson of the Board is Tuomas Kurttila and Vice Chairperson is Sanna Vesikansa. In 2021 the Board of Trustees met seven times.

MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION IN 2021

Members	Deputy Members
Mirka Soinikoski (Greens), Chairperson	Noora Koponen (Greens)
Eeva-Johanna Eloranta (SDP), Vice Chairperson	Kimmo Kiljunen (SDP)
Riitta Mäkinen (SDP)	Johanna Ojala-Niemelä (SDP)
Ari Koponen (FP)	Juha Mäenpää (FP)
Sanna Antikainen (FP)	Sheikki Laakso (FP)
Anna-Kaisa Ikonen (NCP) (until September 14, 2021)	Terhi Schoolman (NCP)
Sinuhe Wallinheimo (NCP) (from September 14, 2021)	
Ville Kaunisto (NCP)	Pekka Aittakumpu (Centre)
Hilkka Kemppe (Centre)	Pasi Kivisaari (Centre)
Pia Lohikoski (LA)	Mikko Ollikainen (SPP)

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES IN 2021	
Members	Deputy Members
Tuomas Kurttila, Chairperson	Johanna Laisaari
Sanna Vesikansa, Vice Chairperson	Mikko Mäkelä
Maria Kaisa Aula	Hanna Heinonen (<i>resignation effective September 1, 2021</i>)
Petri Pohjonen	Arto Willman
Mirjam Kalland	Jorma Komulainen
Riitta Särkelä	Mikko Mikkola
Terhi Päivärinta	Tuire Santamäki-Vuori

The Asset Management Committee's role is to support the Foundation by enabling responsible investment activities. The Foundation's asset management must be systematic, secure, profitable, considered and sustained. The Financial Management Committee met four times during the financial year.

The role of **the Editorial board of the Kasvun tuki journal** is to direct the work. Its role is to develop the content of the journal and the new review system, promote the research-based focus of the journal and to ensure the quality of systematic overviews and to approve method updates.

The mission of the international **Advisory Board**, appointed in 2020, is to support and strengthen the position and impact of Itla domestically and internationally. The Advisory Board challenges and brings global perspective and expertise to strategic themes and content, among others by expanding the Foundation's international networks and impact potential in order to achieve strategic objectives. The Advisory Board can also participate in a separately agreed manner in the Foundation's strategic projects.

Because of the Corona pandemic distance working has become the norm at Itla. During the spring of 2021, it was decided to switch to a location independent working mode, i.e. employees can decide on their own where they want to work, in so far as their work duties permit it.

16 people worked at Itla at the end of 2021.

Members of the Editorial Board of the Journal Kasvun tuki in 2021

Taina Laajasalo, Chairperson

Kirsi Peltonen

Jorma Komulainen

Mika Niemelä

Riittakerttu Kaltiala

Members of the Asset Management Committee in 2021

Mikko Mikkola, Chairperson

Tuomas Kurttila

Annika Ekman

Sami Yläoutinen

Members of the Advisory Board in 2021

Professor Jens Meyer, INSEAD, France, Specialised in Management and Strategy

Professor John Lavis, McMaster University, Canada, specialised in the social impact of wellbeing interventions and evidence-based action.

Senior Project Manager, PhD Piret Tõnurist, OECD-OPSI, France, specialising in innovation and service design in OECD countries



Asset Management and Economy

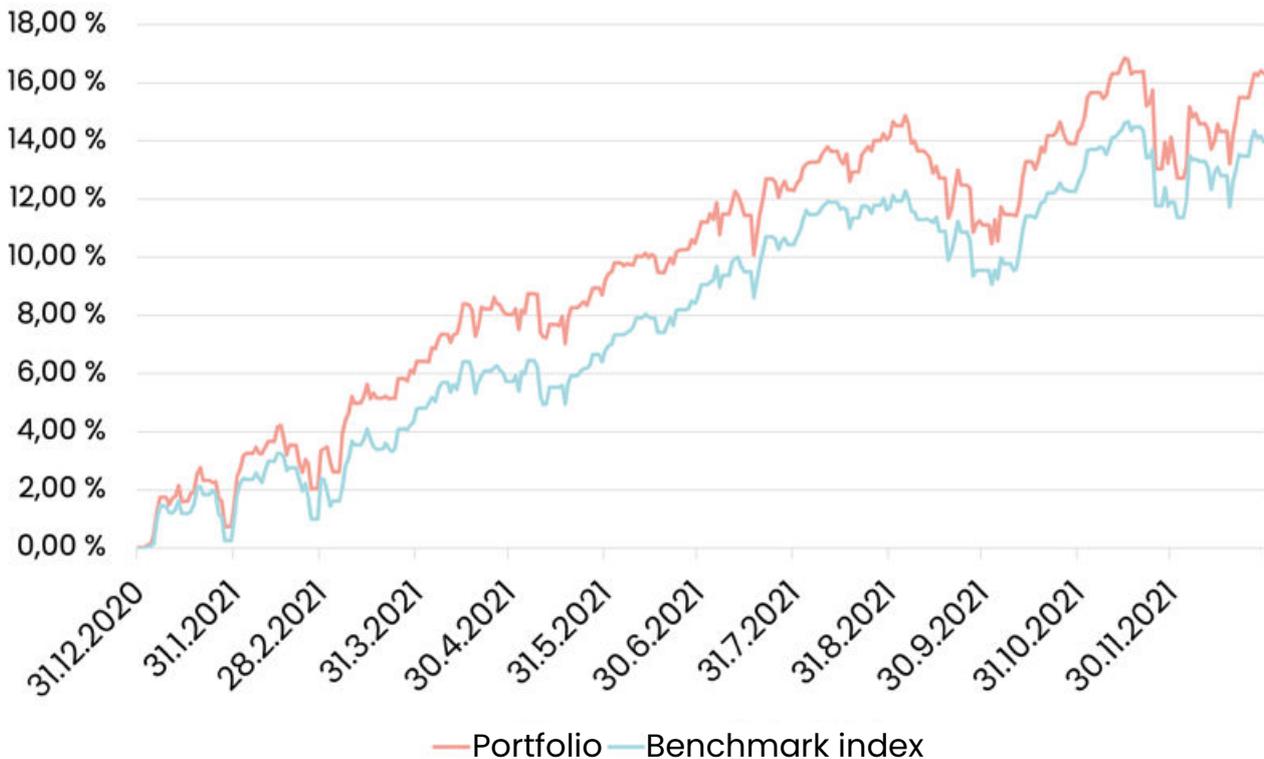
In the Foundation's investment strategy, the long-term strategic goal of invested assets is an annual real rate of return of 4 per cent. The time frame of the Foundation's investments is long and investments must be systematic and responsible. The investments must be efficiently distributed across different asset classes, geographical regions, sectors, asset managers and investment types. Intelligibility and transparency are important principles for the Foundation in carrying out investments.

- The operational budget for 2021 was EUR 2,750,000
- The operating expenditure budget for 2021 was EUR 2 320,144.84 (EUR 2,067,026.27 in 2020)
- As of December 31, 2021, the market value of investment assets was EUR 64,135,576.91 and cash equivalents were EUR 5,123,901.65

Realized expenditure: EUR 2,320,145

Operating expenditure budget: EUR 2,750,000

Investment Portfolio Income (TWR)





View to the Year 2022

From the point of view of child wellbeing, 2022 will continue to be a year of upheaval.

2022 WILL STILL BE MARKED by the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects, albeit diminishing. The pandemic has had direct effects on children, young people and families, for example in the form of a mental health load and learning deficits. Moreover, in the early 2022 during the preparation of this annual report, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has put the world in a new situation, forcing Finland to rethink its perspectives on child wellbeing and the sustainability of our society.

The change in our security policy environment is reflected in the wellbeing of children. With this in mind, the Foundation has been active in launching measures related to the war in Ukraine in early 2022.

2022 will be the last year of Itla's current strategy period. During 2022, the Foundation, together with stakeholders, will develop a strategy for 2023–2026 as an open process.

2022 is also Itla's 35th anniversary year. We celebrate our jubilee anniversary with signs of work and under the patronage of our President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö. The main themes of our jubilee is the future and social and resilience of children's everyday life - supporting excellence and ensuring the services for families with children in changing situations.

The emerging theme in Itla relates to the children's relationship with nature and, by extension,

the planetary wellbeing of children. For example, talk about mitigating climate anxiety is becoming commonplace in Finland. In 2022 we we are also likely to see phenomena that challenge the wellbeing of children and families with children in new ways. One such phenomenon is associated with the otherness and loneliness experienced by children. Certain challenges are brought by rapidly progressing demographic changes such as the decline in birth rate and the ageing population, which rapidly affect access to services for children and families with children. The welfare areas that start their activities at the beginning of 2023 for their own chapter in this transformation process. Solutions such as service integration and family services will be made by each welfare area separately by the end of 2022.

The 2022 operating year will see an increase in demand for the Foundation's research expertise, which has been a strategic objective in recent years. This follows the renewed interest in recent years in being able to collaborate with the Foundation on issues relating to child welfare.

The core of Itla's activities will not change in 2022. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the strengthening of equality, the reduction of inequalities, internationalism and bridge-building by bringing together actors of change will remain the leading stars of organising and activities for the Foundation.



“Question that arise in relation to leadership are very universal.”

Leadership training brightens the goal in one's own work

Jussi Ketonen, Development Director at Family Rehabilitation Centre Lauste, started Itla Childhood Builders during the first leadership training in early 2020. The training expanded Ketonen's own network and gave birth to a new outlook on his own habits and perceptions.

The first course of leadership training at Itla Childhood Builders was completed by 22 leaders from various fields of expertise. The training consists of six modules, as well as intermediate tasks to strengthen systemic understanding of leadership and welfare issues, development of management of people-oriented organisations and service activities, and to promote diverse and effective use of information as well as the inclusion of children and families.

Participants included decision-makers, leaders and influencers in child welfare issues. Jussi Ketonen says that being involved with different people was a wealth for education.

“The phenomena of leadership are quite universal. We will consider the same types of questions, regardless of in which industry we are professionals. I have always felt that the wider and more diverse the set, the richer the conversation”, Ketonen says.

“By examining the good experiences and trajectories of others in relation to one’s work, you learn much more. It is interesting to hear people in different industries and organisations share their work and think about what the same phenomena mean in their working environment.”

Ketonen has worked in expert and development roles in child protection for nearly 20 years. Leadership training has brought new perspectives on how to view one’s own field of work.

“Child protection involves a lot of legislation and peripheral conditions that define activities. However, in order to achieve service development and welfare impacts, it was important to turn the gaze on how we could get more co-development in child protection and ecosystem development based on service thinking. We need new types of operational structures and service innovations that can transform the entire industry.”

Ketonen says that he deliberately finds himself in situations where he has to consider issues related to his own work and occupation in a more broad perspective. No good comes from isolation, because the interfaces of industries and services provide opportunities for learning and development. The same is repeated in personal professional encounters.

The first course of training eventually stretched into two years, although its original length was

destined to be 10 months. According to Ketonen this stretching was not beneficial for the learning process.

“It would have been good to see more live because not only the actual training but also the conversations that take place in those other moments are important and useful. It is from those discussions in informal moments that good ideas and reflections arise”, Ketonen adds.

“On the other hand, the Covid-19 pandemic have also brought a positive addition to work as we now have managed to solve current problems surrounding the circumstances and have had to look for new perspectives.”

Ketonen praises leadership training for its knowledge basics and the fact that phenomena and management were examined from different perspectives, led by different experts. Despite Covid, the group also got to meet in person a few times to explore child-centric services and to observe activities driven by a successful customer experience.

“I have gotten to know a large number of people during the training, and had the opportunity to about what I perceive as important in my work and to mirror my perspective in a wider context.”





The phenomenon table talks spawned debates about the effects of family background on educational pathways

The first phenomenon table of the Equal Start for Everyone (Samalta viivalta) programme was a delve into the generational transition of poverty. The second debate strongly emphasised the inability of the Finnish service system to support immigrant families.

In spring 2021, Itla launched a three-year research and development programme to tackle poverty in families with children. The Equal Start for Everyone programme refines research data as a basis for decision-making, launches experiments and strengthens cooperation between researchers and actors in the subject area. In autumn, two phenomenon table discussions were organised in cooperation with Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), one for researchers and another one for professionals. The discussions are part of the Phenomenon Map method applied in the Equal Start for Everyone programme.

The first table of phenomenon delved into the generational transition of poverty by surveying what is known about the impact of family background on educational pathways – and what is not. There were ten scholars approaching the subjects from their own perspectives, whose dialogue opened up the complexities of the connection between family backgrounds and educational outcomes.

“The debate opened up a number of critical issues that research on the topic has yet to grasp.”

“The discussion identified essential research related questions and definitions for data synthesis”, says **Tiina Ristikari**, Director of Development at Itla.

For the purposes of data synthesis, three claims were crystallised during the debate:

1. The connection between family background and school performance as well as educational paths has been strengthened in Finland over the last 15 years.
2. The link between family background and school performance and educational paths is weaker in Finland than in analogue countries.
3. Finnish education together with the service system cannot adequately support the learning challenges related to family background.

The second phenomenon table in December continued this discussion with professionals providing services for families with children. The inability of the Finnish service system to support immigrant families was strongly emphasised during the debate. There was also a debate about the inability to support vulnerable children at school. In addition, it was concluded that co-operation with parents does not always work. Professionals claim that pupil maintenance work may be overridden in cases where the families prove to be “too challenging” and a direct contact with child protection services might be needed in those cases. The debaters also claimed that multi-professional collaboration between services often turns out to be nothing more than a myth.

“The debate opened up a number of critical issues that research on the topic has yet to grasp. The discussion also proved that there is an increasing need for more dialogue between professionals and researchers in the future in order to identify key information needs and genuinely effective means of action”, says **Aapo Hiilamo**, Senior Researcher at Itla.

In spring 2022, the Samalta viivalta Phenomenon Table discussions will continue, in particular together with decision-makers. Based on the conversations, literature searches are conducted and data syntheses are compiled. In 2022 the first synthesis of the scientist’s phenomenon table will be published.

WHAT IS A PHENOMENON MAP?

The Phenomenon map is a method used in producing reliable evidence syntheses on complex topics corresponding user needs produced by Sofi, the Science Advice Initiative of Finland. Experts, researchers and other practitioners involved in relevant topics take part in the process of the Phenomenon map. The Phenomenon map is an entity consisting of parts that structure or present information about a phenomenon differently.

The process is structured as follows:

1. Formatting the question layout together with experts working on the topic.
2. Design and implementation of information retrieval.
3. Evidence syntheses work: classification of results, evaluation of the degree of evidence, writing, mapping of research gaps.
4. Formatting the proposals for measures.
5. Communication and interaction of results.

Source: Sofi, acadsci.fi/sofi/mita-sofi-tekee/ilmioikartta



Pictured Riikka Paloniemi (left), Marianne Aulake and Terhi Arola.

The relationship with nature promotes children's wellbeing

Researchers from the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE reported in November at the Child Rights Forum about their review, which explores what is known about the importance of nature for the wellbeing of children.

TEXT BY Ina Ruokolainen

Children's relationship to nature has a multidimensional, holistic connection to health and wellbeing. Both research and resources are needed to support children's everyday interactive relationship with nature. It is equally important to trust children as independent actors in defining and building a relationship with nature.

This is said by researchers from the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) Riikka Paloniemi, Marianne Aulake and Terhi Arola, who reported on the importance of nature relationship for children's wellbeing at the Child Rights Forum ÄÄNI21 event on 12 November in Helsinki.

They presented a review based on research literature, which has been conducted by researcher Anna Ott among others. The review is part of a project funded by the Alli Paasikivi Foundation and Itla Children's Foundation and jointly produced with SYKE's research group.

The interest in children's relationship to nature has increased considerably in recent years. The relationship with nature changes with urbanisation, digitalisation and the impoverishment of biodiversity. The researchers posed the question of what the effects of this change are on the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Recently, more and more articles have been published in which both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to study the effects of nature on wellbeing and health. The review is based on 21 core articles selected amongst a total of 1,760 international articles on the children's relationship with nature. The review had three dimensions of health: physical, mental and social.

The need for a review arose from a desire to bring together scattered research data and to identify the basis for further research and practical measures. The key main finding of the studies is that there is a link between the relationship to nature and wellbeing.

“Most of them utilised a positive outlook as the starting point. All articles found a connection between health and the relationship with nature. Only a few articles focused on looking at the relationship from the perspective of worry, anxiety or negative nature experiences,” Aulake says.

The researchers presented a Canadian research article, (Piccinnini et al. 2018), based on a nationally representative sample of children and adolescents aged 11–15. The study found that children who considered the relationship with nature as important experienced less depression, irritability, nervousness and problems falling asleep than others. Playing outside had a connection with a reduction in strong symptoms in girls; however, the connection was not statistically significant amongst boys.

The reason for the differences between girls’ and boys’ reactions and different perceptions of anxiety are one of those potential topics that require further study. Additional new topics relate to the importance of media and virtual nature experiences for the relationship with nature and wellbeing of children and young people.

Children know how to act and tell

In the qualitative study, there was more variation than in the quantitative one, in terms of what role nature plays for children. In the interviews conducted in the studies, the children named various activities that can be done in nature, such as play, fish and swim. Interviews also highlighted a connection to nature and a revival process that can be experienced when being surrounded by nature. Children are able to tell what makes them happy when spending time in nature.

“It is essential that children themselves are able to actively seek wellbeing in nature. The fact that nature is accessible to all must be considered in all decision making and planning processes”, says Arola.

It is the duty of adults to provide an opportunity for children to build their own relationship with nature and the opportunity to act and be active in nature. It implies inclusion and the possibility to influence things, for example, during construction of environments or planning of activities in nature.

The purpose of SYKE’s group is to continue research and also provide material for practical applications.

“SYKE aims to produce research that is socially relevant and also rapidly applicable. For example,

I am interested in how we could strengthen children’s relationship in nurseries in their everyday life. This everyday exposure to nature creates a foundation for health and wellbeing, but, of course, nature school activities are also needed. It is also important to consider how children and young people can plan the courtyards of their own nurseries and schools together with professionals. This co-operation has the ability to create surrounding environments that reflect the children’s personalities, environments in which they feel comfortable and that support their wellbeing”, Paloniemi says.

The ideas for the mapping were supported by other speakers at the seminar; children and adolescents spoke about their relationship with nature and researchers and policymakers addressed the topic from different angles. Amongst other things the speakers highlighted issues regarding resources such as the possibility to hold nature clubs and to acquire adequate equipment for spending time in nature.

Interactivity with nature was one of the most important topics discussed.

“Interestingly, the bipolarity of our relationship to nature was also discussed, meaning what we can give to nature in return for spending time there”, says Arola.

“When nature promotes human health, man should also contribute to the health of nature”, Aulake supplements.

NATURE AND THE WELFARE EFFECTS IT PRODUCES, ON THE OTHER HAND, and

concerns about the state of the environment, have emerged in a new way at Itla.

The understanding of the link between children and young people’s wellbeing and ecological sustainability as well as their relationship to nature was discussed further by sustainability experts. Experts from public administration, organizations, foundations and corporations consider supporting the wellbeing of children and young people as part of the promotion of planetary wellbeing and sustainable development.

It is likely that welfare areas will end up adapting methods for which there is no strong evidence to be effective.



Marjo Kurki, PhD, is a specialist researcher at the Research Centre for Child Psychiatry at the University of Turku in the Academy of Finland's Invest flagship project. Her research targets early-stage mental health interventions and their implementation. In addition, Kurki works as a specialist researcher at Itla, where she is responsible for the methodological evaluation of Early Intervention.



There is almost nothing to be said about the social impact of psychosocial services for children and families

There is extensive evidence on the social impact of many Finnish methods used in social and health services. On the other hand there is not so much evidence of the social impact of psychosocial services for children. Something should be done about this matter. To solve the problem, more resources are required to conduct an impact study, writes Marjo Kurki, a specialist researcher.

The premise of health and social care services is that there must be extensive evidence of their social impact. Otherwise, it is a waste of resources and money, and it makes no sense to organize services. There is extensive evidence on the social impact of many Finnish social and health care services. Healthcare relies on the national Current Care Guidelines based on research evidence for treatment and prevention of diseases.

The choice of psychosocial methods and psychological tests for children and families should also be based on the best possible evidence of the social impact of interventions and the reliability of the tests. What truly is the current de facto situation? Is there enough social impact?

International studies indicate low social impact

Psychosocial services use methods to promote mental health and wellbeing and to prevent problems. Psychological tests, on the other hand, refer to surveys or observations with prearranged ways

to interpret measured results. Such is, for example, the GAD-7 form measuring common anxiety disorder.

In order to know if the psychosocial method is effective we need extensive research evidence of positive changes in children's wellbeing. Similarly, the reliability of psychological tests should be based on extensive research evidence.

Very little is known about the social impact of many psychosocial methods and psychological tests in Finland. Sure, the aspiration is to do better, for example, by providing trainings for implementing effective methods. In addition, in October 2021, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health opened a call for government grant applications in regards to the evaluation of psychosocial services for children and adolescents.

The funding provided by the Ministry is intended to support work on the development of welfare areas. Welfare areas should be able to provide effective services in particular. Whether there is sufficient knowledge and skill to do this is uncertain.

It is likely that welfare areas will end up adapting

“Only three per cent of psychosocial interventions and just over ten per cent of psychological tests had strong evidence of social impact.”

methods for which there is no strong evidence to be effective. However; one round of funding applications by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the results it would bring, do not change the overall situation, that requires long-term work and understanding of research knowledge in decision-making processes.

Even a small amount of research indicates major problems with social impact. This became clear in the systematic review that we compiled. The review focuses on the social impact of psychosocial interventions and psychological tests used in all Nordic countries, including Finland, among children under 2 years of age as well as their families. The results of the review are thought-provoking.

Only three per cent of psychosocial interventions and just over ten per cent of psychological tests had strong evidence of social impact. In Finland, the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) form used in maternity counselling, which is developed to identify maternal postnatal depression, is an example of a test with evidence of social impact.

In more than half of the psychosocial interventions, there were no evidence of social impact at all in the Nordic countries or internationally. So neither – strong or good evidence.

At least, three quarters of the psychological tests had good or excellent evidence of social impact. So the problem lies first and foremost in psychosocial interventions, not so much in the social impact of psychological tests.

Examination of social impact requires a lot of time

Strong research evidence means that the results of several high-quality methodical studies on social impact coincide. It is a question of cumulability,

i.e. the cumulability of research data. Now cumulability is low in Finland in regards to psychosocial services for children. It is a matter of insufficient research resources.

Typically, social impact studies are based on analysis of causal relationship. A randomized comparison test is the most effective method for establishing the causal relationship between the given method and the effect. In the experiment, a group of subjects are randomly divided to receive one of several different therapies or methods.

It takes a lot of time to study causal relationships. Examination of social impact cannot be done without several years of follow-up data. This is precisely why impact studies require very specific resources and why funded research projects should be of sufficient length. This is not the case at the moment, at least with regard to the social impact study of psychosocial services.

As a result, psychosocial services for children and families are offered in Finland, with far too little known about their social impact. This is a waste of resources.

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A foundation for lifelong wellbeing and mental health is created during the first 1,000 days

The project First 1,000 Days in the Nordic Countries explores how mental health is promoted in healthcare during pregnancy, and supports the formation of a safe attachment in healthcare for babies and young children, defines risk factors and supports mental wellbeing in daycare and preschool. In Finland, Itla coordinates the Finnish section of the Nordic project in cooperation with the Finnish institute for health and welfare.

In 2021, a review of the social impact of psychosocial interventions and psychological tests was published: *Psychosocial Interventions and Psychological Tests: A Review of the Evidence*.

The aim of the review was to provide assessment data on psychosocial interventions and

psychological tests in use in the Nordic countries, targeted at the time of birth or the child's first two years of age. The review revealed that "almost nothing can be said about the social impact of psychosocial services for Finnish children and families". Therefore, it is important that research efforts are strengthened in the Nordic countries to support the wellbeing of Nordic children and families, as Senior Researcher Marjo Kurki wrote in a paper published at the MustRead Academy in December.

During 2022, the project's policy recommendations will be published as an independent report – *The First 1,000 Days in the Nordic Countries: Policy recommendations*.



BALANCE SHEET

	31 December 2021	31 December 2020
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Material assets		
Machinery and equipment	16,155.82	21,541.10
Investments		
Other shares and participations	53,174,500.63	51,189,088.41
Non-current assets, total	53,190,656.45	51,210,629.51
Current assets		
Receivables		
Non-current		
Other receivables	11,502.00	11,502.00
Current		
Trade receivables	105,564.67	1,677.47
Other receivables	6,224.66	317.31
Accrued income	577,963.19	199,888.79
Current receivables, total	689,752.52	201,883.57
Receivables, total	701,254.52	213,385.57
Cash and bank deposits	6,008,472.61	5,124,276.87
Current assets, total	6,709,727.13	5,337,662.44
TOTAL ASSETS	59,900,383.58	56,548,291.95
LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Initial capital	50,456.38	50,456.38
Donation fund from the Finnish Government	49,999,949.00	49,999,949.00
Profit (loss) from previous accounting periods	6,285,505.46	7,149,045.46
Surplus (deficit) for the accounting period	3,074,840.35	-863,540.00
Total equity	59,410,751.19	56,335,910.84
Liabilities		
Short-term liabilities		
Advances received	121,180.72	0.00
Accounts payables	219,368.53	85,189.97
Other liabilities	38,808.26	27,940.13
Accrued expenses	110,274.88	99,251.01
Liabilities, total	489,632.39	212,381.11
TOTAL LIABILITIES	59,900,383.58	56,548,291.95

INCOME STATEMENT

	1.1.2021–31.12.2021	1.1.2020–31.12.2020
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES		
Child policy knowledge		
Income	26,375.77	50,077.70
Personnel expenses	-302,097.91	-274,887.77
Other expenses	-227,598.68	-241,818.97
Child policy knowledge, total	-503,320.82	-466,629.04
Child policy management skills		
Personnel expenses	-164,616.61	-132,081.63
Other expenses	-50,954.97	-89,141.56
Child policy management skills, total	-215,571.58	-221,223.19
Child policy innovation activities		
Income	56,663.00	0.00
Personnel expenses	-217,247.65	-161,863.70
Other expenses	-511,916.87	-392,338.94
Child policy innovation activities, total	-672,501.52	-554,202.64
Child poverty program		
Personnel expenses	-15,595.52	0.00
Other expenses	-28,960.24	0.00
Child poverty program, total	-44,555.76	0.00
Communication and advocacy		
Income	4,105.39	8,166.26
Other expenses	-61,991.11	-62,802.72
Communication and advocacy, total	-57,885.72	-54,636.46
Grants and contributions	-170,000.00	-106,880.00
Centralized operations		
Income	96,518.61	45,000.00
Personnel expenses	-363,656.75	-384,577.84
Other expenses	-389,171.30	-323,877.10
Centralized operations, total	-656,309.44	-663,454.94
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES, TOTAL	-2,320,144.84	-2,067,026.27

	1.1.2021–31.12.2021	1.1.2020–31.12.2020
INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES		
Income		
Gains on sale of securities	4,407,953.56	1,190,444.05
Dividend income	563,680.83	405,034.32
Interest income	69,306.19	67,734.39
Profit Shares	33,688.03	39,131.19
Other investment income	77,719.38	62,887.30
Reversal of impairment	543,616.23	100,537.16
Total income	5,695,964.22	1,865,768.41
Expenses		
Losses on sale of securities	-79,229.13	-327,060.14
Interest expenses	-27,316.82	-23,532.10
Asset Management	-43,895.55	-37,706.11
Impairment	-150,537.53	-273,983.76
Tax withheld at source	-0.00	-0.03
Total Expenses	300,979.03	-662,282.14
INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES, TOTAL	5,394,985.19	1,203,486.27
EARNINGS FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	3,074,840.35	-863,540.00
SURPLUS (DEFICIT) FOR THE FINANCIAL PERIOD	3,074,840.35	-863,540.00

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