Evaluation of ECEC in Finland

FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

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August 23, 2024, Hannover

Kuva: Kari Leo

On the agenda:

Framing the context

Role of FINEEC

External and internal evaluation

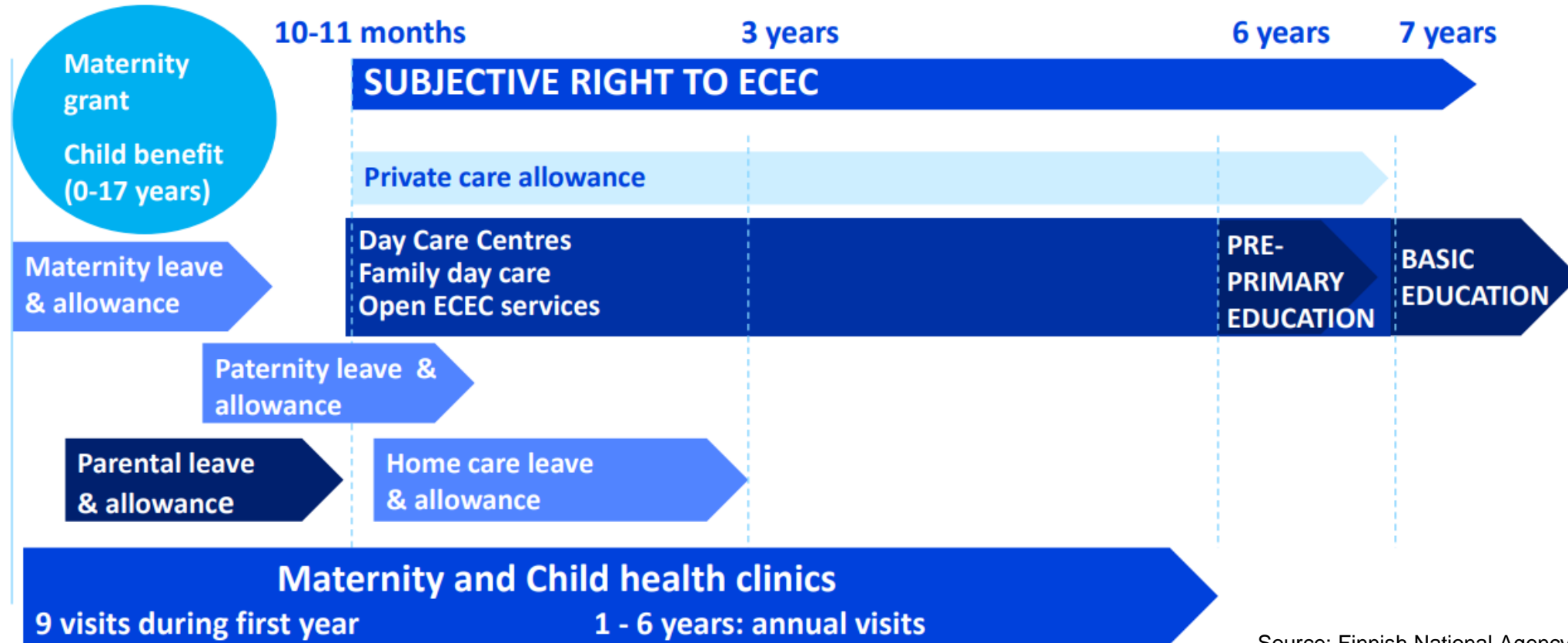**Developing support for ECEC organisers**

Introduction to Valssi evaluation system

Future plans

ECEC in Finland – framing the context

# Parental leave and ECEC system aim to provide all children and families equal opportunities

Source: Finnish National Agency of Education

Finnish ECEC comprises education, care and upbringing

- **293 municipalities responsible for organising ECEC**

- **232 926 children (77,2 % 1-6 y olds) in**
  - **3171 municipal centres**
  - 2376 municipal family day care
  - 330 municipal group family day care (centres)

  - **981 private centres**
  - 732 private family day care
  - 117 group family day care (centres)
  - ➔ Private provision app 15 %, because centres are often smaller

Source: Vipunen database 2022

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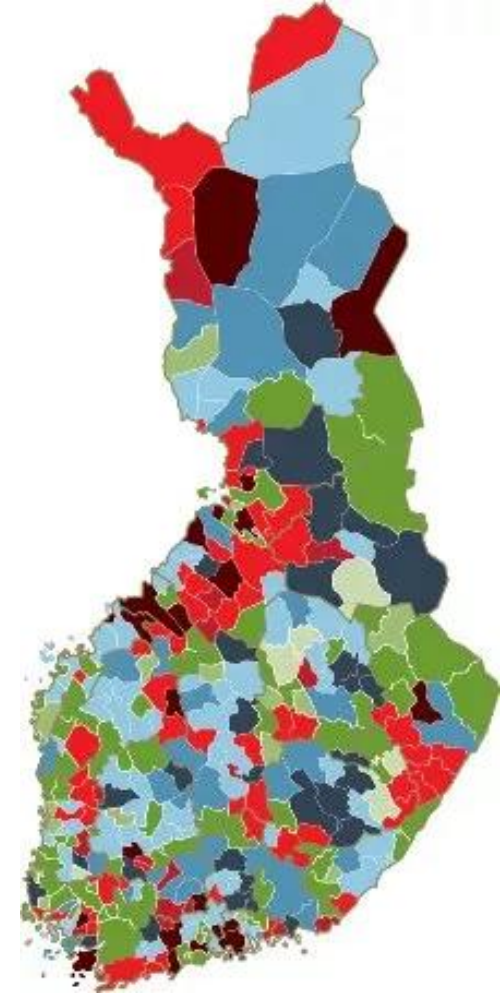
Working in multiprofessional teams – Higher education standards allow autonomy, yet responsibilities

- **Head of ECEC centre,** minimum Bachelor's degree (EQF 6) ➔ **FROM 2030 MASTER'S DEGREE (EQF 7)**

- **Teacher (ECEC),** minimum Bachelor's degree in education (EQF 6)

- **Social pedagogue (ECEC)** Bachelor's degree in healthcare and social services including studies in ECEC and social pedagogy, university of applied sciences (EQF 6)

- **Childcarer (ECEC),** vocational upper secondary qualification (EQF 5)

- **Family daycare childminder,** VET qualification recommended (EQF 4)

- **Pre-primary teacher,** university-educated ECEC teachers (Bachelor or Master of Education, EQF 6-7) or primary teachers (Master of Education, EQF 7)

- **Special education teacher** (ECEC), (EQF 7)

- **Changes in group structures and qualifications from 2030 onwards**

  - Currently 1 Teachers, 2 childcarers ➔ **from 2030 onwards 1 Teacher, 1 Social pedagogue, 1 childcarer**

What are the realities in which ECEC centre heads work in Finland? (FINEEC evaluation: Kuusiholma et al. 2023)

- Evaluation survey sent to all heads of municipal and private ECEC centres in Mainland Finland (n = 293)
  - A total of 1 429 responses were received from 245 municipalities (response rate 56%)

- ECEC centre heads have an average of 24 direct employees (range of 1–75).
- 36 % of heads lead one, 31 % lead two, and 33 % led three or more centres (facilities).

- 34 % of the heads work also in a child group on a permanent or occasional basis.
  - 69% of the heads working permanently in child groups work in the private sector.

- 59% of ECEC centre heads have one deputy, 17% of have several deputies.
  - 24% of heads do not have a deputy at all.

The role of FINEEC in the Finnish ECEC quality assurance system

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Finnish Education Evaluation Centre FINEEC

- **An independent expert organisation focusing on external evaluations of all levels of education from ECEC to higher education**

    - operating as a separate unit of the Finnish National Agency for Education

    - FINEEC was founded in 2014; ECEC became part of it in 2016

    - Around 40 employees (currently 3 in ECEC)

    - Approx. 200 external experts

- **Produces information for decision-making on education policy and the development of education sector on both national and local levels**

    - Based on the continuous feedback (surveys), FINEEC has a good reputation in the ECEC field. Our evaluations and recommendations for development have influence.

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ECEC evaluations aim to develop and steer, not to control
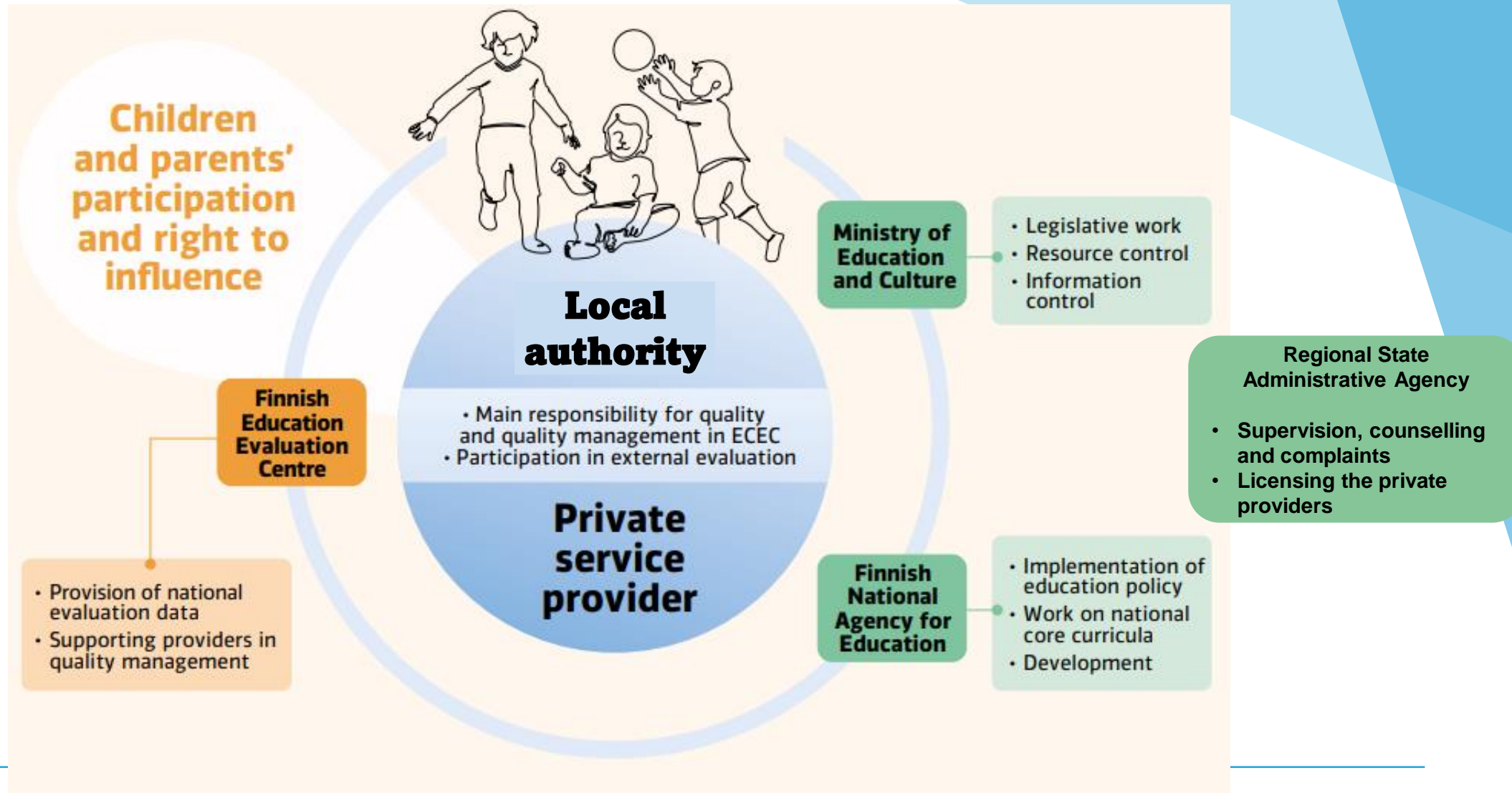
MAIN TASKS OF FINEEC:

1) To implement external evaluations of ECEC in accordance with the national evaluation plan

- Instead of focusing on learning outcomes, the **objective of evaluation in ECEC sector is to promote the preconditions for children's well-being, development, and learning** (Law on ECEC 540/2018).
- FINEEC carries out sample-based national evaluations in order to provide **objective information for decision making and strategic development of ECEC** (no educational inspections).

2) To support ECEC organisers on issues related to their quality management

- National evaluations are based on **the principle of enhancement-led evaluation** (Patton 1997; FINEEC 2020), which emphasises the responsibility of the local actors to monitor, maintain, and improve their own ECEC services.

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Assuring quality of ECEC is a joint task

Children and parents' participation and right to influence

Local authority

- Main responsibility for quality and quality management in ECEC
- Participation in external evaluation

Private service provider

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre

- Provision of national evaluation data
- Supporting providers in quality management

Ministry of Education and Culture

- Legislative work
- Resource control
- Information control

Regional State Administrative Agency

- Supervision, counselling and complaints
- Licensing the private providers

Finnish National Agency for Education

- Implementation of education policy
- Work on national core curricula
- Development

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External evaluations give direction to development work and inform political decision making

External evaluation of ECEC is implemented as thematic evaluations

- Thematic evaluations are conducted on current topics related to ECEC. Evaluations focus on how the goals set for ECEC (pedagogy, curriculum) are met and how the system and structures supporting it should be improved (quality recommendations for different levels are provided).

- The themes and schedules of FINEEC's evaluations are determined in the **National Plan for Education Evaluations**, approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Current plan covers years 2024-2027.

- FINEEC has carried out 1-2 external ECEC evaluations yearly. External evaluation usually includes national level data collection. Multiple methods and data are used to get a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

- The evaluation is carried out by an evaluation group that consists of FINEEC's staff and external experts.

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Examples of external evaluation recommendations for developing ECEC

Education of the professionals in the ECEC sector (2024)

- The competence profiles of qualifications and degrees in ECEC sector should be further clarified.

Implementation of local ECEC curricula (2023)

- The culture of ECEC should be developed towards increasingly seeing inclusion as a holistic and cross-cutting approach.

Leadership and the work of the head of early education centres (2023)

- The management responsibilities of ECEC centre leaders should be limited. The management entities should not be too large.

Our first policy brief for ECEC published in 2024: *Sustainable political decisions are needed to deliver high-quality early childhood education and care*

KANSALLINEN KOULUTUKSEN ARVIOINTIKESKUS

Developing support for ECEC organisers and providers to carry out internal evaluations

ECEC organisers and providers must

- evaluate the ECEC they provide, including the quality and the effectiveness of the activities

- take part in external evaluations of their activities

- publish the key findings of evaluation

(Section 24 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018.)

Legislative tasks of ECEC organisers and providers
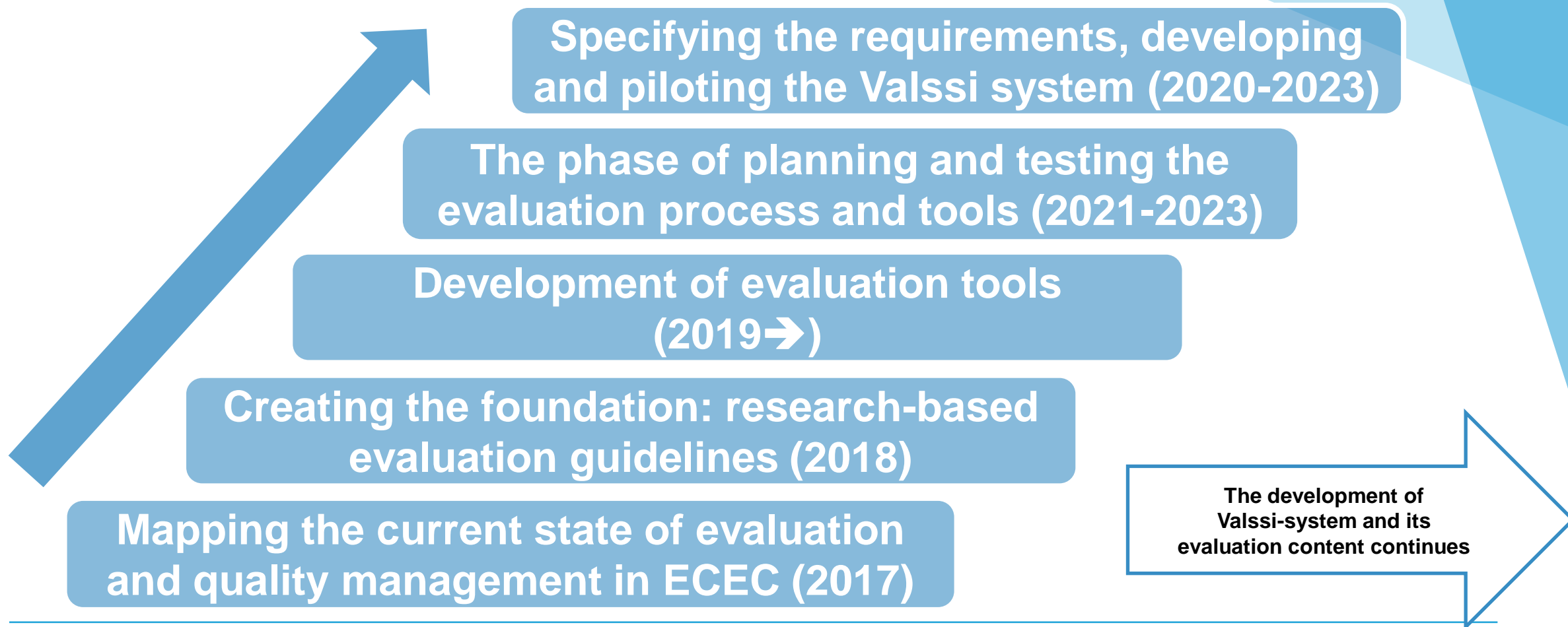
Legislation does not

…specify in detail what the ECEC organisers and providers should evaluate or how the evaluation should be carried out.

…or provide detailed instructions on how, where and in what scope the results should be published.

Consequently, ECEC organisers and providers need support in planning their quality management and carrying out their self-evaluations. (FINEEC, Mikkola et al. 2017)

**Autonomy
Reguirements
Responsibilities**

Support for the quality management of ECEC has been systematically developed since 2016

Specifying the requirements, developing and piloting the Valssi system (2020-2023)

The phase of planning and testing the evaluation process and tools (2021-2023)

Development of evaluation tools (2019➔)

Creating the foundation: research-based evaluation guidelines (2018)

Mapping the current state of evaluation and quality management in ECEC (2017)

The development of Valssi-system and its evaluation content continues

(Vlasov & Salminen 2023; Harkoma, Sarkkinen & Vlasov 2023; Vlasov et al. 2018; Mikkola et al. 2017)

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How did we begin the work?

- Forming the **systemic approach** to quality management and evaluation of Finnish ECEC

- Drawing up national ECEC quality indicators **(= setting up the quality goals for Finnish context)**
    - **Defining** what should happen in ECEC to make it of **good quality**
    - Identifying the **values guiding ECEC** and all evaluation and operationalising them
    - Deriving the key quality factors from the Law on ECEC 540/2018; National ECEC Curriculum 2022; UN Children's Rights1989
    - **Extensive research review was carried out** to find out, what kind of **structural and process factors** are linked to children's learning, development and overall wellbeing

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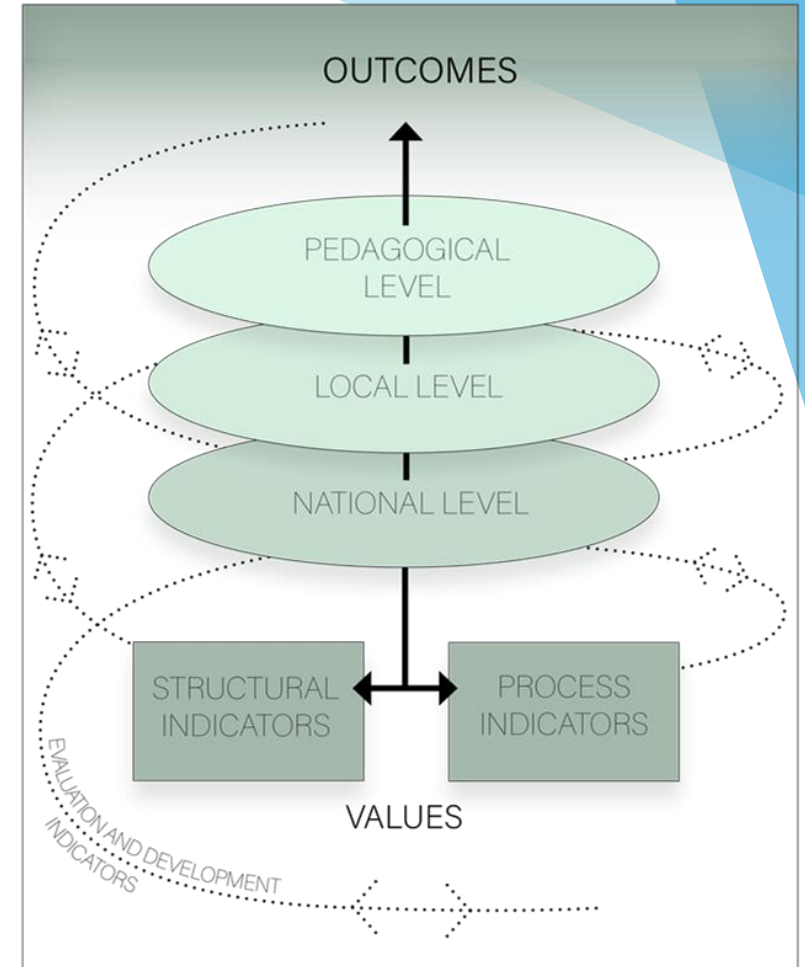
Finnish ECEC legislation is more than a set of regulations (The 10 goals of ECEC)

1. **promote the holistic growth, development, health, and wellbeing of each child** as determined by his or her age and development;
2. support the child's **prerequisites** for learning, and promote his or her lifelong learning and implementation of equality in education;
3. **carry out versatile pedagogical activities** based on play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage and enable positive learning experiences;
4. ascertain that the children's ECEC **environment promotes development and learning and is healthy and safe**;
5. safeguard an approach that respects children and **stable interaction relationships** between the children and the ECEC personnel;
6. **provide all children with equal opportunities for ECEC, promote equity and gender equality** as well as help the children develop their capacity to understand and respect the general cultural heritage and each child's linguistic, cultural, religious, and ideological background;
7. **recognise the child's need for individual support** and provide him or her with appropriate support in ECEC if the need arises, in cross-sectoral cooperation when necessary;
8. develop the child's teamwork and interaction skills, promote the child's ability to act in a peer group as well as **guide him or her towards acting responsibly and sustainably, respecting other people and becoming members of the society**;
9. ensure that the children get an **opportunity to participate and influence** matters concerning them;
10. **act together with the child as well as the child's parent or other guardian** to promote the child's balanced development and holistic well-being as well as to support the parent or other guardian in educating the children.

The pedagogical framework of ECEC curriculum

SUOMI FINLAND

TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES

Thinking and learning

Participation and involvement

Multiliteracy and competence in information technology

Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression

Taking care of oneself and managing daily life

Environments in which children grow up

CHILDRENS INTERESTS AND NEEDS

Pedagogical activities in early childhood education and care

LEARNING AREAS

Rich world of languages

Diverse forms of expression

Me and our community

Exploring and interacting with my environment

I grow, move and develop

I learn

I play

I experience

A LEARNING AND WELLBEING CHILD

I move

I participate

I explore

I act

I express my self

Education, instruction and care

Principles and procedures   Learning environments   Working methods   Cooperation

Pedagogical documentation   Evaluation and development

UNDERLYING VALUES   CONCEPTION OF LEARNING

Defined structural factors of ECEC quality (13 factors – 34 indicators)

Structural factors of ECEC quality	Examples of indicators
• Legislation on ECEC • Adequacy, availability, accessibility and inclusiveness of ECEC • Curriculum guiding ECEC	*National level:* **The national steering system safeguards every child's right to ECEC. High-quality services implementing the principle of inclusiveness are available and accessible to all children.** *Local level:* **ECEC organisers must ensure the availability and accessibility to all children of high-quality ECEC services in which the principle of inclusiveness is implemented.** *Pedagogical level:* **ECEC staff ensure that all children can participate in all activities, regardless of their background and individual characteristics.**
• Staff's basic and in-service training and other competence development	…
• Guidance and counselling related to ECEC for guardians • Guidance, advice and oversight related to ECEC services	…
• Uniform educational system and horizontal transitions	…
• Structures for evaluating and developing ECEC	…
• ECEC leadership system • Staff structure and resources • Working time structures and planning	**The local level has a clear decision-making and leadership system, leadership structures and procedures for ECEC. The leadership system supports the staff's pedagogical work and the children's wellbeing as well as ensures that the objectives set for ECEC are achieved.**
• Child group structure and size • Learning environments of ECEC	**All ECEC learning environments are healthy, safe and diverse and promote learning.**

Defined process factors of ECEC quality (7 factors – 26 indicators)

Process-related factors of ECEC quality	Examples of indicators
• Staff-child interaction	Interaction is positive, caring, encouraging and gentle. The staff are committed to each child and the child group.
• Pedagogical planning, documentation, evaluation and development	The staff observe and document the children's daily lives in ECEC regularly and systematically in order to understand the child's world of experience. Information produced together with the children by diverse methods is used in the planning, implementation, evaluation and development of the activities.
• Pedagogical activities and learning environments	The staff and the children carry out together versatile pedagogical activities based on play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage that offer positive learning experiences for the children. The activities promote the achievement of objectives set for different areas of learning and transversal competence.
• Leadership at the level of pedagogical activities	The ECEC teacher is responsible for planning the activities for the child group, achieving the objectives set for the activities, and the evaluation and development of the activities. The entire staff work together to plan, implement, evaluate and develop the pedagogical activities.
• Peer interaction and group atmosphere	…
• Interaction among staff and multidisciplinary cooperation	…
• Interaction between staff and guardians	…

Development continues by drawing up more specific evaluation criteria and self-evaluation tools

- **Official mandate and approval from the government:** Ministry of Education and Culture appointed us (with funding) to develop <u>quality criteria</u> for Finnish ECEC and to take part in the development of a digital evaluation system

- **Quality criteria and the national self-evaluation tools were then developed in close co-operation with researchers, experts, and the users (Harkoma et al. 2021)**
  - Over 30 Finnish ECEC university researchers and other experts (eg. Samí parliament, parent association) have taken part in defining the evaluation criteria
  - We carried out a pilot-study 11/2020 – 03/2021 (63 municipalities, 153 public and private ECEC centres, as well as family day-caretakers from one municipality) to test out both the criteria and the planned evaluation process
  - The positive results of the pilot confirmed that we could continue with the development path we had chosen

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Evaluation tools for structural factors of ECEC quality

Structural factors of ECEC quality	Valssi evaluation tools
• Legislation on ECEC • Adequacy, availability, accessibility and inclusiveness of ECEC • Curriculum guiding ECEC	• **Local guidelines of support for development and learning** • **Local curriculum process**
• Staff's basic and in-service training and other competence development	• **Staff's in-service training and other competence development**
• Guidance and counselling related to ECEC for guardians • Guidance, advice and oversight related to ECEC services	• **Guidance and counselling related to ECEC for guardians** • **Guidance and oversight of and advice provision for private ECEC services**
• Uniform educational system and horizontal transitions	• **Structures for children's transitions from home to ECEC**
• Structures for evaluating and developing ECEC	• **Quality management and systematic evaluation of services**
• ECEC leadership system • Staff structure and resources • Working time structures and planning	• **Pedagogical leadership (upcoming)**
• Child group structure and size • Learning environments of ECEC	• **Physical learning environment**

Evaluation tools for process factors of ECEC

Process-related factors of ECEC quality	Valssi evaluation tool
• Staff-child interaction	• **Sensitive interaction and different ways of expression** • **Reciprocal and linguistic interaction**
• Pedagogical planning, documentation, evaluation and development	• **The pedagogical process (planning, documentation, evaluation and development of activities)**
• Pedagogical activities and learning environments	• **Mathematical thinking** • **Technology education** • **Environment and sustainability education** • **Multiliteracy, digital competence and media education** • **Physical education** • **Play** • **Food education** • **Basic activities** • **Support for the child** • **Physical learning environment**
• Leadership at the level of pedagogical activities	• **Pedagogical leadership (upcoming)**
• Peer interaction and group atmosphere	• **Peer interaction, togetherness and group atmosphere** • **Supporting the child's emotional well-being and participation**
• Interaction among staff and multidisciplinary cooperation	• **Multidisciplinary cooperation** • **Interaction between staff**
• Interaction between staff and guardians	• **Educational cooperation and guardians' participation**

30.8.2024

Sensitive interaction and ways of expression (evaluation tool for staff)

Assessment scale: implemented very weakly – implemented weakly – implemented moderately – implemented well – implemented very well

- I face the children without haste in different situations of the day.

- I make sure that all the children in the group are shown warmth and acceptance on a daily basis.

- I use banter and humor in my interactions in a way that a child can understand.

- I am consciously present and ready to participate in the interaction with children in different situations of the day.

- I make sure that every child is welcomed to the group when they arrive, and at the same time I show that the child is an expected and important member of the group.

- When the child arrives, I make sure that they can participate in the group's activities.

- I give my coworkers peace of mind to focus on activities with the children.

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Example of an evaluation form of play (evaluation tool for staff)

Assessment scale: implemented very weakly – implemented weakly – implemented moderately – implemented well – implemented very well

- We show interest in children's play.

- We consciously arrange time to play with the children.

- We empathise children's play while playing with the children. *(The facial expressions, gestures, body movements and tone of voice of an adult participating in play have liveliness and warmth.)*

- We use playful interaction as well as humor and banter in guiding play. *(Eye contact, expressions and gestures)*

- We create shared play worlds with children that last for several days.

- We combine play with areas of learning and other forms of pedagogical activities.

- We discuss the ways of guiding the play together and share good practices with each other.

- We document children's play and inform parents of it in a variety of ways.

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How are children included in the evaluation?

- Our evaluations have shown that **children's participation in planning and evaluating of the activities should be enhanced** (Repo et al., 2019; Juutinen et al., 2021).

- **Staff needs support**: FINEEC's new publication presents comprehensive and child-friendly methods.

- **Children do not use the digital system Valssi.** Instead, the staff must ensure that children are included in the planning and evaluation of the pedagogical and everyday activities.

- Instead, it is important to think about **what participation means and how children's opportunities to influence can be increased.**

- Enhancing understanding **how young children can be heard by applying age and development appropriate methods, rather than methods derived from the adult world.**

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CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING AND EVALUATING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

SUMMARIES 13:2022

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Combining internal and external evaluation

External and internal evaluations on developing the quality of ECEC system

- Evaluation data on ECEC is produced together by different actors and at many different levels.
    - External evaluation at the national level
    - Self-evaluation at the local level and
    - Self-evaluation at the level of pedagogical activities (center, group, individual child's needs).

- The topics for evaluation stem from multiple perspectives and have different focus. Evaluation on all levels is based on the national laws and national curricula.

- Information produced from different viewpoints and based on different data sets lays the foundation for the systematic development of early childhood education and care.

- External and internal evaluation together strengthen the ECEC system's quality.

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External and internal evaluation on structural factors of ECEC quality

Structural factors of ECEC quality	External evaluation	Internal evaluation (Valssi evaluation tool)
• Legislation on ECEC • Adequacy, availability, accessibility and inclusiveness of ECEC • Curriculum guiding ECEC	**Multiple curricula-focused evaluations (2018, 2019, 2023)**	• Local guidelines of support for development and learning • Local curriculum process
• Staff's basic and in-service training and other competence development	**Education of the professionals in the ECEC sector (2014, 2024)**	• Staff's in-service training and other competence development
• Guidance and counselling related to ECEC for guardians • Guidance, advice and oversight related to ECEC services	**Evaluation of the experiment on free ECEC for 5 years old (2019, 2020, 2021)**	• Guidance and counselling related to ECEC for guardians • Guidance and oversight of and advice provision for private ECEC services
• Uniform educational system and horizontal transitions	**Evaluation on ECEC for under 3 years old (coming)**	• Structures for children's transitions from home to ECEC
• Structures for evaluating and developing ECEC	**Current state of quality evaluation in ECEC (2017)**	• Quality management and systematic evaluation of services
• ECEC leadership system • Staff structure and resources • Working time structures and planning	**Leadership and the work of the head of early education centres (2021, 2023)**	• Pedagogical leadership (upcoming)
• Child group structure and size • Learning environments of ECEC	**Pedagogy for five-year-olds and the current state of skills and art education in ECEC (2021)**	• Physical learning environment

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External and internal evaluation on process factors of ECEC quality

| Process-related factors of ECEC quality	External evaluation	Internal evaluation (Valssi evaluation tool)
• Staff-child interaction	• **Process-related factors are a continuous theme on external evaluations:**	• Sensitive interaction and different ways of expression • Reciprocal and linguistic interaction
• Pedagogical planning, documentation, evaluation and development	• **Implementation of local ECEC curricula at day-care centres and in family day care (2023)**	• The pedagogical process (planning, documentation, evaluation and development of activities)
• Pedagogical activities and learning environments	• **Pedagogy for five-year-olds and the current state of skills and art education ECEC (2021)** • **Every-day quality in early childhood education and care (2019)**	• Mathematical thinking • Technology education • Environment and sustainability education • Multiliteracy, digital competence and media education • Physical education • Play • Food education • Basic activities • Support for the child • Physical learning environment
• Leadership at the level of pedagogical activities	• **Leadership and the work of the heads of early education centres (2021, 2023)**	• Pedagogical leadership (upcoming)
• Peer interaction and group atmosphere	• **Evaluation on anti-bullying activities and methods on bullying prevention and supporting social-emotional skills in ECEC (upcoming)**	• Peer interaction, togetherness and group atmosphere • Supporting the child's emotional well-being and participation
• Interaction among staff and multidisciplinary cooperation		• Multidisciplinary cooperation • Interaction between staff
• Interaction between staff and guardians		• Educational cooperation and guardians' participation

VALSSI – QUALITY EVALUATION SYSTEM FOR ECEC

SUPPORT FOR PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

Forming processes and structures for quality management and creating a quality culture

Source: Main elements of quality management in the education and ECEC sector (Link to the publication: FINEEC 2023)
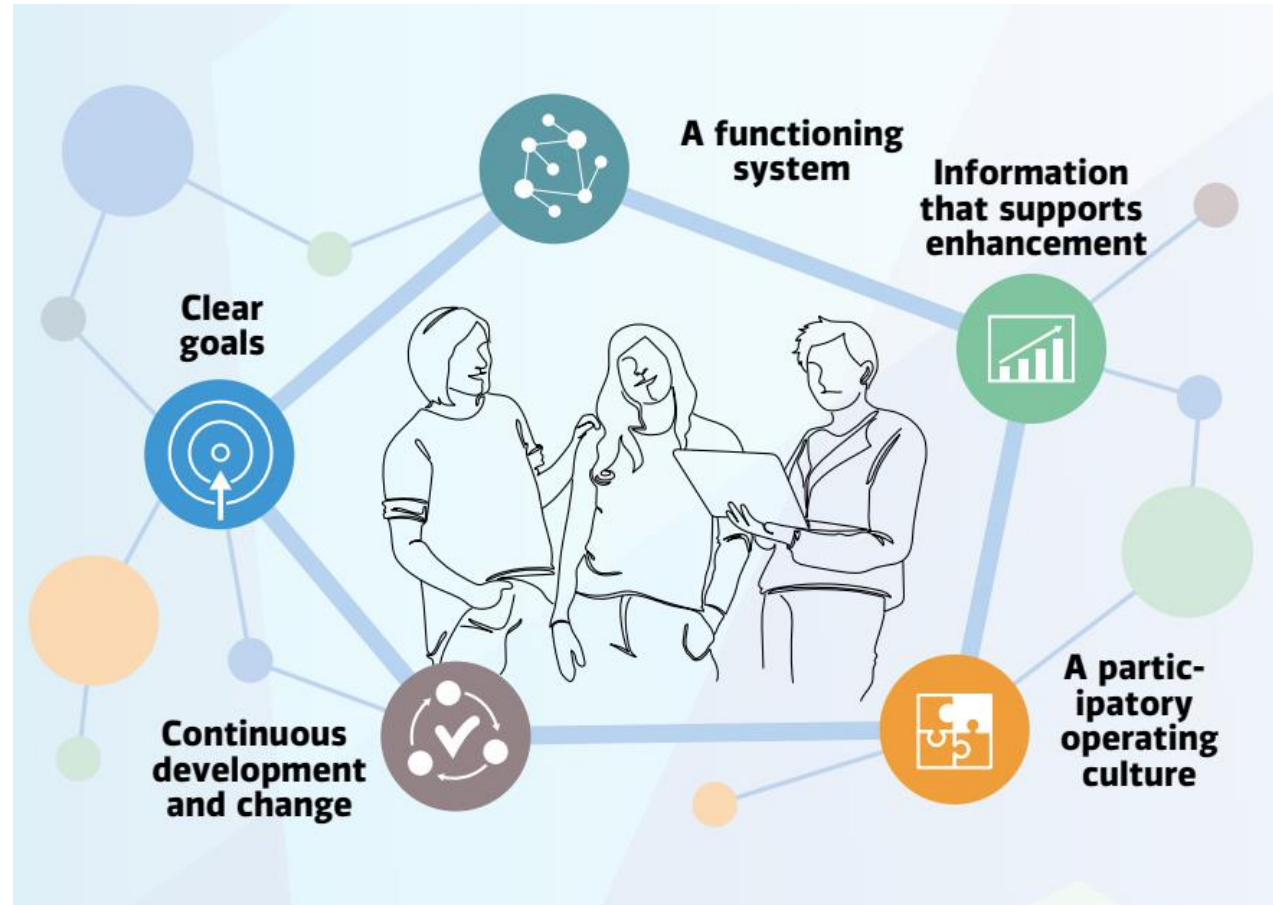
A national quality evaluation system for all ECEC organisers and providers

A digital system that is laid down in the Act on FINEEC

Support service for quality management and leadership (free of charge and voluntary)

Impactful information to support decision making

VALSSI

Nationally unified, research based evaluation tools

Enhancement led and participative evaluation

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Designing a concrete and easy-to-follow evaluation process

1. Preparations for evaluation

2. Data collection with Valssi

3. Reporting of data collection

4. Discussion and reflection on all levels

5. Results and plans for development on all levels

6. Evaluation conclusion and launch of development plans

VALSSI

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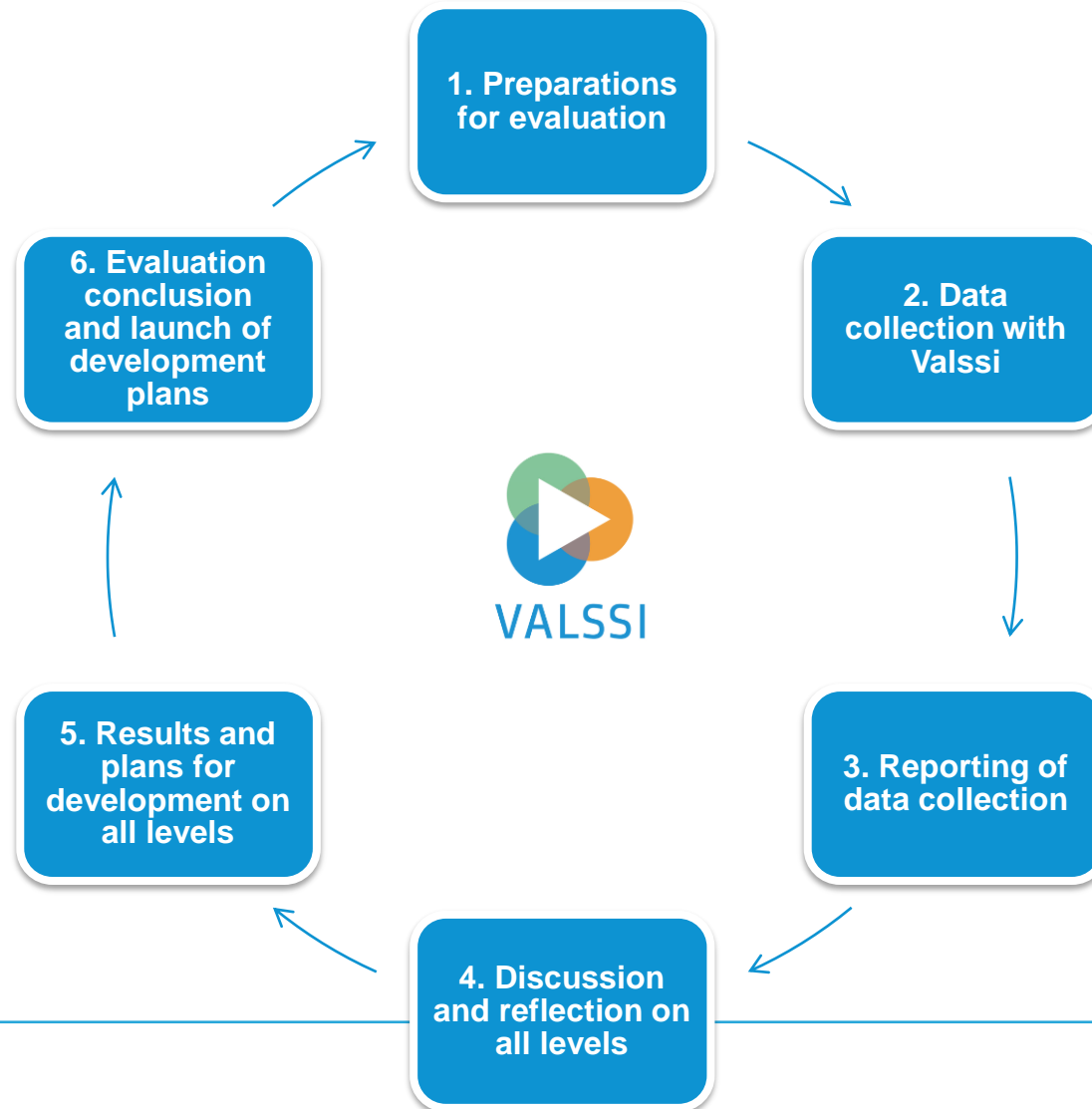
Evaluation process with Valssi system

Starting the evaluation

Management team of municipality / private service provider starts the evaluation.

The head of an ECEC centre prepares the evaluation process.

Informing the staff and parents about the upcoming evaluation.

Discussion and shared understanding of the evaluation process's goals and methods.

Data collection

The data collection is organized from management level and performed in each centre.

The head of an ECEC centre sends the evaluation forms to the staff.

Staff evaluates their own or the group's pedagogical activities with the evaluation tool.

Background info / demographics from Varda, the national ECEC data warehouse.

Reflection

Management team reviews the evaluation report and initial findings.

Heads of ECEC centres presents the report to their staff.

Groups discussions based on the self evaluation report, observations and professional views.

Through the discussion the strengths and development areas of group's pedagogical activities are identified.

The evaluation results

A development workshop on ECEC centre level is organized.

The key points identified in groups are brought together to create a shared vision of the strengths and development areas.

Based on the joint discussion the head of an ECEC centre prepares a summary of key findings.

Based on centre summaries and other findings the local level draws up the evaluation results.

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Evaluation summaries and results

Concrete and short descriptions of the main findings on center and provider level:

How did we carry out the evaluation?

What data did we use?

Main findings: What are we good at?

What do we need to improve?

How will we do it?

When will we follow, and look at where we are?

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An example of organizer level evaluation results (Sensitive interaction and different ways of expression):
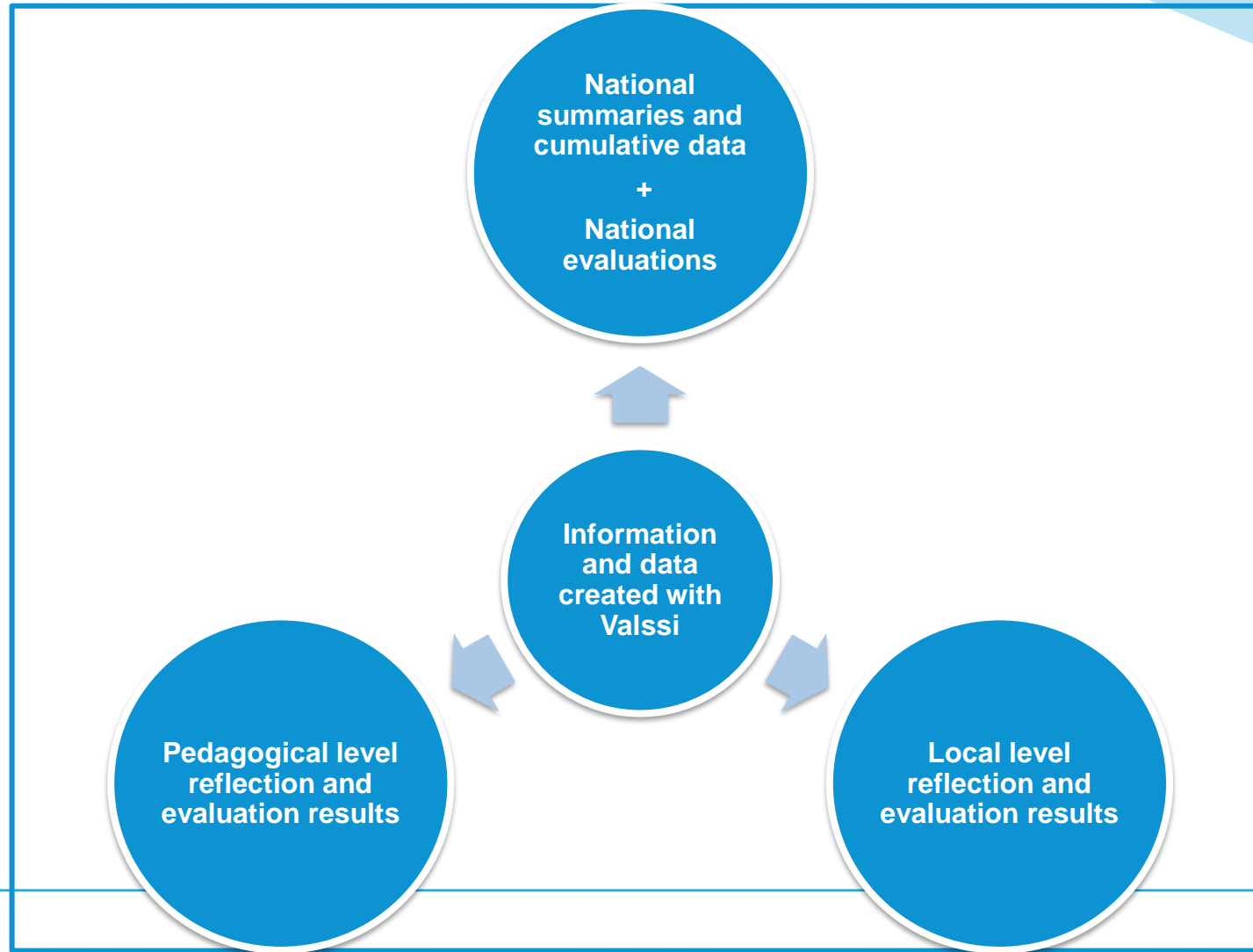
Strengths:

"The interaction with the children in centres is warm and positive: children are encouraged and praised and noticed. Children are given positive feedback and attention is paid to their strengths. Humour and fun are a key part of the interaction between children and educators, as well as between educators themselves. Humour is perceived as an empowering factor in the work community."

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Development points:

"More time and space is needed for pedagogical discussion within the team among educators, as well as with the whole working community. This means, for example, discussing values and common lines. There is a desire to increase the sense of community among staff and to engage staff in common practices and their development.

More adult presence and involvement in children's play is also desired. At the same time, the practice of emotional and interaction skills with the children needs to be strengthened, as does the more active use of pictures and supportive sign language in the groups."

Creating data for both local and national level use

National summaries and cumulative data

+

National evaluations

Information and data created with Valssi

Pedagogical level reflection and evaluation results
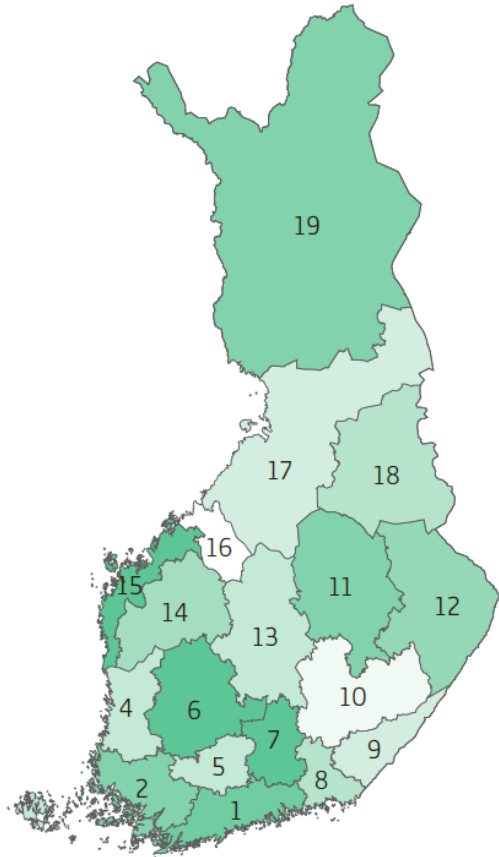
Local level reflection and evaluation results

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How are we doing at the moment?

Implementation of the Valssi-system has gone well

Maakunta	Valssin käyttö
1 Uusimaa	20/26 (77 %)
2 Varsinais-Suomi	18/27 (67 %)
4 Satakunta	8/16 (50 %)
5 Kanta-Häme	7/11 (64 %)
6 Pirkanmaa	20/23 (87 %)
7 Päijät-Häme	9/10 (90 %)
8 Kymenlaakso	3/6 (50 %)
9 Etelä-Karjala	5/9 (56 %)
10 Etelä-Savo	5/12 (42 %)
11 Pohjois-Savo	13/19 (68 %)
12 Pohjois-Karjala	9/13 (69 %)
13 Keski-Suomi	11/22 (50 %)
14 Etelä-Pohjanmaa	11/18 (61 %)
15 Pohjanmaa	12/14 (86 %)
16 Keski-Pohjanmaa	3/8 (38 %)
17 Pohjois-Pohjanmaa	14/30 (47 %)
18 Kainuu	4/8 (50 %)
19 Lappi	13/21 (62 %)

- 185 (/293) municipalities and 76 private day-care centers/chains have registered as Valssi-users. This covers 63 % of all municipalities.

- Number of registered users and municipalities has grown steadily during the first year.

- The feedback from the users has been positive and affirmative.

- 68 % of municipalities and 35 % of private providers, who are not using Valssi, plan to implement it between 2024 and 2025.

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Keeping it simple is a key to success – both evaluation process and the digital system

Valssi-system is easy to use

% of management responses (n = 407)

- ■ Strongly disagree
- □ Somewhat disagree
- ■ Neither disagree nor agree
- □ Somewhat agree
- ■ Strongly agree

(2, 4, 9, 48, 37)

Evaluation process was easy to conduct

Staff (n = 2484): 1, 11, 21, 49, 19

Management (n = 406): 2, 8, 11, 52, 28

% of respondents

- ■ Strongly disagree
- □ Somewhat disagree
- ■ Neither disagree nor agree
- □ Somewhat agree
- ■ Strongly agree

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Evaluations carried out with Valssi

- In total, **27 evaluation tools are available in Valssi. (**18 process; 9 structural)
- The staff have mainly evaluated the process factors of ECEC quality. Evaluation tools have been used in **1661 ECEC centres**, with a total of **17080 responses** from the staff.
- A total of **836 responses** have been received for the evaluation of structures from ECEC management, centre heads, and experts.
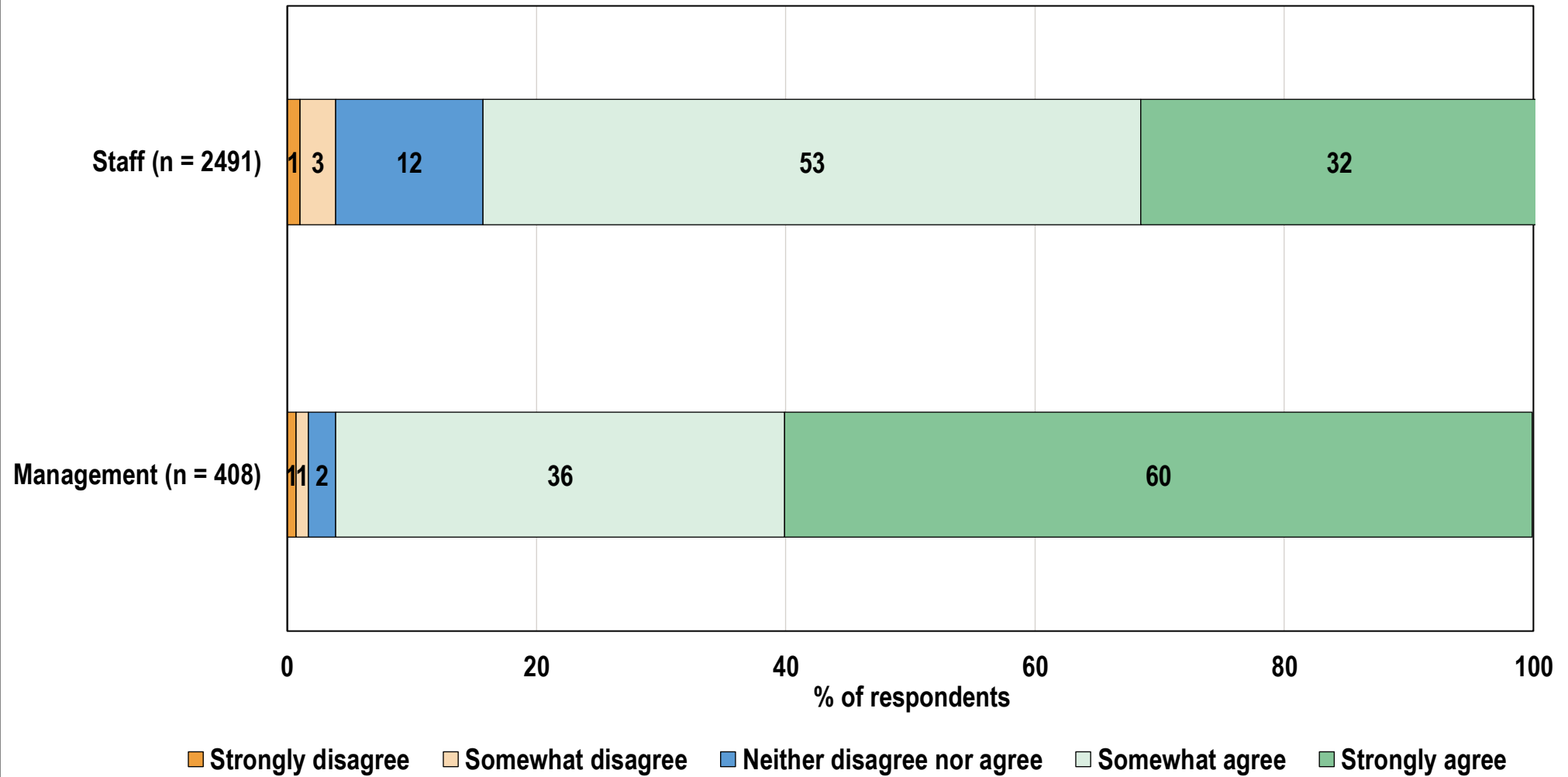
The most common themes for evaluation:
(The number of centres)

1. Sensitive interaction and different ways of expression (324)

2. Play (317)

3. Peer interaction, community togetherness and group atmosphere (193)

4. Support for the child (170)
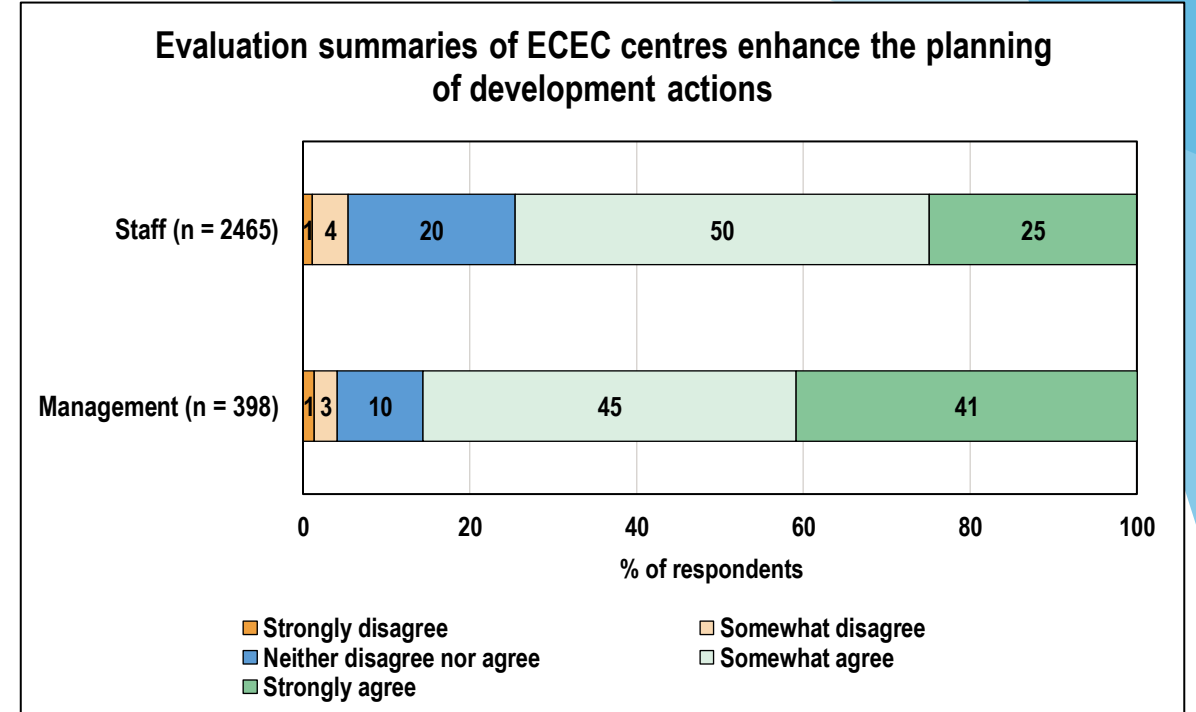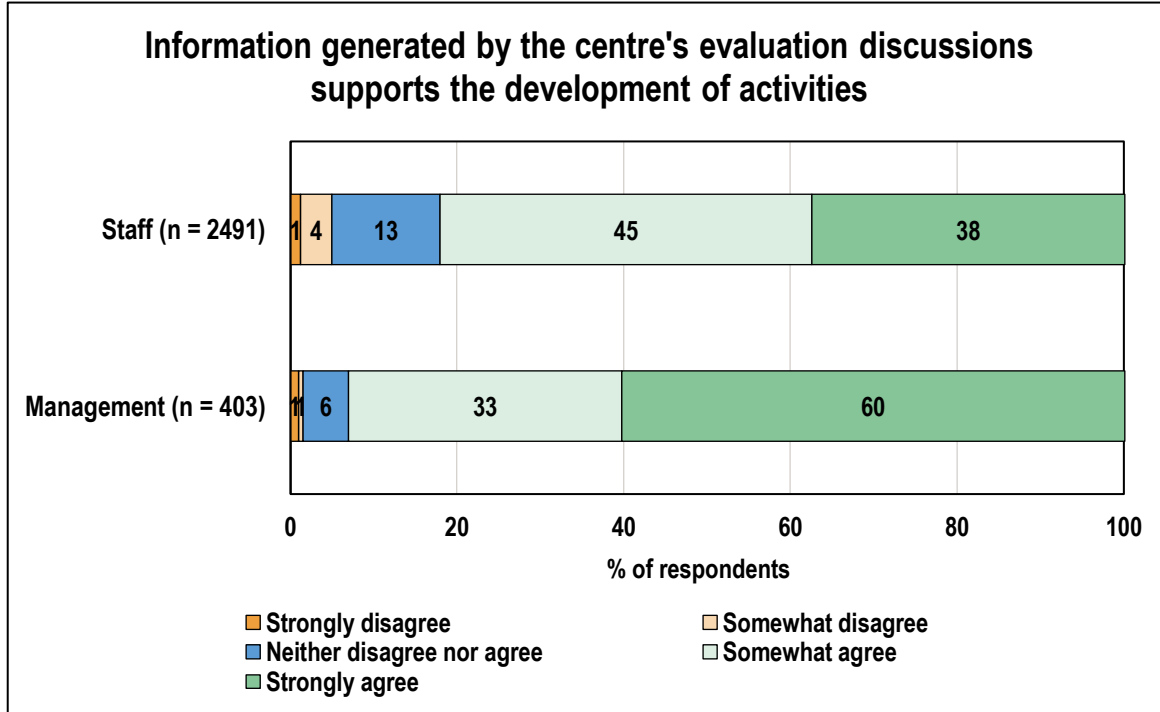
5. Physical learning environment (144)

> Evaluation tools provide ready-to-use material to support the pedagogical discussions. With these tools, we have found areas for development and everyone's knowledge has been strengthened. The knowledge about the needs for improvement have also increased at a conceptual level.

Evaluation tools cover topical and important themes

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Staff (n = 2491)	1	3	12	53	32
Management (n = 408)	1	1	2	36	60

The evaluation process strengthens the participation of staff and the moderation between everyone

Information generated by the centre's evaluation discussions supports the development of activities

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Staff (n = 2491)	1	4	13	45	38
Management (n = 403)	1	1	6	33	60

Evaluation summaries of ECEC centres enhance the planning of development actions

|	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Staff (n = 2465)	1	4	20	50	25
Management (n = 398)	1	3	10	45	41

Feedback from the local level

> It took some time to get the overall picture of the evaluation process and to understand how the areas for improvement relate to other development aspects. Now, after a year of brainstorming, the local evaluation process has taken its shape and we are ready to move forward. Special thanks to the skilled developers of Valssi, and for the time and effort that has been put into creating the system. It was great that the system was actually ready when we started using it. Often systems are incomplete when they are put into operation.

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# Conclusions: Valssi supports organisers' quality management, leadership and development of ECEC

Research-based evaluation tools are useful and suitable for the evaluation of ECEC on a local and pedagogical level.
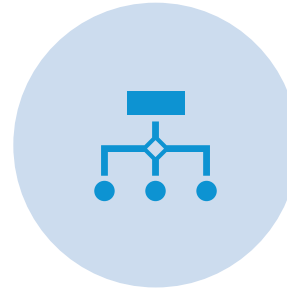
The enhancement-led evaluation process is participative and promotes interaction.

The creation of evaluation results with Valssi helps to support the development of ECEC on organisation and pedagogical level.
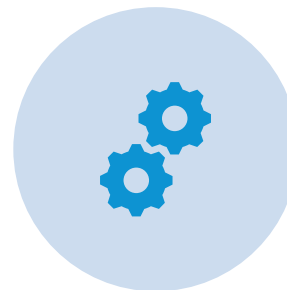
Main challenges for Valssi-system and the evaluation process have been the limitations in time and other resources, as well as technical issues related to the background information.

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Goals for future development of Finnish ECEC evaluation

National level:

- We will have to be able to provide more support for a wide range of organisers and service providers.

- Valssi system and processes will need to be constantly developed and updated.

- Valssi will be used to conduct external evaluation in the future, and this requires many steps from us.

Local level:

- ECEC organisers will need to update their processes for quality management and evaluation.

- The responsibilities for data handling and transfer need to be strengthened.

- Lack of resources and increase in responsibilities challenges the use of Valssi.

Pedagogical level:

- Time for discussion and reflection is needed to ensure shared clear goals.

- Self evaluation requires qualified and motivated staff.

- Evaluation process requires time for leadership on centre level (National evaluation by FINEEC, 2023).

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Links to our online-materials (www.karvi.fi)

- **National plan for Education Evaluation 2024–2027**
- **Main Elements of Quality Management in the Education and ECEC Sector** (2023)
- **Guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of early childhood education and care** (2018)
- **Children's participation in planning and evaluating early childhood education and care** (2022)
- **Sustainable political decisions are needed to deliver high-quality early childhood education and care (Policy Brief 2024)**
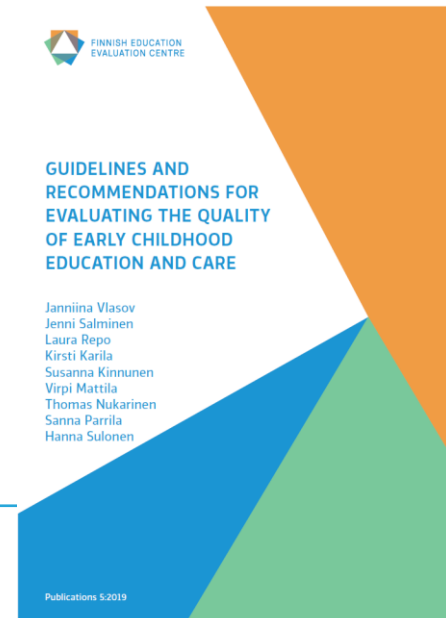
External evaluation reports:

- **Implementation of local ECEC curricula at day-care centres and in family day care (2023)**

- **Evaluation of education in the ECEC sector (2024)**

- **Leadership in early childhood education: The current state, strengths and areas of development (2023)**

- **Summary: Evaluation of the experiment on free of charge early childhood education and care for five-year-olds in the period 2018–2021 (2021)**

- **Pedagogical continuums and joy of expression! Pedagogy for five-year-olds and the current state of skills and art education in early childhood education and care (2021)**

- **Every-day quality in early childhood education and care – ECEC curriculum implementation at day-care centres and in family day-care (2019)**

- **Implementation evaluation of the 2016 national core curriculum for early childhood education and care – Deployment and contents of early childhood education and care curricula (2018)**

- **Policy Brief: Sustainable political decisions are needed to deliver high-quality early childhood education and care (2024)**

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Photo by Kari Leo

Thank you for your interest!

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