

The Finland we want by 2050 – Society’s Commitment to Sustainable Development

Vision: A prosperous Finland with global responsibility for sustainability and the carrying capacity of nature

“Every person in Finland will be an equal and valuable member of society. Finland will be a competence-based welfare society capable of renewal in the face of global changes. Further development of the welfare society will be enabled by a sustainable economy and growth in employment.

“Together we will lay the foundation for sustainability and provide the necessary conditions for all people to live sustainably, and for communities and companies to operate sustainably. The carrying capacity of nature is not exceeded and natural resources are used in a sustainable manner. Finland will promote peace, equality, non-discrimination and justice both nationally and internationally.”

We are living in an age of great global change, mostly due to the growth of the world population and increasing consumption of materials. To manage this change, determined and concerted efforts are called for over the next few decades. From a global perspective, we have already exceeded the ecological risk limits in terms of biodiversity, climate change and the nitrogen cycle. At the same time, over a billion people are struggling in extreme poverty while even greater numbers live without adequate income, electricity or food.

Finland is a modern society that assumes its responsibility for the shared future in the global context and is boldly and actively involved in the joint efforts to address international problems. Through this involvement, the State of Finland, and Finnish companies and organisations will reinforce their international standing and wield more influence. At the same, this will create the necessary conditions for offering sustainable clean solutions, boosting exports and highlighting Finland’s role as a pioneer in promoting sustainable development across the world.

In Finland, national challenges regarding sustainable development include the safeguarding of the welfare state while the population ages, the sustainability gap and changes in the economy, high carbon dioxide emissions relative to the size of the population, the protection of biodiversity, and the sustainable, fair and efficient use of natural resources. Now the challenge is to create a sustainable economy that generates wellbeing and contributes to the quality of life while, at the

same time, reducing the detrimental impacts on the environment. To be able to attain the objectives set for sustainable development in the international context, industrialised countries like Finland need to honour their commitments to financing development cooperation.

Sustainable development is both a necessity and an opportunity, and it is something that we can achieve by engaging in ever-closer and more extensive cooperation with different levels of administration, civil society organisations, companies, educational institutions, research institutes and the general public. It is a question of a humanity-wide learning process that seeks to bring about a cultural change contributing to a sustainable future society and world. To this end, we need jointly established goals and objectives and the commitment to see them through, based on each person's individual expertise and potential.

We will assume responsibility for the national implementation of global sustainable development commitments (Agenda 2030) while, at the same time, creating local and innovative solutions. Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development is one of the key tools in implementing Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its principles and 17 objectives in Finland. In more tangible terms, the promotion of sustainable development calls for:

- a shared determination to solve problems;
- understanding, expertise and continuous, collaborative learning;
- people who shoulder responsibility and bring about changes, as well as leaders and pioneers;
- development of new solutions through joint efforts involving the public, private and third sectors and other operators; adjustment of values and attitudes, more effective and closer cooperation, and political guidance;
- making full use of the potential offered by digitalisation in a sustainable way;
- more effective ways of operation; and
- research and evidence-based decision-making.

To respond to these requirements, we, the members of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, undertake to promote sustainable development and invite all parties and the public to take part in the efforts to achieve the objectives in Society's Commitment.

Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development will serve as a long-term framework and coherent policy instrument for the strategic and programme-defined efforts to be undertaken by the individual administrative sectors and other social actors. The goal is to incorporate the principles and objectives of this Society's Commitment into future government programmes, the Government's foresight efforts and budget preparation.

Society's Commitment represents the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development's interpretation of what sustainable development means, while its actual content at the practical level will be defined by the measures taken by the various parties involved.

Our principles of sustainable development

Cooperation and commitment

Sustainable development calls for joint efforts by everyone. All people must be prepared to make sustainable choices and be active in voicing their opinions. In Finland, we solve our differences

together and trust that our society is able to deal with whatever issues arise. A sustainable society is based on services that cover people's entire lifespan and that provide an adequate level of social security.

Creative use of knowledge and expertise

Research lays the foundation for solving the major challenges faced by society and humanity. The ability to combine skills, knowledge, expertise and creativity is a necessary condition for prudent action over the long term. We need to ensure access to both experience-based knowledge and evidence-based scientific expertise and improve transparency in this area. We also need to make more efficient use of existing information and skills in order to find sustainable solutions. At the same time, new solutions call for cooperation and initiative and involve a process of trial and error. Proper education both at school and at home allows current and future generations to adopt lifestyles and acquire skills, knowledge and competence that support sustainability.

Limited carrying capacity of nature

The wellbeing of the systems that maintain life on Earth is indispensable to the wellbeing of people. As the world population continues to grow, natural resources dwindle per capita. As a result, the capacity of nature to produce and sustain the functions that are vital to the wellbeing of people and all other species has been exceeded. We need to adapt our activities to the carrying capacity of nature and its ability to regenerate in order to ensure that people will continue to have a chance of enjoying a good life.

Broad-based cross-generational thinking

Our actions must be assessed in terms of their far-reaching implications for the future. Instead of promoting short-term interests, we should weigh the effects that our decisions will have on future generations. A cross-generational perspective calls for the ability to see the big picture, understand the complex inter-related consequences of our choices and assume responsibility for our actions.

Global responsibility

The effects of our actions extend far beyond our national borders. Since we share the same challenges as the rest of the world, we are in a position to assume a pioneering role in the efforts to solve shared global problems. By offering sustainable solutions across the world and ensuring, on its own part, that sustainable procedures are duly complied with in global production chains, Finland can make a major contribution to sustainable development. The effect of this contribution will be more far-reaching than if it was limited to Finland alone. Global responsibility calls for a sense of fairness: through its actions, Finland must ensure that others retain their potential for sustainable development and the resulting security and peace. In the international context, we will focus on the forms of cooperation that create demand for Finland's expertise and that allow us to make a difference and generate added value also locally. Finland honours its obligations under international conventions and commitments.

Capacity for renewal and good governance

To succeed in an interdependent, multidimensional and uncertain world, countries need to be able to come to terms with continual change. Sustainable development is a learning process that affects values, attitudes and cultures and that compels us to adopt new ways of acting. Therefore, the renewal of society calls for drivers of change, leaders and trailblazers, as well as close cooperation between the various parties. Consistency in policies, commitment and decision-making capabilities are indispensable to progress in sustainable development. Ultimately, all political and administrative

decision-making should be based on this premise. Sustainable development should be promoted openly, boldly and consistently by enabling change and, at the same time, the effectiveness of the measures taken should be continually assessed. Public and private resources should be allocated flexibly in order to implement the necessary changes.

The principles above underlie all the actions and objectives in the context of Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development.

Our shared objectives

To make our vision a reality, Finland must focus on achieving the following objectives. For the purposes of these objectives, sustainable development is perceived in terms of the wellbeing of people and the environment, a healthy and sustainable economy and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.

Objective

1. Equal prospects for wellbeing

All members of society will be guaranteed equal prospects in terms of health, education and employment. A socially sustainable society treats all its members fairly, supports health and functional capacity, and offers the necessary security and services. Existing resources will be used for reducing inequality and enabling a better quality of life. We will maintain a high standard of education and general knowledge, while promoting social mobility. Sustainable development will be integrated into general and specialised education and lifelong learning. We will reduce inequality and poverty by ensuring an adequate level of income and providing basic social security. We will pay special attention to the wellbeing of children and young people. We will ensure equal access to all welfare services. We will be prepared for the challenges posed by the information society and digitalisation with due regard to the risks of social exclusion, the required skills and competence, and the vulnerability of the systems involved. We respect human dignity and human rights and promote a humane approach and respectful interaction with all people. We promote gender and cross-generational equality. We support the recognition of cultural rights and reinforce cultural values conducive to sustainable development. We support the Sámi people in their efforts to preserve their indigenous culture in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and to transmit it to the future generations. We give due consideration to the rights of immigrants and facilitate their integration into Finnish society.

We will work actively to promote human rights, eliminate extreme poverty and reduce inequality and discrimination in the world. We will honour our commitments to international development cooperation.

2. A participatory society for all

We will strengthen democracy and promote equal opportunities to enable all people to have a say in public affairs and matters that affect their own lives, in the global context as well. All people should feel that they are valuable and a part of society. We will make special efforts to facilitate civic

participation by young people. We will increase transparency in government: free access to information boosts public confidence and allows people to have a say in public affairs. We will promote cultural activity, diversity, equality and tolerance to enable all citizens, including the various minorities, to participate fully in developing the Finnish society. Education at school and at home will play a key role in these efforts.

We will take an active part in international cooperation to promote peace and security, human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as sustainable development on a broad front.

3. Work in a sustainable way

To achieve a more sustainable economy, measures will be taken to create jobs and improve productivity, profitability and quality of work. Our goal is a high employment rate. We will promote the creation of jobs consistent with sustainable development by modernising production methods and business models both at home and, through international cooperation, beyond Finland's borders. Finnish companies will operate in the global economy in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and take steps to ensure a high standard of social responsibility and sustainability, not only in-house but also across their supply chains. We will develop our educational and social security systems to respond to the need for new skills and competencies and address the concerns related to employment relationships, the labour market and adequate basic incomes. We will promote equality in the labour market by facilitating the recruitment of young people, people approaching the retirement age and immigrants, and by improving access to the labour market for people with partial work capacity. We will work actively to reduce the gender pay gap and remove barriers to women's career development. We will promote entrepreneurship and innovation and develop the service sector. We will lower the threshold for starting a business or accepting employment and take steps to combat the shadow economy.

We will help industry to restructure in order to create jobs that generate more added value and improve productivity. We will improve wellness at work, occupational safety and the quality of the working life by expanding opportunities for employees to influence their own work and working environments, and by facilitating the adoption of flexible workplace arrangements and working hours. We will also support the global efforts to promote decent work.

4. Sustainable society and local communities

We will create sustainable and safe communities where jobs, housing, comprehensive services, sustainable transport systems, the use of information and communications technology, and green areas support economic, social and cultural wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of the environment. We will strengthen social cohesion and local communities by supporting an active civil society and developing forums and operating models for collaborative learning and local decision-making to enable people to create pleasant and healthy living environments for themselves. We will reduce the need for motorised traffic, create urban structures conducive to healthy and sustainable transport, increase the implementation of telecommuting arrangements and expand electronic services. We will take steps to sustain the vitality of the countryside and cities and ensure that the development of rural and urban areas is mutually supportive and generates new forms of cooperation. Efforts will also be made to support rural living and entrepreneurship. We will prepare for changes in the climate and water conditions and facilitate local adaptation to climate change.

We will promote sustainable development and planning in urban areas and communities, and improve the opportunities for local communities to participate in decision-making, also in the international context.

5. A carbon-neutral society

Our objective is a carbon-neutral society. To achieve it, we will implement the national roadmap towards a carbon-neutral society and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Key measures to reach this objective are to improve energy efficiency, increase the share of renewable energy sources in a sustainable way, produce and export climate-friendly products and services, and develop the low-carbon sectors of the economy.

We will develop intelligent and interconnected structures, such as transport and energy systems, to enable and promote the use of renewable energy sources and achieve energy savings, while at the same time encouraging people to reduce energy consumption. We will invest in the development of innovative energy technologies and forms of energy, as well as the creation of new business. We will harness the ability of forests and fields to bind carbon by promoting sustainable forestry and agriculture. We will promote carbon neutrality in construction. We will restore ecosystems and the services they provide for the benefit of people and society. These are some of the steps that will help mitigate climate change and facilitate the transition to a carbon-neutral society both in Finland and beyond our borders.

6. A resource-wise economy

Finland and Finns will promote and offer sustainable and competitive solutions, both nationally and globally. We will enhance resource and materials efficiency, promote a circular economy, adopt business models that multiply the productivity of natural resources, encourage investments and facilitate experimentation in all sectors. Another trend offering unprecedented potential for new concepts is digitalisation. Finnish companies will be globally respected for their socially responsible business operations.

Wise utilisation of resources and free access to knowledge give a competitive advantage to companies and communities, providing a sound basis for environmental business. Finland will offer the best test market and operating environment in the world for environmental innovation and a sustainable economy. In particular, we will invest in clean technology, high-quality research, the bioeconomy and renewable energy, as well as in the development and production of non-material goods and services. Finland will be a pioneer in sustainable public procurement and the development of sustainable food production, water resources management and forestry.

7. Lifestyles respectful of the carrying capacity of nature

We will contribute to the efforts to bring the global consumption of natural resources to an environmentally sustainable level. To make it possible to adopt a lifestyle respectful of nature, it is necessary to develop the existing technology and have society adapt to a more resource-wise low-emission economy. We will focus on encouraging both consumers and companies to reduce their ecological footprints. At the same time, we will intensify efforts to promote exports of sustainable cleantech solutions and by doing so will enlarge our positive carbon handprint. We will make it as easy and cost-effective as possible for consumers to make choices that conserve natural resources in terms of housing, transport and food. In these efforts, the public sector can serve as an enabler and

set an example. We will encourage companies and communities to offer sustainably produced products and services to consumers. We will strengthen people's relationship with nature, educate the public in eco-social issues and promote positive attitudes towards sustainable choices. We will support lifestyles based on non-material consumption and services that sustain such lifestyles, such as sustainable nature tourism.

8. Decision-making respectful of nature

We will increase people's respect for biodiversity and raise their awareness of its importance in order to persuade administration, municipalities, companies and the public to give due consideration to sustainability issues in their decision-making and actions. The objective is to stop biodiversity loss by 2020.

We will allocate more resources to education and guidance that promote biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources with due regard to the rights of ownership. We will harness the benefits offered by nature on a sustainable basis for the good of the people and society at large. We will reassess environmentally harmful incentives with due regard to the local social, economic and cultural conditions. We will promote the use of scientific evidence in support of decision-making.

We will support decision-making that is respectful of nature and we will support measures that reverse biodiversity loss and that contribute to the conservation of seas, also in the international context.

Commitments to operational objectives and monitoring of performance in attaining the objectives

Operational commitments

To reach the objectives detailed in this document, operational commitments to specific measures will be invited from administrative sectors and other parties, such as companies, municipalities, organisations, educational institutions and local actors. Private individuals may also make their own similar commitments.

By making these commitments, the parties commit themselves to do their part to attain the objectives outlined in Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development. The commitments include concrete measures, changes in operating procedures and innovative trials that promote our shared goals and that can be carried out over the next 5 to 10 years. Through these concrete commitments, the parties can choose to advance all or just some of the shared objectives. When undertaking their commitments, the parties will, at the same time, contribute to the national implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Commitments are invited by the National Commission on Sustainable Development and its secretariat. All commitments are posted on the Commission's website at sitoumus2050.fi.

The National Commission and its general secretariat actively contribute to the implementation of Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development by bringing together the various parties,

communicating results, encouraging cooperation in a given sector or related to a given objective, and promoting the exchange of information on best practices.

Monitoring of Society's Commitment

The National Commission and its secretariat regularly monitor the implementation and attainment of the objectives detailed in Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development. The general secretariat provides a reporting and monitoring platform for the affiliated parties and it reports on the progress made in implementation. The attainment of the shared objectives, milestones and individual commitments to specific measures will be monitored continuously on a real time basis by means of impact and monitoring indicators. Additionally, progress in Society's Commitment is reviewed at annual events.