

# Children in reception centres

## Overview of the on-going research project and its methodology

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# Asylum-seeking children in Finland 2018

- Applications
  - Accompanied children 806
  - Unaccompanied children 109
- All unaccompanied minors are accommodated in special under-age units, accompanied children and their families are accommodated in adult units.
  - 40 units for adults and 6 for unaccompanied minors

# Introduction

- UN Convention on the Rights of Children:
  - Every child has the right ‘to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities’
- Finnish law and the human rights treaties:
  - The asylum-seeking children in Finland have the right to obtain the same health care and social services as Finnish children



# Introduction

- Protected on Paper? An analysis of Nordic country responses to asylum-seeking children. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2018)
  - Clear tendency to give migration law priority over the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Municipalities are not obliged to offer early childhood education places to asylum-seeking children.



## Good Practice 4: Finland

In Finland, Save the Children implemented a project to establish child-friendly spaces at a few selected reception centres. The project has been a success because it provides a breathing space, not only for children in the centre, but also for the adults there, who can play with their children in the space, or simply enjoy the community feeling that builds around it.

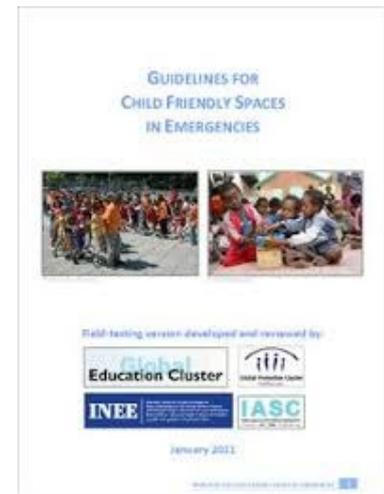
Source: Interview with Save the Children Finland, Helsinki, 26 October 2017.

# Introduction

- Children frequently deprioritized in environments in which meeting basic needs is a challenge
- Double exclusion?
  - ‘Out of place’ in the society, and ‘with no place’ in the reception centre
- What is it like for children and adults to live in reception centres depends on
  - The buildings and the people who live and work there
  - The relations to the local community
  - National and international rules and regulations
  - Public opinion and on wars and other political events

# Child Friendly Space (CFS)

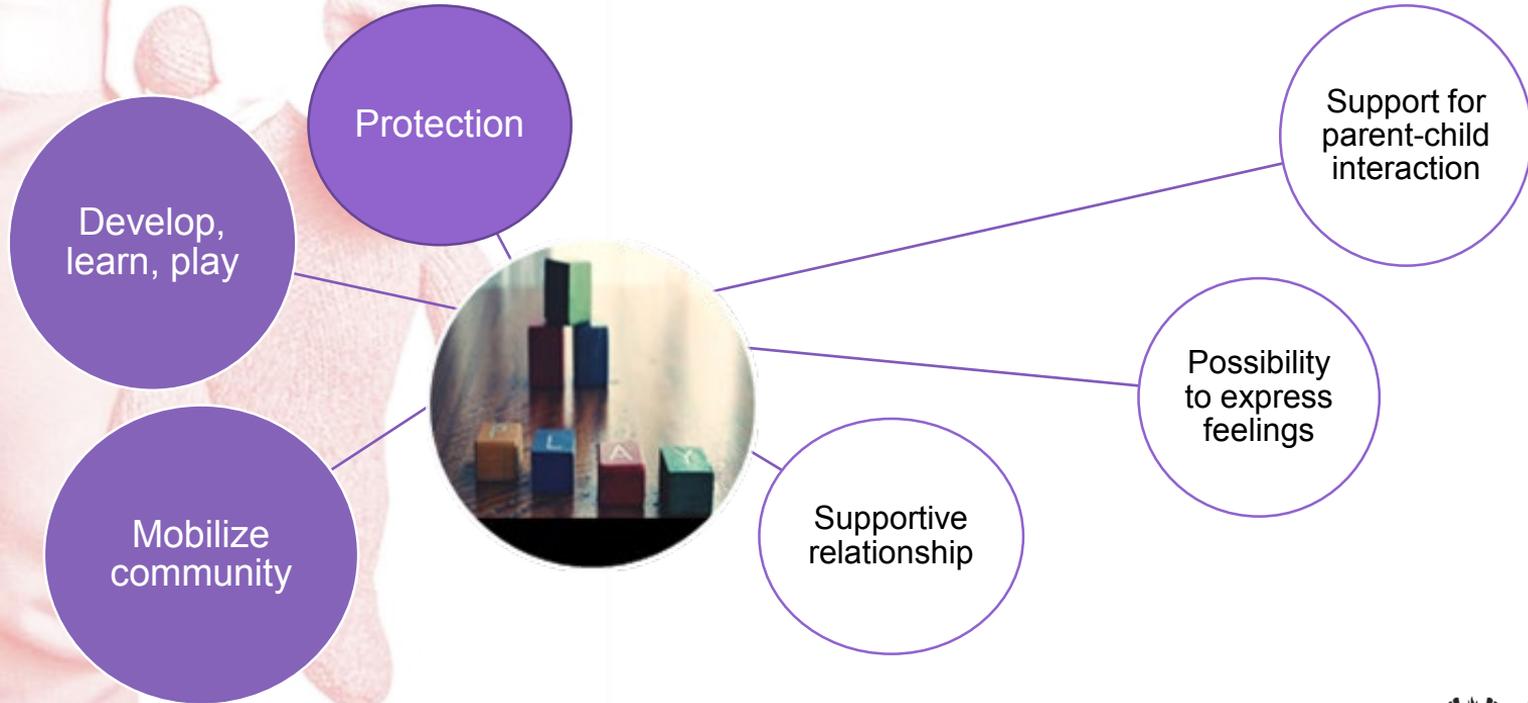
- An operating model used around the world to support children affected by different crises
- Supports the resilience and well-being of children through community organized, structured activities conducted in a safe, child-friendly, and stimulating environment
- The need for basic services, safety, care, daily structure and meaningful action for children escaping life- and health-threatening circumstances are the same irrespective of the surrounding environment



# CFS in Finland

- Save the Children pilot project started in 2015
  - The CFS concept was adapted to the reception centre environment in which it had not been previously implemented.
- CFS in the reception centre in Oulu
  - Activities 2-3 times a week
  - Mainly for under school-aged children
  - Trained volunteers together with the Save the Children supervisor
    - Also volunteers from amongst the asylum seekers living in the centre
  - The space is well-equipped with materials such as games, toys, clay, hobby crafts and costumes to support and enhance children's healthy development and wellbeing.

# CFS objectives



# CFS literature

- Lack of evidence of impact of these interventions due to major design weaknesses
- Metzler J, Diaconu K, Hermosilla S, et al. Short- and longer-term impacts of child friendly space interventions in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Uganda. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*. 2019.
  - The first rigorous analysis of both short- and longer-term impacts
  - Attendance at CFSs supported children's well-being and development.
  - Sustained impact beyond active CFS programming was not demonstrated.

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# Research Questions

- Do children attending CFS have better psychological outcome and psychosocial situation compared to the children in the control group?
- What kind of experiences parents and reception centre employees have of reception centre conditions that support children? What kind of experiences parents and reception centre employees have of CFS?
- Does CFS influence the policies of reception centre by making children's needs better observed and met?

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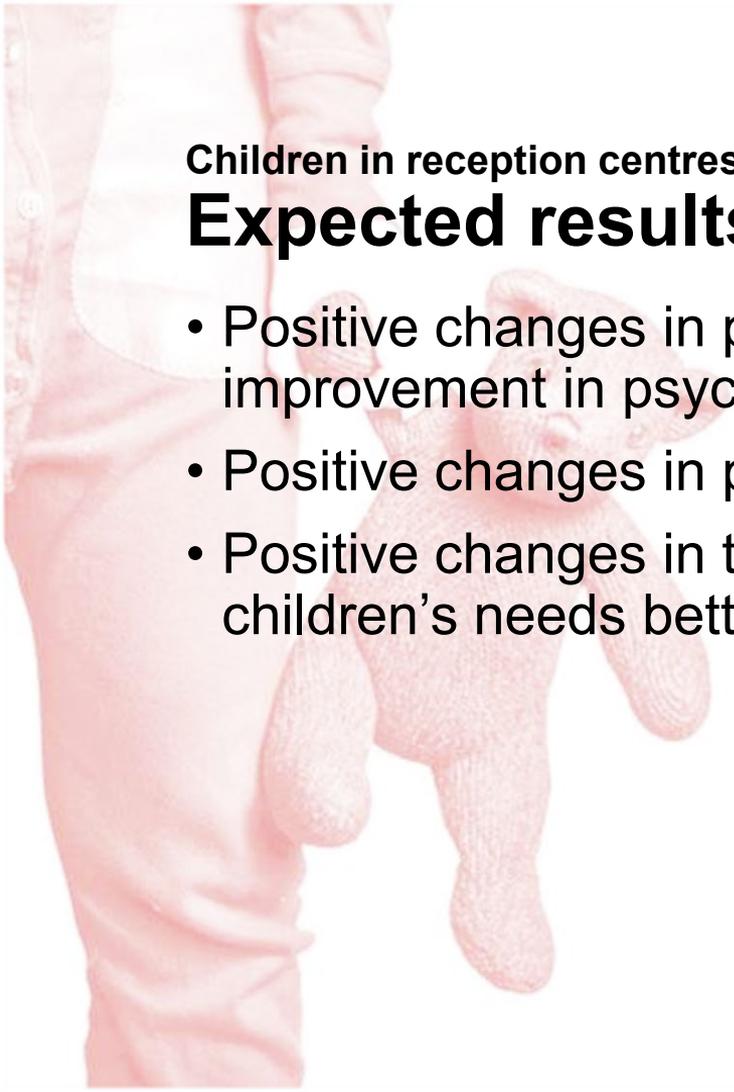
# Research methods

- The participants of the controlled intervention study are asylum-seeking children in the age group of 2-6 years with their parents.
  - 75 intervention + 75 control
  - 3 reception centres (1 intervention + 2 control)
  - 9 languages
- Data collection started 11/2018 and continues until 9/2020 (new participants until 12/2019)

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# Research methods

- Quantitative
  - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) filled in by parents and CFS supervisor
    - 0, 2 and 9 months
- Qualitative
  - A one hour semi-structured interview with the parents
    - Views on parenting in the reception centre and the possible changes in child's behaviour or parenting after leaving the home country
    - Views on CFS
  - Written inquiries for reception centre employees and CFS volunteers
    - Views on children's position and development and parenting in the reception centre
  - CFS weekly report



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## **Expected results**

- Positive changes in psychological symptoms and improvement in psychosocial situation
- Positive changes in parent-child interaction
- Positive changes in the policies of reception centre by making children's needs better observed and met

# Conclusion

- These children on the move with several stressful events in their country of origin, on their journey and during their wait in Finland need special long-term support. More evidence is needed of interventions in order to improve their psychosocial situation and secure their development from childhood to adolescence and adulthood.

# References

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**Any questions?**



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