

IN BRIEF

MTT: Organic food goals set by Finland branding committee unrealistic

The agricultural research institute Agrifood Research Finland (MTT) stated on Monday that the goal of bringing the domestic proportion of organically grown produce up to 50 per cent by 2030 is unrealistically demanding. At present only eight per cent of Finnish produce is organically grown.

The goal was one of many set out in the much-derided Mission for Finland report that was produced by the by the Country Brand Delegation and released in late November 2010. The Delegation was set up in 2008 by the then-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Stubb. In the words of the Ministry's press release announcing the publication of the report, the Delegation's task was to create 'a strategy for Finland that would convince the world to turn to us more often and more effectively'. **HT**

State support measures have cut unemployment levels

According to the National Audit Office, infrastructural changes implemented in recent years by the state have reduced unemployment levels in the public sector. The National Audit Office is the supervisory authority that oversees state finances and asset management and the spending of public funds. **HT**

However, the Office warns that the positive trend is unlikely to be sustained unless longer-term measures are implemented in the near future. In the last five years, the state has spent 220 million euros on measures to help local authorities adapt to structural changes, most commonly by finding new employment for those whose jobs are lost in process.

The support measures have by no means been entirely successful, however. Closures of large operations, such as paper mills, result in the loss of around 500 jobs within a municipality on average. **HT**

Aamulehti: Radical drop in adoptions from abroad

Tampere-based Aamulehti reported on Tuesday that the number of applications for adoptions from outside the country has declined drastically. Whereas around 300 applications were filed in 2008, the figure for the whole of 2011 was only 120.

According to Irene Pärssinen-Hentula, the head of the international adoption programmes with the non-governmental organisation Save the Children Finland, the decline is mainly due to the long waiting times, the highly bureaucratic procedures, and economic uncertainty. Prospective foster children also more frequently find a home in their home country, at least in those developing countries where the standard of living has been improving in recent years **HT**

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

The spouses of the two remaining presidential candidates Sauli Niinistö (NCP) and Pekka Haavisto (Greens) have been in the spotlight during the election campaign.

Does the home life of a president have any bearing on his or her ability to carry out their duties?



View details and this week's question at www.helsinkitimes.fi.



The low costs and high quality services for under-three-year-olds in Nordic countries compare favourably to other OECD countries.

Triumphant returns

Finnish early education lures back some highly skilled expatriates.

ELIOT BAKER
HELSINKI TIMES

AFTER FOOTING footing their education bill, Finland has long worried over losing too many of its prodigal children to financially greener pastures. But that same precious education system – particularly early education – seems to draw Finnish expatriate families and all their advanced degrees and taxable incomes back home.

Over 70 per cent of Finland's roughly 16,000 foreign university students move abroad upon graduation, reportedly for lack of professional opportunity. About 250,000 Finnish citizens live outside of Finland. Finnish education authorities have long stressed the importance of international experience for its graduates, and Finland's early education system can lure some of the family-types back home.

Quality care

The early childcare education systems of Finland and the Nordic countries rank at the top of OECD countries in terms of years provided, staff qualifications, government funding and family subsidies, according to an article published January 2008 in the *Review of Economics of the Household*.

Depending on household income, Finnish families pay from nothing to a maximum of 15 per cent of those costs, or 254 euros, per child, per month. That compares with a maximum of 28-45 per cent of total costs in Norway, 33 per

cent max in Denmark (which spends easily the most per child on early childhood education in Europe, roughly doubling Finland's expenditure), and 20 per cent max in Sweden.

Finnish daycare staff are highly qualified. One in three of the staff must have at least a Bachelor's degree, and the adult-to-child ratio must not exceed one-to-seven for 3-6-year-olds and one-to-four for kids under three. In most OECD countries, according to the article, the ratio is one-to-10.

The low costs and high quality services for under-three-year-olds is "outstanding" in Nordic countries compared to other OECD countries. The numbers even out for kids over three in many OECD countries, where childcare at that age is considered education.

A family-driven decision

Neuroscientist **Petri Ala-Laurila** and his wife **Suvi** returned with their toddler son, **Emil**, after several years in Boston and Seattle. Ala-Laurila's research into the neural circuits of the eye has been published in the world's most prestigious scientific journals and landed him an independent position as an Academy of Finland Research Fellow.

Returning to Finland was a significantly family-driven decision. He will put his grant money to work at the Department of Biosciences at the University of Helsinki.

"I am excited to join the Finnish neuroscience community after all these years in the USA," says Ala-Laurila. "I look forward to setting up my own research in Finland while retaining strong connections to the US neuroscience community. I am also glad to see that Finland can attract insanely great international post-docs."

Too good to pass up

For many Finns and their spouses, Finland's childcare services are too tempting to pass up, even with cushy jobs in a higher-paying country.

Petri Isola, a technical sales engineer moved back to Helsinki in the summer of 2010 after living two decades in Massachusetts, where he sent his first son through Brookline's well-regarded public school system. Isola returned to Helsinki with

- 90 per cent of Finnish daycares are public.
- 90 per cent of US daycares are private, for-profit centers.
- Finland ranks around the top of OECD countries in terms of staff qualifications: 1-in-3 teachers at a Finnish daycare must have at least a Bachelor's degree.
- Finnish families pay 15 per cent of the nation's total government-funded day care costs.
- The Nordic countries provide free or low-cost daycare earlier and thus longer than many OECD countries, from under one year old to 5.
- Finland and the Nordic countries invest the most in terms of % GDP in early childhood education and care.
- Finnish formal school typically begins at age seven, preceded by one year of pre-school.

Sources: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment (OECD PISA) and Finland's Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Greater interest in foreign-based online stores

PAULIINA PIETILÄ – STT
HT

THE FEDERATION of Finnish Commerce fears that the government's planned VAT increases will spur consumers to turn to foreign-based online stores. The Federation's chief economist **Jaana Kurjenoja**

oja says that the online retail share of the overall Finnish retail trade was between seven and eight per cent in 2010.

"The figures for 2011 haven't yet been published, but the online share of the market is growing all the time." According to the economist, this is both a threat and an opportunity for Finnish retailers. She cites a recent survey by the Federation that shows generally high interest in purchasing from cheaper foreign-based online stores.

"We administered the survey to 2,500 internet users, and 45 per cent responded

his wife and their two small children largely for Finland's child-friendly advantages.

"Back in the States you either put your kids in private school or move to the 'right' (read: expensive) neighborhood to get to good public schools," Isola says. "In addition to having a large support network here in Helsinki, the school issue certainly was attractive when deciding to move back. It was really only after we moved that we started reading all about the greatly respected quality of the Finnish educational system."

"Also, my first son, who will graduate from Brookline High School, regarded the best public high school in the Boston area, spent a year in a Helsinki school as an exchange student. He thought that the school system here made much more sense and was more relaxed and left more time to be a kid."

That fact is, educated people appreciate top education, and they'll cross oceans to get it. The grass no longer looks so green for many once they've explored settling children onto foreign educational soil.

For example, America's eye-popping salaries can be offset by its educational system's heart-stopping costs and uneven standards, for example in Boston-area daycares whose under-qualified staff and substandard facilities were far less impressive than their price tags of 1,000 to 2,000 US dollars (1,552.50 euros) per child, per month. This represents an important snapshot of unsubsidised daycare, which is also common for children under three in the UK and some other countries where formal education begins at age four or five.

Gloomy outlook

PAULIINA PIETILÄ – STT
HT

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THE ECONOMIC outlook in the automobile industry is especially bleak this year, with sales predicted to drop by four per cent. When purchasing power is generally weak, large outlays are put off, which is evident in the sales of cars, household ap-

pliances, and electronics in particular.

According to chief economist **Jaana Kurjenoja** of the Federation of Finnish Commerce, sales in the automobile sector managed to recuperate from the 2009 recession by as much as 16 per cent, with 2011 being especially good for sales. Sales were driven up last year also by the knowledge of the impending increase in auto-

mobile tax. "The trade that normally would have been done early this year occurred late last year instead."

Employment levels in the sector have been predicted to drop by two per cent this year, and Kurjenoja believes that layoffs in wholesale trade are also likely. "During 2009 the automobile sales and wholesale sectors managed to get by with temporary lay-offs, and so managed to hold on to their experienced staff. In the current economic situation that will no longer be possible."



Jaana Kurjenoja

ed that they would consider doing more of their purchases through foreign online stores if the Finnish VAT level increases."