

A safe and prosperous Finland within planetary boundaries

– From acute crises to continuous transformation

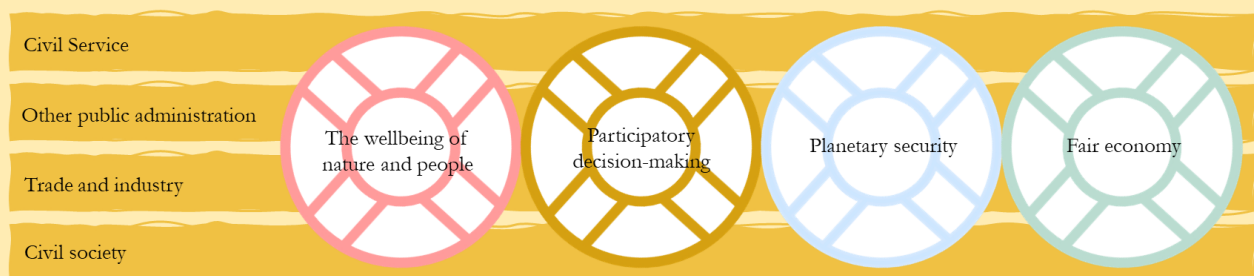
Finnish society can flourish only within planetary boundaries. If everyone on Earth lived like Finns, we would need the natural resources of 4.1 planets every year.¹ We must undergo a sustainability transformation —shifting from today’s unsustainable ways of living to those that operate within planetary boundaries.

The Finnish Expert Panel for Sustainable Development has prepared a science-based government programme vision that enables sustainability transformation. The vision aims for **a safe and prosperous Finland, where societal success takes place within planetary boundaries and ensures a high quality of life for all.** The objective is based on four theses.

- 1) **The wellbeing of nature and people as the primary objective of policy**
- 2) **Participatory decision-making as a central pillar of democracy**
- 3) **Planetary security in the centre of policy**
- 4) **A fair economy within planetary boundaries**

The theses form a coherent set of mutually reinforcing ways of thinking for governing the state in an era of polycrisis. Their core idea is that all decision-making must aim to improve the wellbeing of both nature and people. This requires rethinking democracy, security and the economy: participatory decision-making must become a core element of democracy, planetary security must be embedded at the heart of policymaking and the rules of the economy must be reformed to ensure fairness and alignment with planetary boundaries.²

A safe and prosperous Finland within planetary boundaries



A safe, prosperous Finland within planetary boundaries is based on four theses. The implementation requires engagement from all actors of society.

¹ See Global Footprint Network, n.d.; <https://overshoot.footprintnetwork.org/newsroom/country-overshoot-days/>. Accessed 4.3.2026.

² See Rockström et al., 2009; <https://doi.org/10.1038/461472a>

1) The wellbeing of nature and people as the primary objective of policy



Societies and natural ecosystems are inseparably interconnected and form a single whole. Thus, societies and their institutions must enhance human and environmental wellbeing simultaneously. Strong general education, a well-functioning social security system and accessible health services are essential for our wellbeing. Societal decision-making must take nature's carrying capacity as a fundamental boundary for economic activity. In this context, decision-making prioritises biodiversity and the societal impacts of climate change. Resource-wise consumption must be advanced across generations.

Operating within the carrying capacity of nature creates wellbeing and security across generations. According to the Constitution, responsibility for nature and its biodiversity belongs to everyone,³ and it is the duty of public authorities to safeguard a healthy environment and opportunities for participation for all.⁴ Through legislation and regulation, the efforts of individuals, public authorities and organisations to protect nature are supported.⁵ Our current system already contains multiple structures that support people's agency and wellbeing, including the right to social security and care and access to the services of an educated civic society such as education, art, culture and libraries. These provide the conditions for collective cultural engagement and wide-ranging participation in the sustainability transition. At the same time, we must dismantle the drivers for structural overconsumption, including those related to growth-driven economic thinking, consumer culture and infrastructure.⁶

2) Participatory decision-making as a core element of democracy



Recognising the interconnectedness of nature and human wellbeing requires strong democratic decision-making at both the national and international levels. The Finnish democratic system can be strengthened by improving equality. Citizens' opportunities to influence decision-making must be strengthened, while the political influence of economically powerful actors must be reduced. Participatory decision-making enables individuals, local communities and diverse population groups to genuinely influence decision-making. National policy must support the wellbeing of nature and people through local solutions. Finland must take an active role in international policy to ensure that nature's carrying capacity is protected globally and through shared responsibility.

In Finland, democratic decision-making practices grounded in citizen participation and research knowledge must be strengthened. Opportunities for different civic groups to shape future visions must be reinforced and young people must be placed at the core of decision-making. The role of regional and local decision-making and expertise must be strengthened in social and healthcare services, as well as in the use of local natural resources. Finland must be internationally proactive in tackling global slowly proceeding crises such as overconsumption of natural resources and pollution.

³ The Constitution of Finland 20.1 § 'Nature and its biodiversity, the environment and the national heritage are the responsibility of everyone'.

⁴ The Constitution of Finland 20.2 § 'The public authorities shall endeavour to guarantee for everyone the right to a healthy environment and for everyone the possibility to influence the decisions that concern their own living environment'.

⁵ TuVM 1/2025 vp – VNS 7/2024 vp; https://www2.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Mietinto/Sivut/TuVM_1+2025.aspx.

⁶ Soininen & Linnanen, 2025; <https://www2.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/JulkaisuMetatieto/Documents/EDK-2025-AK-32752.pdf>.

3) Planetary security in the centre of policy



Ensuring human and natural wellbeing requires a planetary perspective on security. Lifestyles that exceed nature's carrying capacity threaten our security. Escalating environmental crises manifest, for instance, as more frequent extreme weather conditions, increased displacement and a growing incidence of pandemics. They are also linked to international conflicts, political instability and geopolitical changes that challenge our societies. Risks of acute and slowly proceeding crises must be systematically assessed to anticipate and minimise harm to wellbeing. Safe everyday life, work and leisure are ensured through inclusive and long-term leadership. Circular economy solutions strengthen security of supply and societal infrastructure.

Security should be governed proactively rather than merely through crisis response. The government recognises that the wellbeing of people and nature is the foundation of planetary security. In a safe society, information is transparent and people, grounded in strong education, can identify misinformation and understand the interconnectedness of humans and nature. The circular economy ensures availability of resources, strengthens security of supply, supports national defence capabilities and improves the operational resilience across different sectors in Finland and Europe. Food and energy systems based on decentralised solutions function reliably, also during disruptions.

4) A fair economy within planetary boundaries



The role of economy is to support the wellbeing of people and nature in a just and equitable way. Economic activity is dependent on material and energy flows. Economic and industrial policy must acknowledge planetary boundaries that shape the operating conditions of business and industry. Business activities must be reformed toward circular economy operating models that promote wellbeing and crisis resilience. Unnecessary production must be reduced. By adhering to the principles of a sufficiency-based economy, people's legitimate needs can be met fairly, without deprivation or excess. Continuous renewal of the economy is essential, yet economic growth must not be treated as a goal per se.

Finland's economic policy must be based on the principle of sufficiency; avoiding unnecessary consumption. Essential services for life, such as healthcare and water services, must be maintained as public goods or be subject to strictly limited profit-making. At the same time, the circular economy and resource wisdom must be made the foundation of our economic system and all business activity. A circular economy that extends product lifecycles through repairable design, maintenance and repair creates diverse employment. In a sufficiency-based economy, economic, innovation and industrial policy function within nature's carrying capacity, with economic capital no longer prioritised over natural and human capital.⁷

⁷ See Dasgupta, 2021; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>.

Authors

The Finnish Expert Panel for Sustainable Development is an independent expert body supporting decision-making and societal debate on the sustainability transformation in Finland. The panel provides research-based, systemic and interdisciplinary understanding on sustainability transformation. The panel also promotes integrating and aligning related environmental, economic and social issues. www.kestavyyspaneeli.fi/en/

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Reference guide

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