



An Honest Broker with a Value Agenda – Finnish Development Policy Influencing in the European Union

Background and Rationale

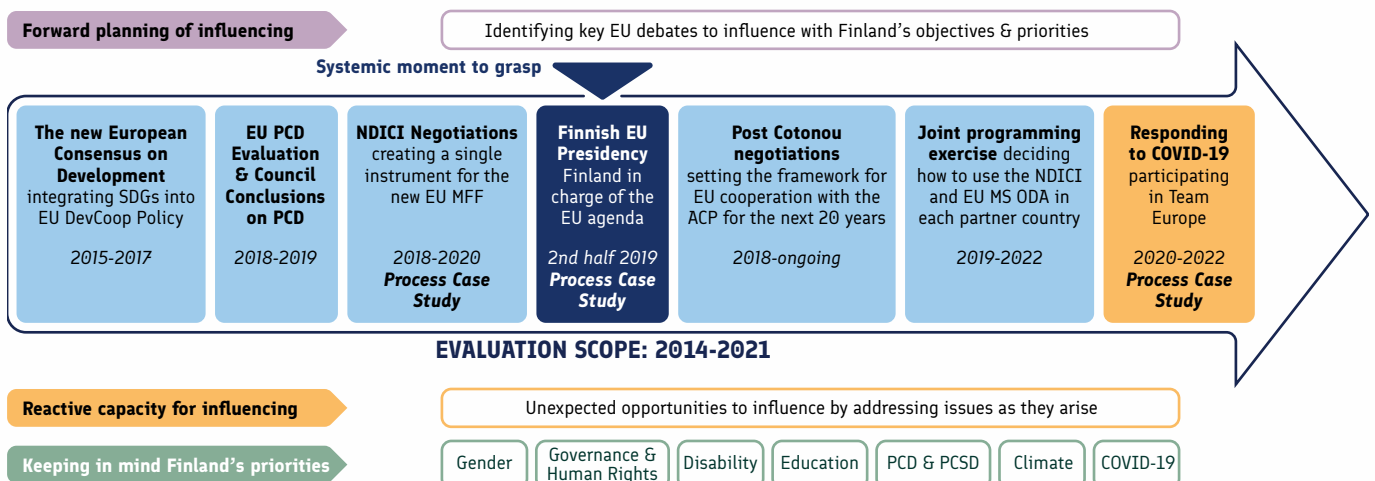
The 2019 Government Programme lays down the premises for Finland’s EU policy, contributing to a globally influential Finland. Furthermore, Report on Development Policy across Parliamentary Terms (2021) states that Finland must actively influence the Union’s development policy and external relations.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are the world’s largest donors of development and humanitarian assistance. The EU has considerable weight in the global governance of international development cooperation and its policies have a global influence well beyond the EU. **Finland is a committed supporter of the European development policy and cooperation** and uses the EU as a significant channel for its development cooperation. In 2019, 223 MEUR (22 %) of Finnish official development assistance was distributed through EU institutions. Finland exerts influence on EU development policy and EU institutions in line with its own development policy priorities.

Finland’s influencing activities towards multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, were evaluated in 2019-2020. However, this is the first time the development policy influencing activities concerning the EU are evaluated at the strategic level.

This evaluation assessed the **relevance, effectiveness and coherence** of the different development policy influencing activities of the Ministry concerning the EU and its institutions. Now the Ministry can **draw wider lessons learnt** on its influencing activities overall, based on these two evaluations.

The evaluation covered the period 2014 to 2021 and it looked a bit deeper at a few key debates on EU development cooperation during those years: **The 2019 Finnish Presidency, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) negotiations and Team Europe.**



The main users of the evaluation are the Ministry's leadership, departments and representations in charge of design and implementation of development cooperation and EU development relations and negotiations, as well as the Finnish agencies involved in the implementation of EU funded development cooperation programmes. Other relevant users are the government of Finland actors engaged with EU coordination and relations, the Parliament, and the Development Policy Committee.

In this brief, the Development Evaluation Unit highlights interesting findings and conclusions reached by the Evaluation Team.

Influencing activities are generally well-implemented

Finland's process for influencing the EU on development cooperation is relevant, coherent, reasonably efficient and runs smoothly. Its practical implementation generally operates well. Finland makes good use of the opportunities and mechanisms commonly used for this advocacy work.

In particular, it works extensively and effectively in coalitions of like-minded member states. Finland was generally seen as very adept at building and making use of coalitions. Finland also cooperates well with the European Commission where it is seen as a constructive member state that plays by the rules, has its red lines, but is also willing to be pragmatic, seek consensus and compromise.

Finland has contributed to significant shifts in EU policies

The evaluation identified 18 influencing outcomes ranging from Brussels to country level. A quarter of them involved policy shifts endorsed by all three key EU institutions and is therefore considered of major significance. The remainder are of more limited significance, and often more operational or policy shifts at a regional or country level.

Joint programming and delegated cooperation are one area of influencing at country level. In Nepal, the EU delegation adopted the model developed in Finland's project in working with local authorities and seeking to use this model in other projects too. During the joint planning of the latest Multiannual Indicative Programme in Tanzania, Finland played a very active role, which resulted in a document that also reflects Finland's priorities. In Ukraine, the education sector has been a key area of collaboration with the EU which helped secure increased funding. Influencing was also found to take place both directions, as in a case of the EU influencing a project by Finland in Ukraine.

Outcomes of Finland's Presidency of the EU Council 2019

1. Council mandate for the NDICI negotiation was revised and Council Conclusion on the role of European Investment Bank/European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus was adopted.
2. A compromise solution was found on the reference to migration.
3. The first round of the NDICI Trilogue negotiations, involving Council, Parliament and Commission, was completed successfully.
4. Council Conclusions on Gender Action Plan II annual report, with reference to sexual and reproductive health and rights, were adopted by consensus.
5. Council amended the directives for the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and regions.

Gender equality stands out as an area where Finland has achieved multiple outcomes, though its ambitions on sexual and reproductive health and rights were not entirely met. There are also individual outcomes relating to other thematic priorities (e.g. rights of persons with disabilities, education), but no specific outcome on Africa. During both the EU Presidency and the NDICI-Global Europe budget negotiations Finland successfully achieved various outcomes it was seeking.

Finland is a credible actor with expertise...

Finland has a good reputation in the EU on development cooperation and is an influential member state on EU development policy. It is seen as a particular expert in gender equality and education, which also correspond to its own development policy priorities.

Finland is seen by EU officials and its peers in other EU member states as a professional, well organised and prepared, efficient and trusted actor in development cooperation – honest and approachable. Its long-term iterative approach and solid experience were also appreciated.

As a result, EU is keen to work with Finland, listen to its views and often adopts its policy priorities.

...and knows how to influence

Finland also knows how to influence the EU. Its officials are very good at working with the Commission and in forming

coalitions with groups of other like-minded EU member states to push their common views in EU meetings.

For instance, it ran a well-respected EU Presidency in 2019, which effectively helped debates on EU policy progress well, including the discussion on the new multiannual budget for development cooperation that was going on at the time.

More widely, Finnish officials are also effective contributors to many fora in Brussels and in partner-countries where EU development cooperation is discussed and managed. They participate in policy expert groups on many different topics such as gender equality, forestry, education or infrastructure in EU development cooperation. They are also valued members of programme steering groups for a wide variety of EU development cooperation projects and programmes.

Finland's long-experience in some countries and sectors worked well to influence the EU. In Tanzania and Nepal, Finland has used its thematic expertise in specific niche areas as a leveraging point both to influence the EU and engage with other EU member states, sometimes as lead. In Ukraine, opportunities were identified through the mediation of a Finnish education and social sector expert.

Finland successfully manages EU funds for development cooperation allocated to development programmes established by Finland. The EU is satisfied with the progress made

on these projects and is keen to cooperate more with Finland in this way so there is scope for Finland to manage more co-operation funds on behalf of the EU.

Finland's positions are well known

Finland has managed to incorporate its policy priorities into its influencing activities. Finland's positions on policy issues are generally well known and it has a well-recognised leading and influential role particularly in gender equality, human rights-based approach (HRBA), inclusion and support for Africa, all topics aligned with its own thematic priorities.

Forestry and education are other areas where its expertise is recognised and respected. Equally, its know-how on disability inclusion is recognised, but less prominent. Climate action emerged as a less prominent feature of Finland's profile in the EU setting.

Management for influencing is not yet fully systematised...

The MFA's EU influencing strategies are coherent with its development policy and generally well understood. Yet, they are complex, not always well focused or prioritised, nor farsighted enough. It would be useful to strengthen forward looking strategies for influencing and identify opportunities well in advance.

In terms of resources, some staff are clearly stretched, though there are also some good examples of flexibility in staff deployment. Leveraging of EU funds for Finnish projects occurs, but is not extensive. There is more scope for Finland to access EU funding through delegated cooperation, but that requires some adjustments and capacity building. There is also the question of how much Finland wants to get involved in Team Europe Initiatives or the EU Global Gateway.

External views are positive on the competence and professionalism of MFA staff. Internal views on roles and responsibilities are more mixed. There are some good instances of informal and ad-hoc reporting, but institutionalised monitoring and learning systems are limited.

...and the pool of staff with EU experience is small

There is a need not just to improve on the forward planning of influencing, but also on training staff, passing on good practices and contacts and ensuring staff have the knowledge they need to do an effective job.

Internal enabling factors

Where Finland has shown **prioritisation, responsiveness, staff placements, and knowledge of EU institutions**, influencing has been effective. Finland's **reputation and credibility** combined with **tried and tested practices** such as working in coalitions with like-minded states yield results. **Consistent focus** on issues such as gender equality combined with **the expertise** give Finland a high profile on the topic. The competent manner of handling the EU Presidency in 2019 contributed to its **professional image**. Finland's **constructive approach** and playing by the book.

Internal hindering factors

A lack of resources, particularly in terms of staff time and budgets limits the influencing efforts. Some opportunities have been missed. The **clarity of prioritisation** in influencing is variable. There is lack of **leadership and focus**, limited internal **ownership** of influencing plans, and a lack of supportive **systems** in place.

Finland among peers

Among the 27 EU member states Finland can be seen as an ambitious and influential donor.

Among peer countries assessed, Finland excels in gender equality and human rights, but performance is below the group average in environmental protection/climate change.

Finland follows a similar track to others on influencing notably via coalition building and coordinating with like-minded states, but could seek to learn from others on the most successful techniques.

Finland stands out as the only one among the six peers that has worked with written EU influencing plans.

Poland and Portugal's practice of leveraging experience from the field for influencing in Brussels is something Finland could learn from.

Sweden has a good deal more experience on the value of secondments of specialist staff to the EU than any of the others.

Member states, including Finland, are picking up a trend of 'influencing moving to the field'. With the advent of Team Europe Initiatives, it is clear this is likely to be increasingly the case in the future.

A useful step would be to encourage more Finns to work in the EU institutions where they can have considerable influence and help Finland keep track of new plans and policies being formulated in real time. Equally, Finnish nationals gaining direct experience of how the EU works creates a valuable knowledge pool that the MFA can then tap into for strengthening its own administration and staff.

The evaluation recommends, inter alia, that the Ministry should further expand the strategic use of the EU as a cooperation and influencing channel, through strong leadership and clearer priorities; forward-looking influencing strategies; increased staff skills, presence and engagement; supportive organisational management and coordination set up;

collaboration with stakeholders; and organisational learning mechanisms in support of strategizing on EU influencing.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was based on 110 interviews with MFA staff and officials from the EU and a selection of other EU member states as well as on published and internal ministry documents. Partner-country case studies were done on Finnish and EU cooperation in Nepal, Tanzania and Ukraine as well as a survey of EU delegations and Finnish embassy staff in 14 partner countries. A peer review was conducted with six other EU member states (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Poland, Portugal and Sweden). The findings were triangulated against each other, against other relevant external sources, and by using different methods. Potential biases were minimized. A workshop was held with MFA staff on preliminary findings, conclusions and areas of recommendations in May 2022.

The evaluation report also contains briefs on Finnish EU influencing in key policy priority areas: gender equality, disability inclusion, education, climate action, forestry, governance and human rights. There are also briefs on COVID-19/ Team Europe, the Finnish EU Presidency in 2019 and on the negotiation of the NDICI-Global Europe.

Acknowledged limitations

Finland's positions and policy objectives on development cooperation are often very similar to those of the EU.

NDICI instrument was still new at the time of data collection.

Policy Coherence for Development agenda was not covered extensively.

Lack of institutional memory among interviewees due to time scope until 2014.

Intrinsic positive bias of outcome harvesting.

Limited response by some stakeholders.

Small sample size for the survey.

Limitations to access to interviewees resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.



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