

# Family leave in Intercultural families

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Perhevapaaat kahden kulttuurin perheissä

Report on survey

May 2023

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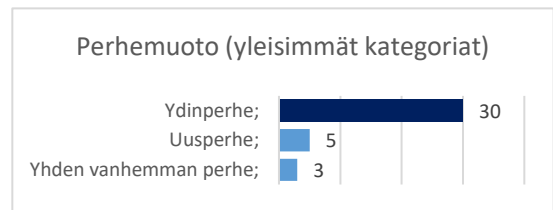


FAMILIA

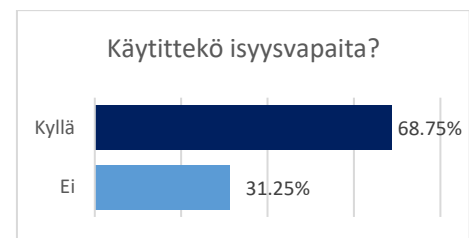
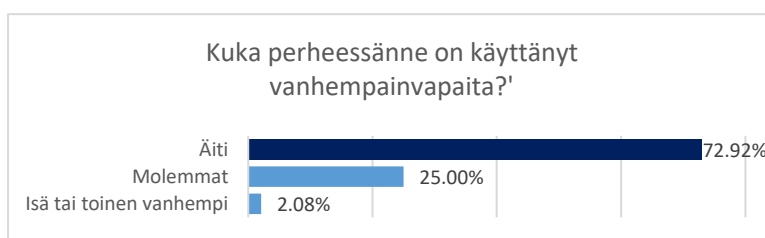
# Yhteenveto

Tässä raportissa käydään läpi tutkimuksen tulokset kahden kulttuurienvälisen perheiden perhevapaiden käytöstä Suomessa, jonka toteutti Familia ry. Kyselyn avulla Familia ry pyrki ensisijaisesti selvittämään kahden kulttuurienvälisen perheiden valitsemaa perhevapaita ja ajanjaksoja, lomien jakautumista kumppanien kesken ja perusteluita niihin, sekä heidän ajatuksiaan perhevapaajärjestelmää kohtaan Suomessa. Kyselyn tarkoituksena on ymmärtää kahden kulttuurienvälisen perheiden tarpeita perhevapaiden suhteen, jotta perheet voitaisiin ottaa paremmin huomioon politiikan vaikuttamistyössä.

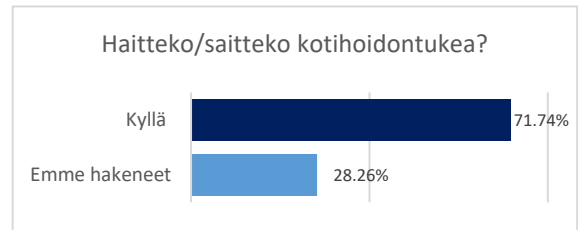
Kyselyä jaettiin avoimesti Familian sosiaalisen median kanavien kautta kesä-heinäkuussa 2022, johon vastasi yhteensä 48 henkilöä. Näistä 45 henkilöä oli kahden kulttuurienvälisen perheiden jäseniä ja 3 yhden kulttuurin perheiden jäseniä. Lähes kaikki kyselyn vastaajat olivat heteroperheen jäseniä ja suurin osa heistä olivat ydinperheestä, jossa oli tyypillisesti yksi tai kaksi lasta. Lisäksi lähes kaikki kyselyn vastaajista olivat naisia ja yli puolet heistä olivat syntyneet Suomessa, kun taas suurimmaksi osaksi heidän miespuolisista kumppaneistansa olivat enimmäkseen syntyneet ulkomailla. Suurin osa vastaajista ja heidän kumppaninsa olivat korkeasti koulutettuja.



Tutkimukseen osallistuneista kahden kulttuurienvälisistä perheistä vain 73% vanhempainrahaa saivat äidit, kun taas 25% perheistä molemmat vanhemmat saivat vanhempainrahaa, vaikka niissäkin äidit saivat suurimman osan tuesta. Vastaajien mukaan syy epätasaiseen jakautumiseen olivat pääosin taloudelliset syyt, sekä ulkomailla syntyneen isän alhainen palkka tai työttömyys, jonka vuoksi palkkasidonnaisen vanhempainrahan saaminen oli taloudellisesti kannattamatonta perheille. Vastaavanlaiset selitykset olivat myös yleisimpiä yli 30% vastaajista, joiden perheet eivät pitäneet tai pitivät vain muutaman päivän isyysvapaita, jotka voivat pitää ainoastaan isät.



Lähes 70% kaikista isyysvapaana olleista pitivät samaan aikaan isyysvapaita äidin ollessa lomalla, joko enimmäkseen sallitulla päivillä tai lähellä sitä. Kuitenkin 69% isistä palasivat nopeasti palkkatyöhön äidin ollessaan vielä lomalla, kun taas äideistä vain 25% työskentelivät toisen vanhemman ollessa vanhempainvapailla. Kyselyyn osallistuneista perheistä 72% hakivat kotihoidontukea ja näistä 60% pitivät äidit.



83% kyselyyn vastanneista kokivat päätöksen tekemisen helpoksi erilaisten tukien käytöstä ja jakamisesta vanhempien kesken. Mahdollinen syy on se, että suurin osa heistä olivat alun perin tietoisia suomalaisen perhevapaajärjestelmästä tai perehtyivät siihen, useimmiten KELA:n sivujen kautta. Siitäkin huolimatta ulkomailla syntyneistä vastaajista olivat useimmiten paljon vähemmän perehtyneitä järjestelmään tai sen selvittämiseen.

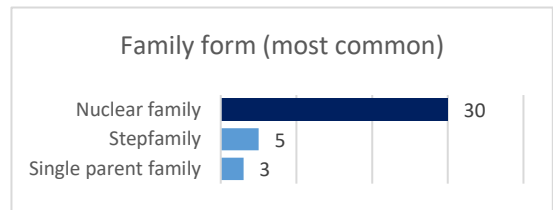


Tutkimustulosten ja erityisesti vastaajien ehdotusten perusteella tässä raportissa esitetään useita poliittisia suosituksia. Ensimmäinen on se, että perhepäivärahojen vähimmäismäärä on nostettava kestäväälle tasolle, jotta kaikki vanhemmat Suomessa voisivat pitää huolta vastasyntyneestä, riippumatta heidän henkilökohtaisesta tai ammatillisesta tilanteestaan. Toiseksi ulkomailla syntyneiden vanhempien integroituminen Suomen työmarkkinoille on parannettava merkittävästi, jotta heillä olisi mahdollista hyödyntää palkkasidonnaisia perhevapaita. Kolmanneksi kotihoidon tuen määrää on lisättävä tai palkkasidonnaisia perhevapaiden muotoja pidennetään. Lopuksi sallitaan enemmän joustavuutta vanhempainvapaiden jakamisesta vanhempien kesken, tukien saamista vain osa-aikaisesti ja jaetaan parempaa tietoa vanhempainrahasta. Kuten kyselyn tuloksien ja vastaajien ehdotuksien mukaan em. toimenpiteiden avulla voidaan helpottaa huomattavasti perhevapaiden käyttöä, jolloin kahden kulttuurienväliset perheet voivat käyttää heidän perusoikeuttaan huolehtia vastasyntyneestä.

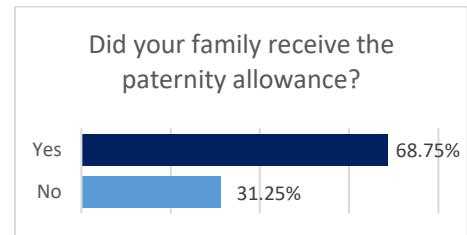
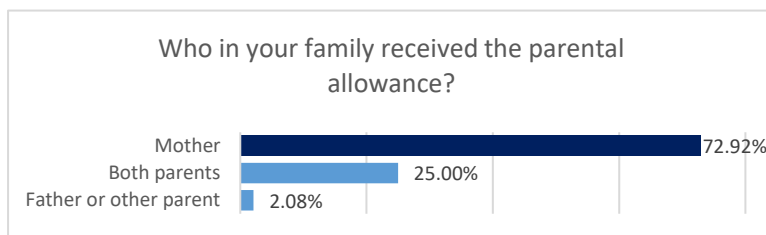
# Summary

This report presents the results of a survey regarding the use of family leave by intercultural families in Finland, executed by Familia ry. Through the survey, Familia tried primarily to find out the types and length of family leave taken by intercultural families, their division of the leave between the partners, their reasoning for these, and their general attitudes towards the family leave system in Finland. The purpose of the survey was to understand the needs of intercultural families when it comes to the family leave, in order to address these better in policy advocacy.

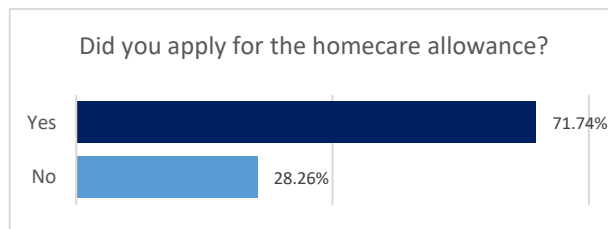
The survey was distributed openly through Familia’s social media channels between June and July 2022, and 48 people overall responded to it. Of these, 45 were members of intercultural families, and 3 were members of monocultural immigrant families. Almost all respondents were members of heterosexual families, and most were part of a nuclear family, which typically included one or two children. Additionally, almost all respondents were females and over half of them were born in Finland, while their typically male partners were mostly born abroad. Most of the respondents and the other parents in their families were highly educated.



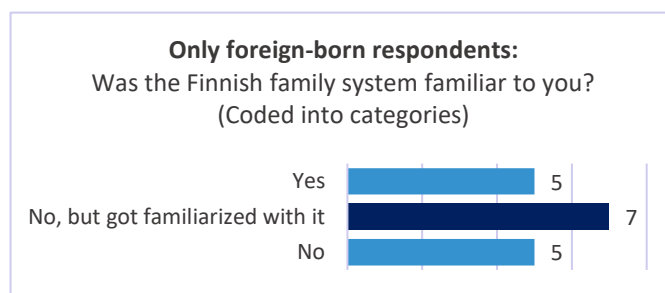
Among the mostly intercultural families who participated in the survey, in 73% only the mother received the parental allowance, while in 25% both parents did, although even in those the mother received the majority of the allowance. According to the respondents, the reasoning for this uneven distribution was mostly financial, particularly low salary or unemployment of the foreign-born father which made receiving the salary-tied parental allowance financially unviable for them. Such explanations were also the most common among the over 30% of the respondents whose families did not take or took only a few days of the paternity leave, which can be taken only by the father.



Of the almost 70% of the fathers who took paternity leave, all have taken some of it at the same time while the mother is on leave, and mostly for the maximum or close to the maximum number of days allowed. Nonetheless, 69% of the fathers returned to paid work quickly while the mother was still on a leave, while only 25% of the mothers worked when the other parent was on a leave. Ultimately, 72% of the families who participated in the survey applied for the home care allowance, and in 60% it was the mother who received it.



For 83% of the survey respondents, the decision was easy regarding how to use the different allowances and divide them between the parents. A possible reason is that most of them had an initial familiarity with the Finnish family leave system or they managed to learn about it, most commonly through KELA's information. Nonetheless, foreign-born respondents were typically much less familiar with the system or managed to figure it out.



Based on the survey results, and particularly the respondents' suggestions, this report makes several policy recommendations. The first is that the minimum daily rate of the family allowances shall be raised to a sustainable rate to allow all parents in Finland to take care of their newborn, regardless of their personal or occupational situation. Secondly, the integration of foreign-born parents into the labor market in Finland must be significantly improved, to equalize their possibility to utilize the salary-tied types of family leave. Thirdly, the sum of home care allowance should be increased, or the salary-tied types of family leave shall be prolonged. Finally, more flexibility shall be allowed in the distribution of the allowances between the parents, in receiving the allowances only part-time, and better information about the allowance shall be distributed. As suggested by the survey results and respondents' suggestions, such measures will considerably facilitate their usage of the family leave, thus allowing members of intercultural families to equally exercise their basic right to care for their newborn.

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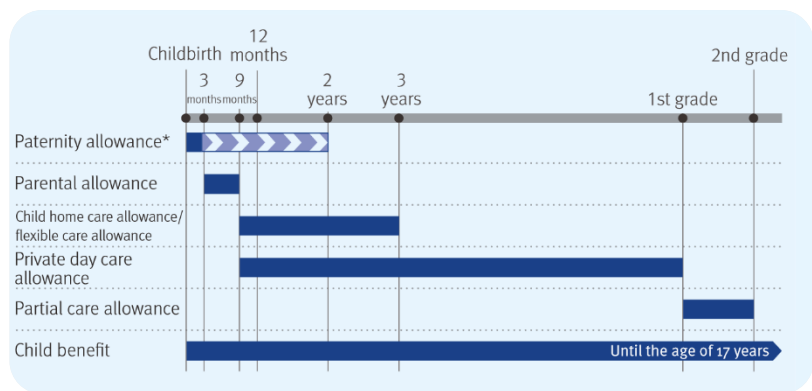
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# Introduction

## Background

Family leave, namely the financial assistance to allow parents and prospective parents to stay at home to care for the family in relation to a birth of a child, is one of the most important welfare rights in Finland.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Finnish family leave system is often considered one of the most extensive in the world, as it allows all people covered by the local social security to receive a variety of financial supports, allowing a home-stay in relation to birth which is rather long in global comparison. Due to these features, the family leave system in Finland is regularly praised as a suitable support for families attempting to bring a child into the world in the country.<sup>2 3</sup>

Up until August 2022, the family leave system in Finland was primarily comprised of four different types of support. The first one which could be taken was the maternity allowance, providing financial support only to the parent giving birth to stay at home for up to 105 working days, which can be taken shortly before and after the birth. After maternity leave, one of the parents could be granted a parental allowance to stay at home for up to 158 working days, namely around half a year. Additionally, during all this time as well as after it a paternity allowance can be paid only to the other parent who did not give birth to stay at home for a maximum of 54 working days, 18 of which can be taken at the same time as the parent giving birth. Ultimately, after taking these different types of family leaves, parents in Finland could still receive home care allowance, providing the parents with financial



Source: <https://www.kela.fi/documents/20124/411922/Families-with-children-brochure-Kela.pdf/b8860aa6-8744-b854-4e01-71efe43e1636?t=1665119912434>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.suomi.fi/citizen/living-together-and-having-a-family/having-children/guide/pregnancy-and-the-birth-of-a-child/leave-and-benefits-for-the-parents-of-small-children>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/dec/04/finland-only-country-world-dad-more-time-kids-moms>

<sup>3</sup> <https://finland.fi/life-society/finnish-society-places-value-on-family-time-and-inclusivity/>

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support to allow them to stay at home either part or full time with the children until they reach the age of three. Nonetheless, the amount of financial support provided through home care allowance is significantly lower than by the other types of allowances, which are linked to the salary the parents received prior to taking the allowance.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, on the 1st of August 2022 a reform in the family leave in Finland entered into force. Among the significant changes offered by the reform, it has given for the first time an equal quota of parental leave to both parents. Additionally, the overall length of family leave has been extended and more flexibility in using the leaves was offered. According to government ministries, these measures were meant to increase equality in working life and between parents, and to take better account of different types of families.<sup>5 6 7</sup>

One type of family, which its share in Finland is growing significantly in the last three decades, is the intercultural family. As it can be defined, an intercultural family is one where the spouses come from different countries, and have different cultural backgrounds. Due to these differences, intercultural families face unique conditions and challenges in many aspects of life, among the most significant of them is the raising of children.<sup>8</sup>

The distinctive circumstances of parents of different cultures when raising children are those which led Familia ry to explore the use of family leave by multicultural families. Founded in 1988, Familia is a Finnish national expert organisation of intercultural families, aiming to support the wellbeing of intercultural families by offering peer support and volunteer activities, information, and advice. Additionally, Familia attempts at making improvements in the social and legal systems, so that the needs of intercultural and multilingual families and Finns would be better met.

The desire to understand the needs of intercultural families when it comes to family leaves, in order to address these better, was the motive behind a survey on the topic executed by Familia between June

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kela.fi/parental-allowances>

<sup>5</sup> <https://okm.fi/en/-/1271139/family-leave-reform-increases-equality-and-takes-better-account-of-different-types-of-families>

<sup>6</sup> <https://tem.fi/en/family-leave>

<sup>7</sup> <https://stm.fi/en/reform-aims-to-encourage-both-parents-to-take-family-leave>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.familiarity.fi/en.html>



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and July 2022. This survey was aimed at parents in multicultural families but was open to all, and was distributed to potential respondents through the different social media channels of Familia. Through the survey, Familia tried primarily to find out the types and length of family leave taken by intercultural families, their division of the leave between the partners, and their reasoning for these. Additionally, the understanding of the Finnish family leave system by intercultural parents was also explored, as well as the parents' suggestions for improving the system.

## The Survey

Familia's survey regarding the use of family leaves by intercultural families in Finland was comprised of three different sections. In the initial section, the respondents were asked for their demographic details, such as their gender, age, marital status, and education. Additionally, they were asked for the form of their family, in terms of whether they are part of an intercultural family, whether their family is a nuclear or a blended form, heterosexual or rainbow, and how many children it includes. Finally, the respondents were also asked for a few details about the other parents in the family, such as the partner's country of birth, and their education.

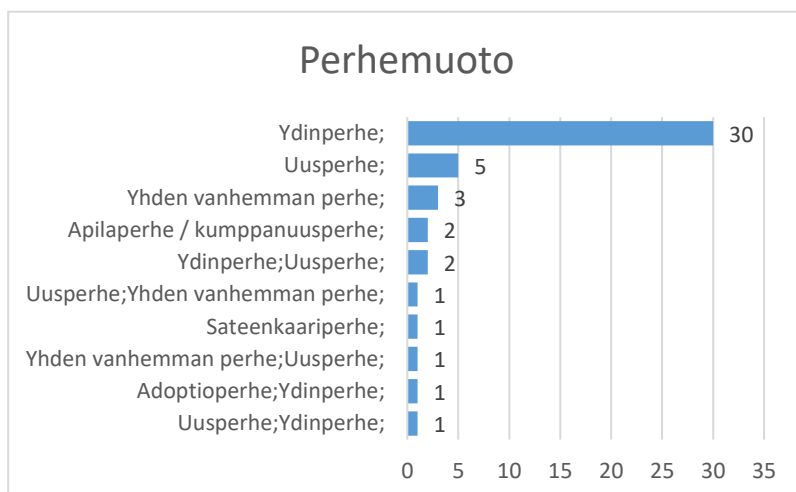
In the second section of the survey, respondents were asked about the usage of the different types of family leave in their family. As abovementioned, there are several types of support for staying at home in relation to childbirth that the parents can take in Finland, and each of these supports has its own components and conditions. Therefore, the respondents were first asked about their usage of specifically the parental allowance, which is the one granted for the largest number of days and allows for the highest flexibility in its distribution between the parents. Consequently, respondents were asked about the usage in their family of the paternity allowance, which is granted only to the parent who did not give birth to stay at home with the child for a maximum of 54 days, of which 18 can be taken together with the parent who gave birth. Finally, the end of the section included questions about the family's possible usage of the home care allowance, a reduced allowance that can be granted to both parents to stay at home until the child is three years old. Regarding all these allowances, parents were asked whether they took them, who of the parents took them, and their reasoning for these practices.

Finally, towards the end of the survey questionnaire respondents were asked about their level of knowledge about the Finnish family support system, the sources for their knowledge, and their suggestions for improving the system. Unlike the previous sections, in this section information was obtained almost exclusively through open questions, which provided for rather extensive and detail-rich answers. Using these different questions of the survey, on their varying topics and forms, allowed receiving meaningful information regarding the experience of intercultural families with the Finnish family support system.

## The Participants

Overall, during the two months when the survey was distributed, 48 people responded to the survey. Among these, 45 can be considered as belonging to intercultural families according to the above definition, as the parents in the family were born in different countries. Among these, in 40 families one of the partners was born in Finland, and hence the other partner was born in a different country, while in five cases both partners were born outside of Finland, albeit each of them in a different country. In contrast, the three other respondents to the survey who cannot be considered as belonging to an intercultural family, belonged instead to a family in which both parents were born in the same country, yet outside of Finland in all three cases.

As for family structure, a majority of 34 or 72% of the respondent were part of some form of a nuclear, heterosexual family. In contrast, 10 (21%) were in a form of a heterosexual blended family (a family in which at least one of the partners has been married or cohabitating before), 4 (8.5%) were in a single-parent family, and 3 were in some form of a rainbow family. Therefore, due to this low number of respondents who are part of a rainbow family, and for ease of reading, the parent giving birth and the one who did not give birth would be referred to in the rest of this report as mother and father, respectively.



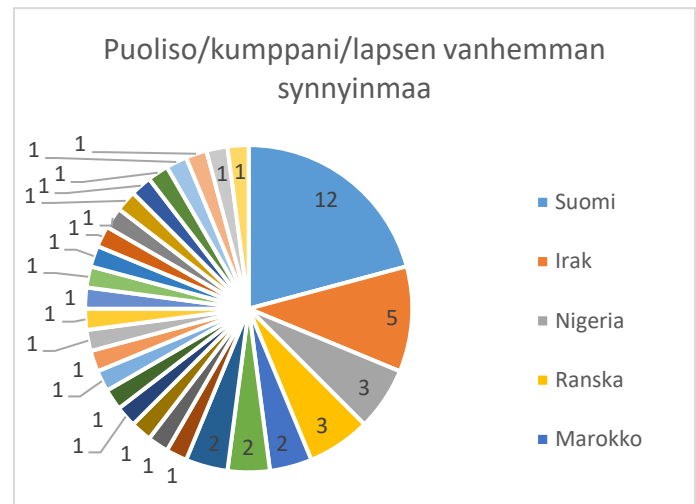
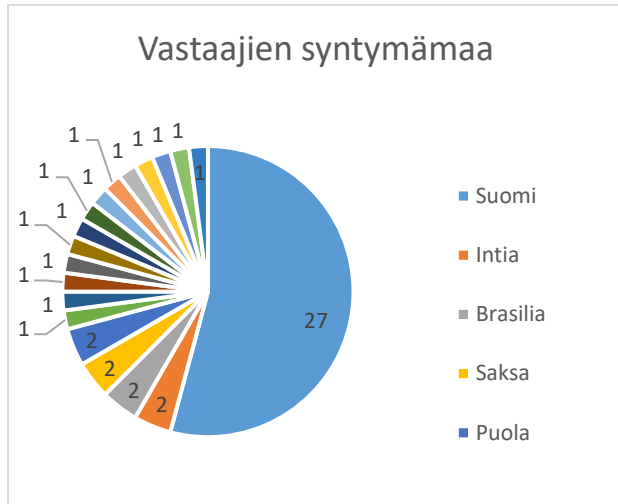
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In terms of their marital status, most respondents (40, 83%) were married or in cohabitation. Additionally, 4 respondents were divorced, 2 were in an unregistered relationship, and 2 others were single. Overall, among all 48 families 26 (55%) included one child, 15 (32%) had two children, and only 6 (12%) had a higher number of children, mostly three or four.

In terms of the demographic profile of the respondents, the gender distribution of the respondents was tilted strongly toward women. Among the 48 respondents, 44 were women, while only 3 were men and one "other". A possible explanation for this female domination in responding to this survey is that family leaves are perhaps still considered a "feminine issue" by the survey's target audience. A certain confirmation for this assumption is arguably found in the later presented answers to the survey questions regarding the distribution of the different types of family leave between the genders, as also there a clear domination of women in taking the leaves was found.

As for the country of birth, most (27 out of 48, 56%) of these primarily female respondents were born in Finland. This majority of Finnish respondents to the survey is rather interesting, considering that as mentioned, all respondents of the survey belong to a family in which at least one of the members was born abroad, and 16% of them belong to a family in which both partners were born abroad. Thus, it would have been expected that most respondents would have been born abroad, but instead, only 42% of the respondents were born abroad, with no significant majority for any country of birth.

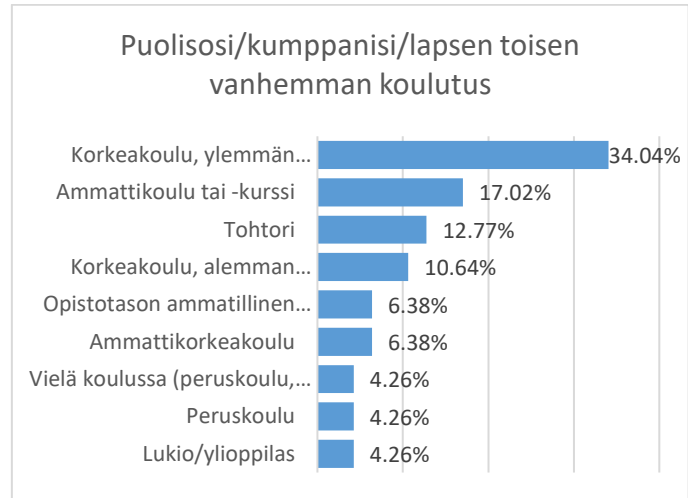
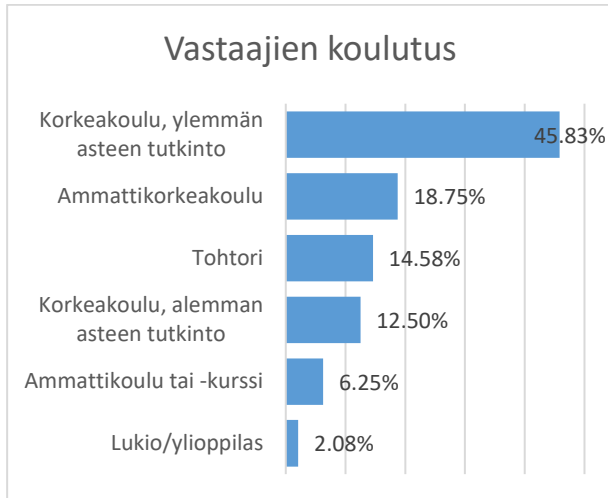
In contrast, among the other parent in the family of the respondents, most typically the father, only 12 (25%) were born in Finland, and the rest 75% were born abroad, with Iraq (5 of the other parents, 10.4%) as the only country with some sort of prominence. Hence, when considering the data that the only 3 males who responded to the survey were also born abroad, it is revealed that in 37 (79%) of the families of the survey respondents, the father was born abroad, while only in 20 (41.5%) the mother was born abroad. It can be summarized, therefore, that in most of the families of the survey respondents, the mother is Finnish, and the father is foreign-born.



Of the 48, mostly women, who responded to the survey, 28 (58%) were aged 30-39 years old, 13 (27%) were 40 years old or older, and 7 (14%) were 20-29 years old. Many of the respondents were rather highly educated: 6 (12.50%) had a lower-scale academic degree, 22 (45.8%) had a higher-scale academic degree, and 7 (14.6%) had a doctor's degree. Additionally, 9 (18.75%) had a degree from a university of applied sciences, 3 graduated from a vocational school or course, and 1 was a high school graduate.

In contrast, the other parent in the family of the respondents to the survey was on average less educated, although still more educated than the Finnish general population average.<sup>9</sup> Among the other, almost exclusively male, parent in the family of the respondents, 5 (10.6%) had a lower-scale academic degree, 16 (34%) had a higher-scale academic degree, and 6 (12.77%) were doctors. Additionally, 3 of the partners had a degree from a university of applied sciences, 3 had college-level professional education, 8 graduated from a vocational school or course, and 6 had only high school or lower level of education.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk\\_koulutus\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_koulutus_en.html)



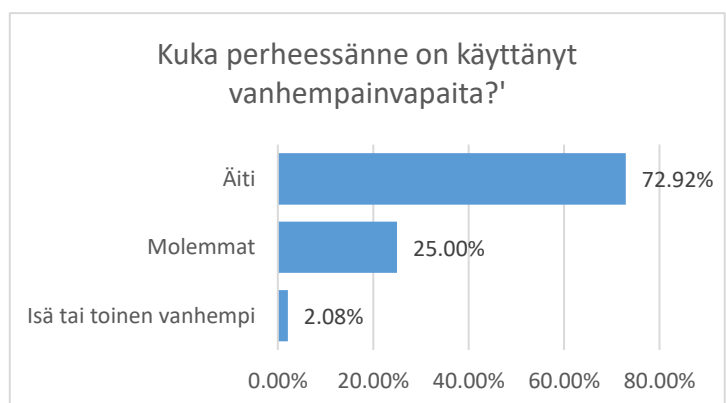
Thus, looking at the average respondent to the survey, this one is typically a Finnish female in her thirties, rather highly educated, who is heterosexually married and has one child. In contrast, her partner is most often a foreign male, with slightly lesser education, but still higher than the Finnish average. These features of the respondents and their partners are interesting and important to bear in mind when reading the results of the survey, because these do not necessarily represent the average or most common intercultural family in Finland. This specific profile of the respondents to the survey, along with the rather low number of respondents (48), therefore necessitates being cautious when drawing general conclusions from this survey regarding the use of family leaves by the general population of intercultural families in Finland. Nonetheless, even with the necessary reservation, it is arguable that the results of this survey are interesting and useful, as they provide some unique, novel insights regarding the experience of intercultural families with the family leave system in Finland.

# Results

The survey outcomes, as will be presented in this chapter, reveal an interesting, rather specific picture regarding the usages, difficulties and limitations, as well as the attitude of intercultural families about the family leave system in Finland. As will be shown, there are several recurring patterns among the multicultural families that participated in the current survey, for example regarding the identity of the parent who takes most of the family leaves, the reasons for it, and the comprehension of the family leave system in Finland. These experiences, it can be suggested, might be unique to intercultural families in Finland, in comparison to the practices and attitudes regarding parental leaves by other types of families with children in the country. Therefore, these results, are worth particular attention by political decision-makers, senior officials in public institutions, social policy specialists in organizations, or anyone concerned with the design of the family leave system in Finland.

## The usage of parental allowance

The review of the survey results shall begin with examining the answers to the questions regarding the families' usage of the parental allowance, which as mentioned can be taken for the largest number of days, and with the highest flexibility in their distribution between the parents. Assessing the replies to the question about this allowance reveals that although both parents are equally eligible to receive the parental allowance and stay with the child, among the families who participated in the survey it has been almost exclusively only the mother who received it. Among the 48 respondents, 35 (73%) stated that in their family only the mother received the parental allowance and stayed with the child, while in 12 (25%) families both parents did, and only in one family it was the father or other parent alone who received the allowance. This distribution remains rather the same even when examining separately and comparing the outcomes among respondents who belong to a family in which the father was born in Finland, and those who belong to a family in which the father was born abroad. Similarly, also the level of education of the respondents or the other parent in their families does not affect these outcomes.



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Additionally, even among those who stated that both parents took the leave, the leave was not distributed equally. Among the 11 who stated that both parents took the leave and gave details on how exactly they divided the leave, 3 answered that the mother took most of the leave and the other parent less than a month, 4 stated that the mother took the longer leave but the father also took a considerable leave, in 3 families both parents took a similar length of leave, and only in one family the father took the majority of the leave. Thus, it can be clearly seen that among the intercultural families who participated in the survey, it has been mostly the mother who received the parental allowance and stayed home with the child.

When asked in an open question about their reasons for their division (or lack thereof) of the parental allowance between the parents, many respondents (20, 49%) cited some form of a financial cause. Specifically, among those who provided a financial cause, a prominent explanation has been unemployment or low income of the foreign-born parent at the time before or after the child's birth. These conditions of low salary or unemployment by the foreign-born parent turned the parental allowance economically unviable for these parents, because as earlier mentioned the amount of parental allowance the parents receive is a certain percentage of the income they would receive otherwise at the same time. Thus, because these parents were low-paid or unemployed at that time, their parental allowance would be very low, actually lower than the unemployment benefit some of them could receive. Because the allowance they would have received would have been very low, these foreign-born unemployed or low-paid parents preferred to either stay at their work, or keep on receiving the higher unemployment benefits and stay at home with the child and the other parent anyway as unemployed.

Other than financial causes, a prominent explanation for the families' usage of the parental leave has been individual and cultural reasons, mentioned by 17 (41.5%) of the respondents. Additionally, 8 respondents (19.50%) mentioned a practical, non-financial consideration related to one of the parents being an immigrant, such as integration training of the immigrant parent at the same time. Finally, 7 (17%) other respondents mentioned other varying practical considerations. These data, of the different explanations of the respondents regarding their families' usage of the parental leave, as coded into different categories, can be found in the table below.

*Table 1 - Respondents' explanations of their families' usage of the parental leave, as coded into categories.*

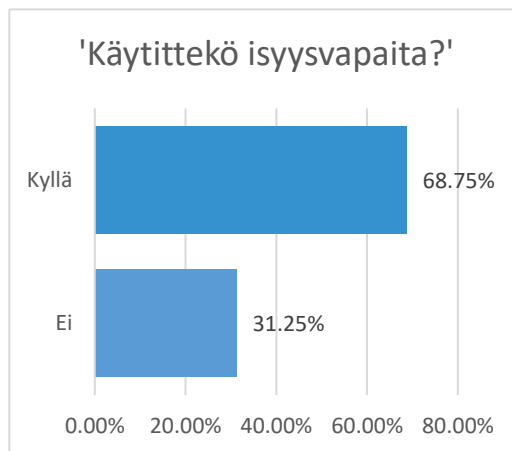
<b>Reasoning for the form of using the parental leave</b>	<b>Percentage of responses</b>
Individual preferences	26.83%
Financial reasons	24.39%
Other practical reasons	12.20%
Financial reasons, Practical reasons related to one of the parents being an immigrant	7.32%
Breastfeeding	4.88%
Financial reasons, individual preferences, Practical reasons related to one of the parents being an immigrant	4.88%
Practical reasons related to one of the parents being an immigrant	2.44%
Financial reasons and individual preferences	2.44%
Financial reasons, Individual preferences, breastfeeding	2.44%
Breastfeeding, Practical reasons related to one of the parents being an immigrant	2.44%
Financial reasons, Individual preferences,	2.44%
Financial reasons, Other practical reasons	2.44%
Breastfeeding, Other practical reasons	2.44%
Financial reasons, Practical reasons related to one of the parents being an immigrant, Individual preferences	2.44%
<b>Financial reasons, overall</b>	<b>49.00%</b>
<b>Individual preferences, overall</b>	<b>41.50%</b>
<b>Practical reasons related to one of the parents being an immigrant, overall</b>	<b>19.50%</b>
<b>Other practical reasons, overall</b>	<b>17.00%</b>
<b>Breastfeeding, overall</b>	<b>12.00%</b>

Interestingly, despite being a rather conceivable explanation, breastfeeding was mentioned by only 5 respondents as one of their reasons for the usage of all or most parental leave by the mother. This low mentioning of a typical reason for the mother to stay at home, along with the prominence of causes related to a parent being foreign-born, indicate that perhaps the mother took the parental allowance and stayed at home in intercultural families for different reasons than those by other families. Instead of staying at home due to for example breastfeeding or gender-roles-related reason, it seems that in many intercultural families, the mother took the parental allowance and stayed at home due to the difficulties of the other, immigrant parent. Indeed, looking at the replies of respondents whose family's father is foreign-born reveals that financial reasons, as well as reasons related to a parent being an immigrant, were more commonly mentioned by them compared to respondents whose family's father was born in Finland, and hence only the mother is foreign-born.



## The usage of paternity allowance

The picture regarding the usage of the allowances by the respondents' families is rather different, yet with some similarities, when it comes to the paternity allowance. This allowance, as previously mentioned, can be taken only by the father and for a much lower number of working days, 54. Regarding this allowance, 33 (69%) respondents reported that the father in their family used the paternity allowance, a much higher number than the 27% of the fathers who used the parental allowance.



Looking at the average number of working days the fathers received the allowance and stayed home with the child, it is rather high, 24 working days, almost half of the maximum 54 working days for which it is allowed to receive the allowance. Nonetheless, this high average seems rather misleading if looking at the median number of days used, which is much lower, 14 days. As this median may suggest, and which is confirmed by looking at the individual answers, although the average paternity leave days taken was 24, most fathers did not take around 24 paternity leave days. Instead, most fathers in the families who participated in the survey took either the maximum of 54 days or close to that, or more commonly 0 or very few days.

Kuinka monta päivää isä käytti vapaita?	Keskiarvo	Mediaani	Moodi
	24	14	54

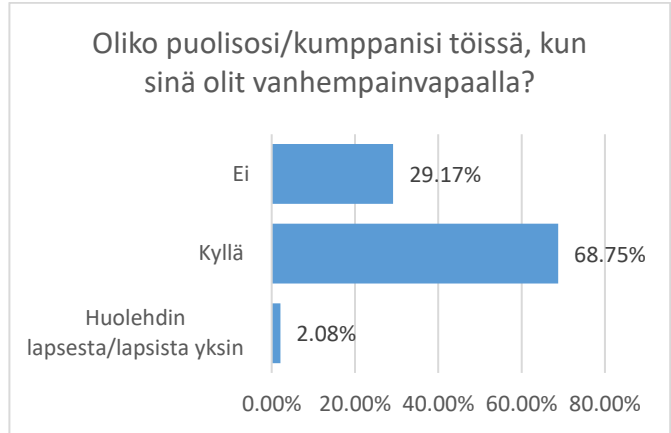
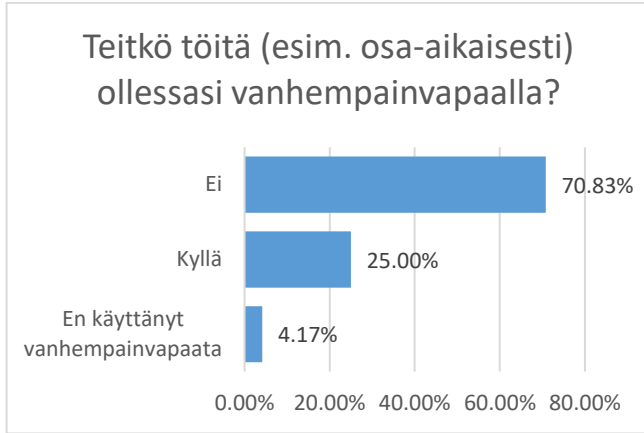
Among the 18 respondents whose family's father took 0 or very few paternity leave days, the most common explanation was again financial factors or unemployment of one of the parents, mentioned by 11 (61%) of these respondents. Same as with the parental leave, these financial issues or unemployment again pertained mostly to the families' foreign-born fathers, to an even more pronounced extent than in relation to the parental leave. This prominence of unemployment of the father as a cause of the lack of use of the paternity leave is illustrated by the fact that among the 18 respondents who reported that their family did not use the paternity leave, 8 stated that the father was at home anyway due to unemployment.

Other reasons for not taking the paternity leave were varying practical issues, mentioned by 3 out of the 18 respondents, as well as lack of knowledge about the paternity leave, immigration issues, and individual preferences, all mentioned only by one or two respondents. Thus, it can be summarized that the most prominent factor affecting the usage of paternity leave in the respondents' families is financial issues or unemployment, specifically of the foreign-born father. An illustration of the significance of the country of birth of the father on whether the family used the paternity leave can be seen in the table below. As the table shows, 38% of the families whose father is foreign-born did not use the paternity allowance, while among families whose father was born in Finland only 10% did not use the paternity allowance.

Isän syntymämaa	Käyttökö isyysvapaita?		
	Ei	Kyllä	LOPPUSUMMA
Suomi	10.00%	90.00%	100.00%
Muut	37.84%	62.16%	100.00%
<b>LOPPUSUMMA</b>	<b>31.25%</b>	<b>68.75%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

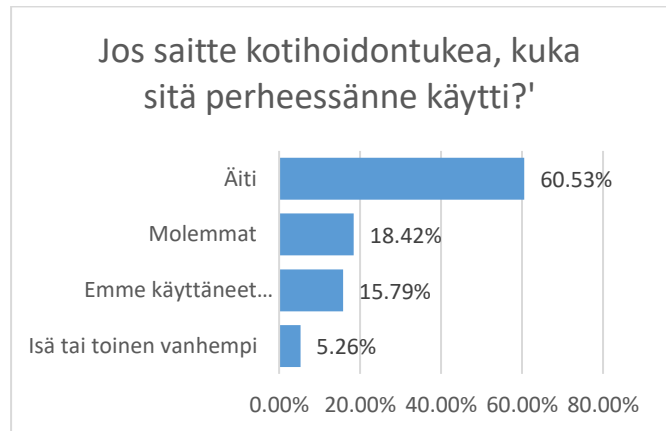
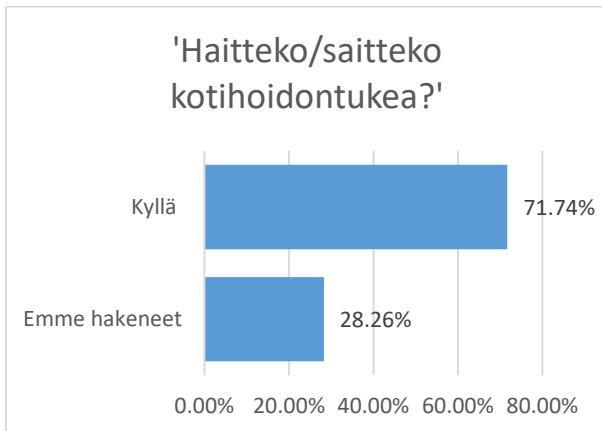
As mentioned earlier, of the 54 working days which the father can take as paternity leave, 18 can be taken while the mother is also on parental leave. This possibility for both parents to take the leave at the same time and stay at home with the newborn was used by all of the respondents' families which used the paternity leave. Moreover, among those 21 families who used the leave and responded to the question about its possible joint usage, 18 (86%) reported that the father took the paternity leave with the mother for the maximum or close to the maximum 18 working days allowed. Additionally, 3 (14%) respondents said that the father took the leave together with the mother for 7 days or less.

Among all 48, mostly female, respondents to the survey, 34 (71%) reported that they did not do any paid work during their parental leave, while 12 (25%) said they worked while on leave, in part-time jobs for example. In contrast, among the almost exclusively male partners of respondents, 33 (69%) worked during the leave, and only 14 (29%) did not. Nonetheless, these outcomes vary quite much depending on where the father was born: in the 10 families whose father was born in Finland, 9 (90%) of the fathers worked while being on leave, while among the 37 foreign-born fathers, 23 (62%) worked during their leave.



## The usage of home care allowance

The last type of allowance which the respondents were asked about was the home care allowance. This allowance is considerably lower, and can be given to one of the parents to stay at home full or part time up until the child is three years old. Regarding this allowance, 33 out of 46 (72%) said that their family applied for it, while 13 (28%) said that their family did not. Among those 33 whose families applied for it, in 23 (70%) it was only the mother who received it and stayed at home with the child, in 7 families both parents received it, and only in 2 the father alone received the home care allowance.



When explaining the division of the home care allowance between the parents, the most common reasons were again financial and employment factors, mentioned by 12 (57%) of the 21 respondents to the question. In contrast, 6 respondents explained the distribution of the home care allowance in their family with individual and cultural causes, and 5 mentioned a practical reason. These outcomes can be seen in the table below, in the form of the explanations of the respondents regarding their usage of home care allowance, as coded into different categories.

<b>Coded categories of 'Millä perusteella teitte päätöksen siitä, kuka kotihoidon tukea perheessänne käyttää?'</b>	<b>Percentage of responses</b>
Financial/employment issues	47.62%
Practical reason	23.81%
Individual preference	19.05%
Financial/employment issues, individual preferences	4.76%
Individual preference, financial issues	4.76%
<b>Financial reasons, overall</b>	<b>57.00%</b>
<b>Individual preferences, overall</b>	<b>28.50%</b>
<b>Practical reason, overall</b>	<b>23.81%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Nonetheless, unlike the explanations about the other allowances, regarding the home care allowance financial and employment-related explanations were more common among respondents from families whose father was born in Finland. Economic reasons for the division of the home care allowance between the parents were mentioned by all respondents from families whose father was born in Finland, and almost always as the exclusive cause. In contrast, among the respondents whose family's father is foreign-born, only 47% have given financial explanations for their distribution of the home-care allowance, while 29% mentioned practical reasons and 24% referred to individual preference.

A possible explanation for this difference is the earlier mentioned very different features of the home care allowance, compared with the maternity, parental, and paternity allowances. Unlike these latter allowances, the home care allowance is not tied to the receiver's income prior to receiving them, but instead, its sum is predefined by the municipality in which the receiver lives. Hence, the home care allowance is typically much lower than the other allowances, making it rather unattractive for people who receive a decent salary in Finland.

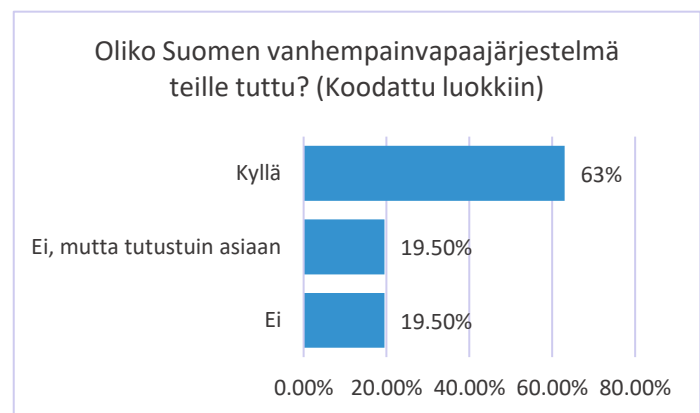
Thus, it is possible that for the Finnish fathers of the respondents' families, the difference between their own salary and the sum of the home care allowance makes it a crucial financial factor for not taking them, and preferring that they would be used by the foreign-born mother of their family. In contrast, among families in which the father is foreign-born, the difference between the sum of the allowance and their own salary perhaps did not play such a major role. As seen earlier, in quite a few of the families in which the father is foreign-born, the father is unemployed or low-salaried, and hence his choice of not receiving the allowance was not only economically based. Instead, as can be indeed

seen in the individual answers of respondents from families whose father is foreign-born, other factors came into play, typically practical, individual, and cultural reasons.

To sum up this sub-section, in the families who participated in the survey, the vast majority of them intercultural, it has been most typically the mother who received most of the allowances and stayed home with the child. However, the reasons for this were typically not related to cultural or gender norms, but instead, in most families financial reasons caused the father to hardly use the different types of paternity leave. As was shown, issues such as low salary or unemployment of the foreign-born fathers were rather common causes for these fathers not to take the salary-tied leave. Nonetheless, quite some of these fathers still stayed at home for some time after childbirth, while receiving other social security benefits, and not the parental allowances. In contrast, in families where the father was born in Finland, he was typically not at home with the mother for a long time after the child birth, but instead returned quite quickly to work.

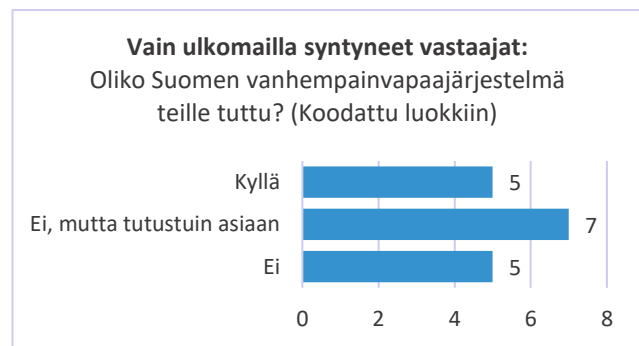
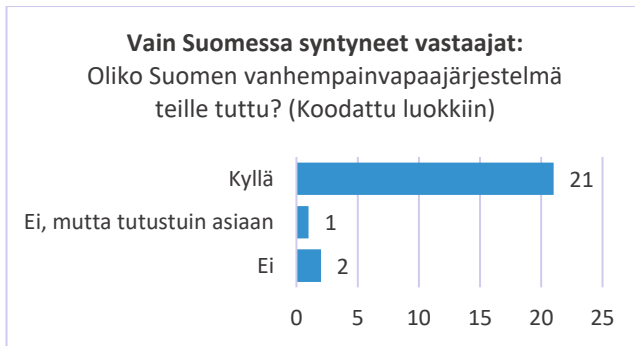
## General attitudes regarding the family leave system in Finland

Finally, in the last section of the survey respondents were asked about their understanding of the family leave system in Finland, the ease of their family in making decisions regarding the parental leave, and their suggestions for improving the system. As they indicated, most survey respondents had good knowledge of the Finnish family leave system, as 26 (63%) of the 41 respondents to this question claimed that the family leave system was familiar to them before the pregnancy. Additionally, 8 (19.50%) respondents said that the system was initially unfamiliar to them but mentioned a source through which they learned about it, and 8 others indicated that they were not familiar with the system without indicating if they eventually learned about it.



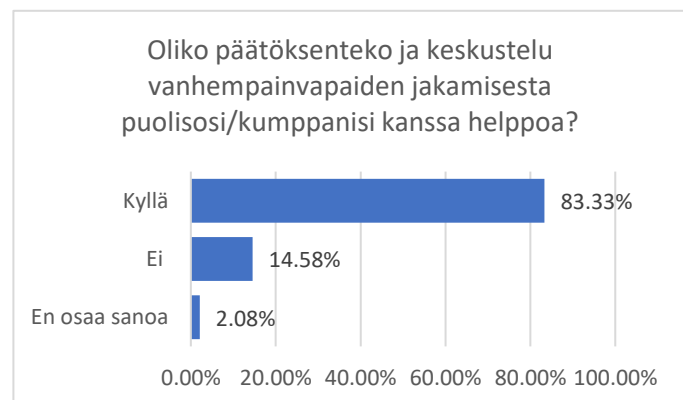
As perhaps can be expected, there are quite large differences between respondents born in Finland and those born abroad regarding prior knowledge about the Finnish family leave system. As found, among the 24 respondents to the question who were born in Finland, 21 (87.5%) stated that they had

an early familiarity with the system, one was not initially familiar with it but mentioned a source of learning, and only two stated that it was not familiar to them without mentioning a source of learning. In contrast, only 5 (29.4%) out of the 17 foreign-born respondents to the question stated that they were familiar with the Finnish family leave system, 7 said that they were not familiar but they learned about the system, and 5 others (29.4%) stated that the system was not familiar to them without mentioning a source of learning about it.



Among the 13 total respondents who mentioned a source of learning about the Finnish family leave system, 11 of them stated they learned about it through the information produced by the Finnish social security service KELA. Additionally, 4 respondents mentioned their employer as their source of information, exclusively or in addition to KELA. Nonetheless, 3 respondents claimed that KELA's information was difficult to understand, particularly in its English version.

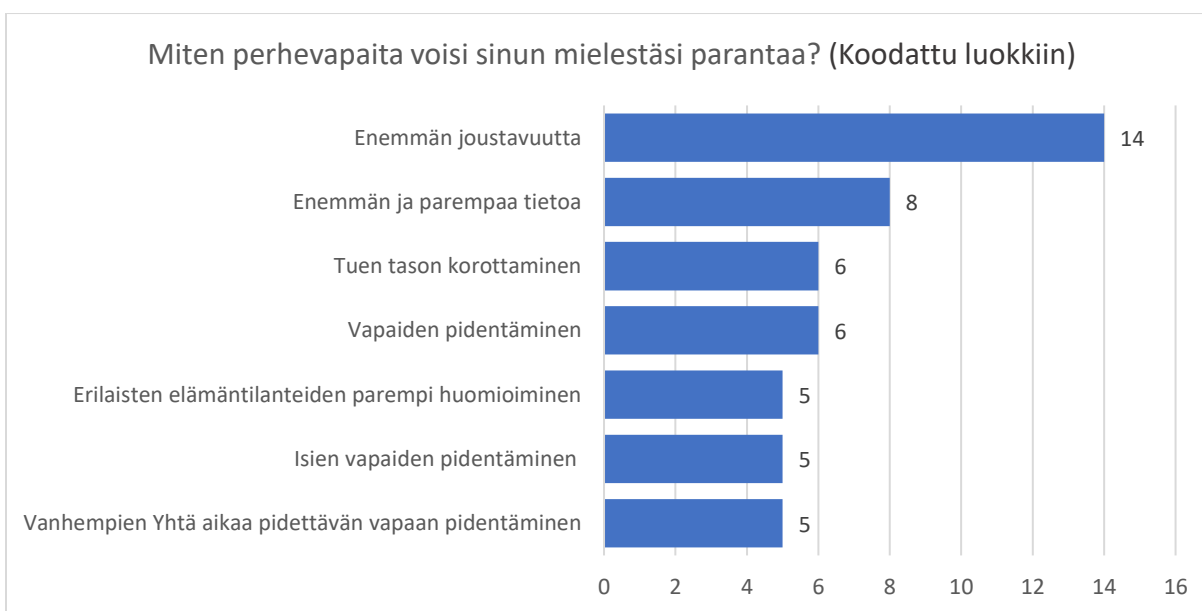
When asked whether it was easy to discuss and decide with the other parent about the usage of the parental leave, 40 (83%) out of the 48 respondents stated that it was easy. In contrast, 7 respondents said that it was not easy, and one respondent could not say. When those who said it was not easy were asked why it was so, 6 of them responded with very different answers from which it was difficult to deduce.



Finally, respondents were asked how they think the family leave system in Finland can be improved. As expected, this question yielded a large variety of answers, but nevertheless, it is possible to identify several different reoccurring themes. Among these, the most common is allowing more flexibility in

the usage of the different types of family leave, mainly by letting the parents more freely choose who stays home with the child at any time, as well as increasing the possibility of working part-time while on a leave. This theme of more flexibility was mentioned by 14 of the respondents, while 8 respondents suggested that more and better information about the family system should be provided, particularly to the parents but also to employers. Additionally, extending the parental leave, as well as increasing the sums of the allowances to be closer to 100% of the parent's salary, were each brought up by 6 respondents.

Other common suggestions to improve the Finnish family leave system, each mentioned by 5 respondents, were extending the leave for the father so it will be equal to that of the mother, extending the time during which both parents can be on leave together, as well as better consideration of people in different life situations. Specifically, about the last suggestion, respondents have explained rather in length that the family leaves in their current form cater mainly to parents who are employed, and much less to those who gain their income through other forms, or are unemployed. Thus, it was suggested, a higher minimal sum of allowance should be secured, and better info should be provided for people who receive a low or no salary.



Finally, there were other important suggestions which were mentioned only by few respondents. Such suggestion was for example significantly increasing the sum of the home care allowance, making it more viable for people to use them and stay with their child at home for a longer time. Additionally,

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some respondents brought up the need to cater better to people with multiple births or special medical needs. Ultimately, it was suggested that better information and encouragement should be provided to immigrant families, and particularly to immigrant fathers, to use the leave.

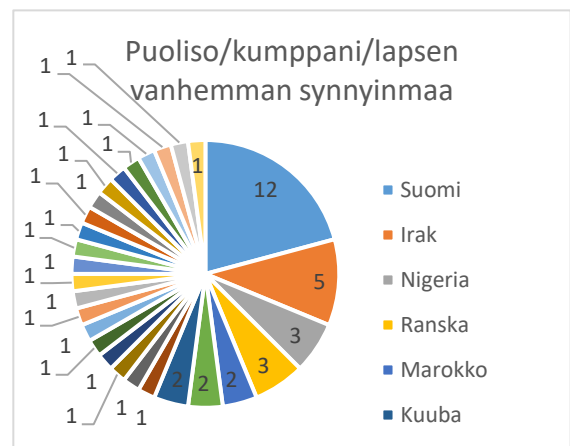
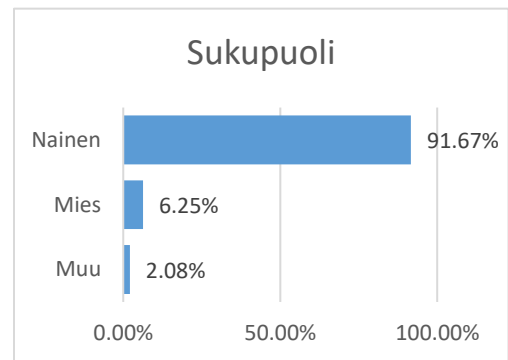


# Conclusions and policy recommendations

## Summary of the results

To summarize, this report presented the results of a survey regarding the use of family leave by intercultural families in Finland. This survey was executed by Familia ry, which is a Finnish national expert organization of intercultural families. The purpose of the survey was to gain insights into the extent and form of usage of family leave by multicultural families in Finland, which could be used by Finnish social organizations, public institutions, and policymakers in the field of welfare services.

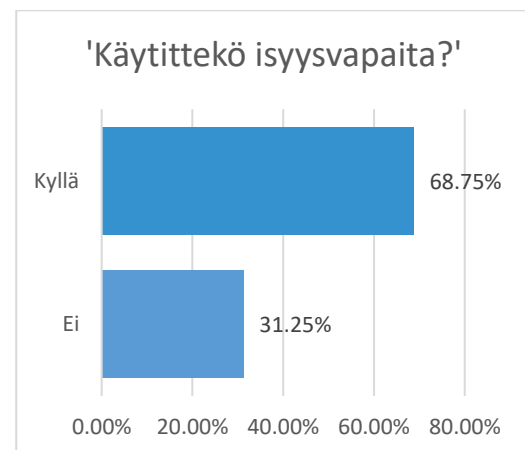
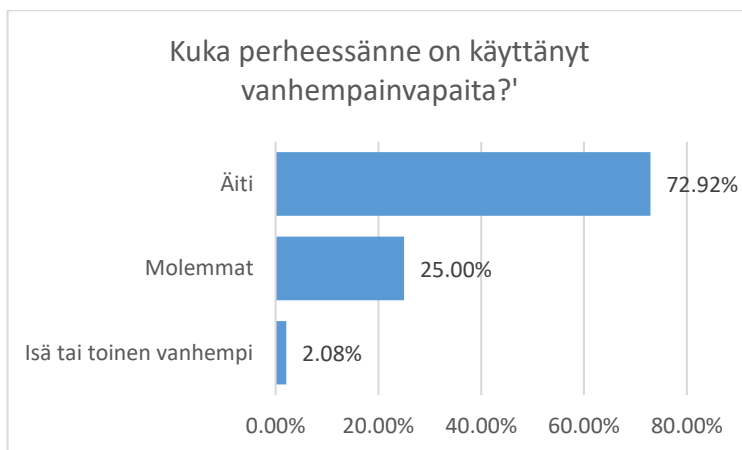
The survey was distributed openly through Familia's social media channels between June and July 2022. Overall, 48 people responded to the survey, of which 45 were members of intercultural families, and 3 were members of monocultural immigrant families. Additionally, 45 out of 48 respondents were members of heterosexual families, and most were part of a nuclear family, which typically included one or two children. In terms of the demographic profile of the 48 respondents, 44 were females, and 27 (56%) of them were born in Finland. In contrast, almost all the other parents in the family of the respondents were male, and 37 (79%) of these males were born outside of Finland. Most of the respondents and the other parents in their families were highly educated, while few of the other parents were comparatively slightly less educated.



This specific profile of the families that participated in the survey certainly shaped its results. As was found, in 35 (73%) of the families who responded to the survey it was only the mother who took the parental leave, while in 12 (25%) families both parents did, and only in one family it was the father who took it. Nonetheless, the domination of the mothers in receiving the parental allowance was typically not due to traditional gender roles or personal preferences, but instead because of financial, occupational, or immigration-related constraints of the foreign-born father in their families. As was

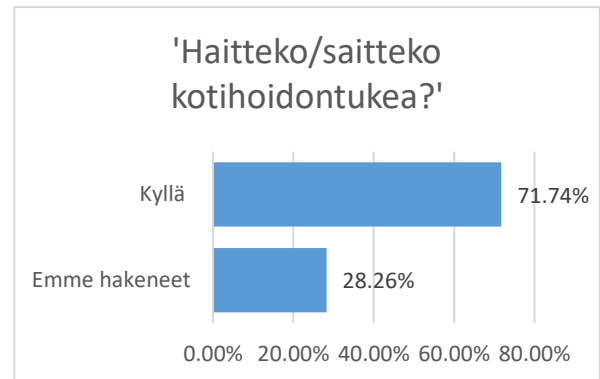
shown, low salary, unemployment, or integration training of the immigrant father has significantly reduced the viability or possibility of taking the parental leave by the father in quite many of the respondents' families. Specifically, because the parental allowance is calculated as a certain share of the recipient's original salary, with a rather low secured minimum rate, families have chosen that the father would not take the leave if he was low-salaried or unemployed.

Similarly, financial or occupational issues were primarily those which hampered the possibility of taking the paternity leave by foreign-born fathers from the families who participated in the survey. As was shown, although most fathers have taken the paternity leave, over 30 % of them did not take it or took very few days. Particularly, not taking the paternity leave was much more common among fathers who were born outside of Finland, compared to fathers who were born in the country. The reasons for that, as was presented, were again most commonly unemployment or low salary of the foreign-born fathers, which made the salary-tied paternity allowance unviable for them.

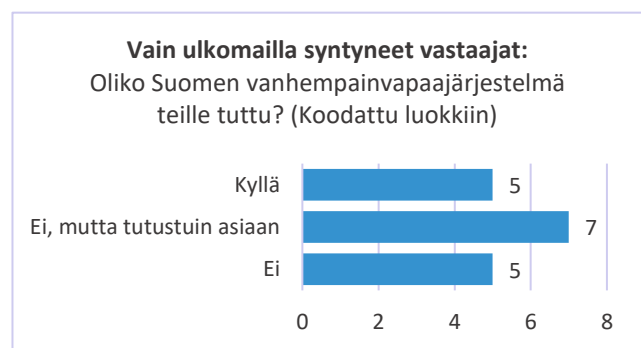
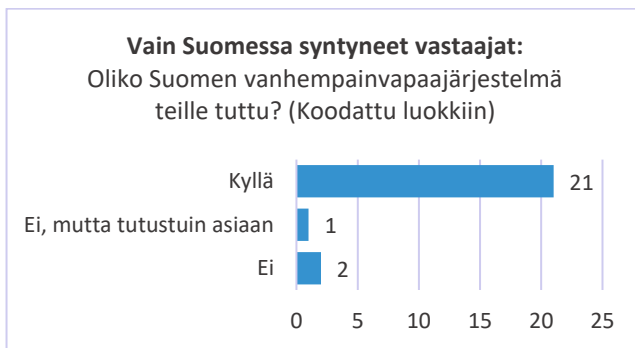


Of the fathers who took paternity leave, the vast majority used the maximum or close to the maximum number of days allowed to take the leave at the same time the mother is on leave. Nonetheless, 69% of the fathers returned to paid work rather quickly while the mother was still on a leave, while only 25% of the mothers worked during the period when one of the parents was on a leave. This outcome again varied quite much between fathers born in Finland and those born abroad, as a considerably lower share of foreign-born fathers worked during the family leave.

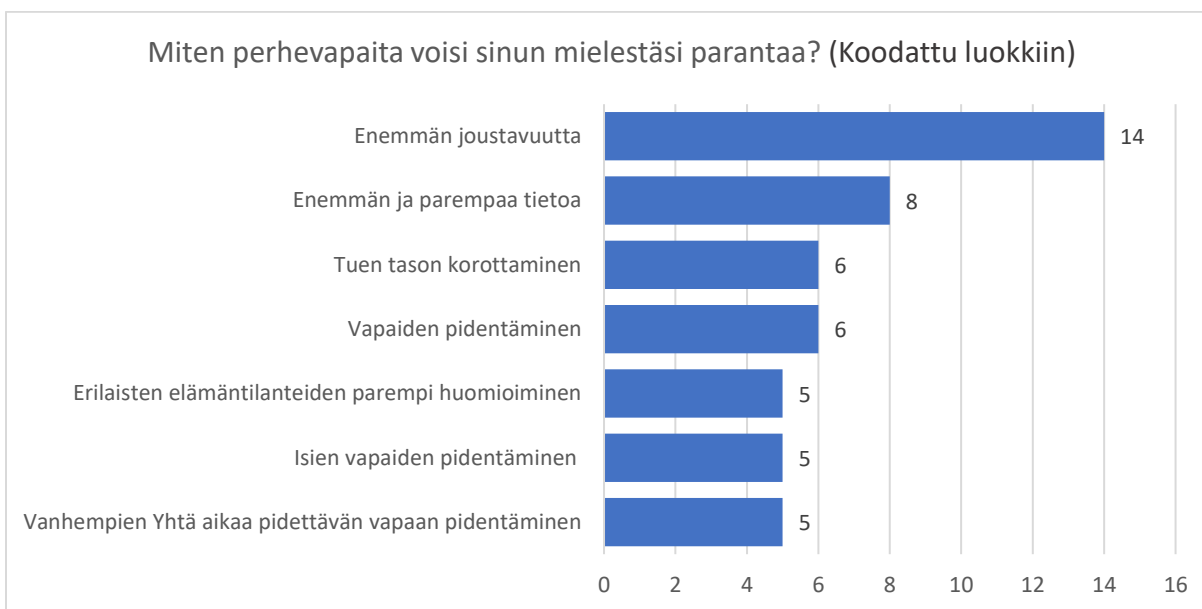
Ultimately, 72% of the families who participated in the survey applied for the home care allowance, and in 60% it was the mother who received it. Again, the most common reason for this distribution of the allowance was financial, but this time this reasoning was used more often by respondents from families whose father was born in Finland. As was suggested, the financial consideration which led fathers born in Finland not to receive the home care allowance was that the sum of this allowance is fixed and low, commonly much lower than their salary.



For 83% of survey respondents, the decision was easy regarding how to use the different allowances and divide them between the parents. A possible reason is that 63% of them claimed that they had an initial familiarity with the family leave system in Finland, and 19.50% said they managed to learn about it, most commonly through KELA's information. Nonetheless, there were large differences in the responses to this question between respondents born in Finland and those born abroad: among foreign-born respondents, much fewer were initially familiar with the parental leave system, or reported a source through which they learned about it.



Quite many suggestions on how to improve the Finnish family system were brought up by the survey respondents. Among them, the most common proposal was greater flexibility in dividing the leave between the parents and in the possibility of working part-time while receiving the allowance. Other suggestions which received considerable mentioning were better information about the system, increasing the allowance and extending the leave for both parents apart and together, and better consideration of people who do not receive their incomes through employment.



## Policy recommendations

Based on the results of this survey, there are several policy recommendations that should be seriously considered by policy makers and implementers. As can be inferred from the responses regarding the usage of the family leave and the attitudes towards it, there are several current shortcomings in the family leave system in Finland, particularly when it comes to catering to different types of families, such as the intercultural family. Moreover, many of these shortcomings found through this survey were not resolved by the reform in the family leave system which entered into force in August 2022. Ultimately, the modifications which can be inferred from this survey outcomes do not only pertain to policies regarding the family leave system, but also in relation to the integration of foreign-born people in Finland in general.

The first, perhaps most obvious, policy recommendation based on the survey results is that more substantial measures must be taken to allow all parents to care for their newborn, as well as equalize this care between the parents. As mentioned at the very beginning of this report, the possibility of staying at home and caring for a newborn is one of the most important welfare rights of parents in Finland. Due to the importance of exercising this right by all parents, the family leave reform from August 2022 has attempted to increase parents' equality in taking the parental leave by giving them an equal quota of it.

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Nonetheless, as highlighted in this report, giving a quota of parental leave does not in fact allow both parents to utilize it, but instead, the usage of the leave is very dependent on the living conditions of each of the parents. As shown, issues such as low salary, unemployment, or ongoing education of one of the parents severely harm the possibility and viability of receiving the family allowances. The reason for that is that the main types of family allowances (maternity, paternity, and parental allowances) are calculated as a percentage of the parent's salary, with a rather low minimum rate in the case of low or no income.

**Therefore, the first concrete policy recommendation of this report is that the minimum daily rate of the family allowances shall be raised to a rate that allows maintaining a family in Finland.** As can be argued, raising the minimum daily rate of family allowance to a sufficient level is crucial to allow all parents in Finland to take care of their newborn, regardless of their personal or occupational situation. Thus, to allow parents in intercultural families in Finland to exercise their basic right to care for their newborn, and to foster equality between the parents in exercising this right, the minimum daily rate of the family allowances must be raised.

An alternative measure, perhaps more comprehensive and ambitious, to allow parents in intercultural families in Finland to equally care for their newborns, is to address the concrete difficulties and inequalities they face. As was presented throughout this report, many parents in intercultural families in Finland encounter everyday, financial, and occupational difficulties. These difficulties, such as integration hardships, low income, and unemployment, typically harm their ability to utilize the different types of family leave in Finland. Moreover, because these difficulties pertain more commonly to the foreign-born parents in these families, they typically lead to inequality between the parents in the usage of the family leave if the other parent in the family was born in Finland.

**Thus, this report's second concrete policy recommendation is that to increase and equalize the use of family leave by parents in intercultural families, the integration of foreign-born parents into the labor market in Finland must be significantly improved.** Such improvement can be executed through a variety of means, many of which were brought up already by Familia ry in other documents, for example in the organization's objectives for the 2023 Finnish parliamentary elections and government

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programme.<sup>10</sup> Prominent measures mentioned in this document to improve the employment situation in Finland for parents who were born abroad were the following:

- Opening up the right to work even before receiving a residence permit for those waiting in Finland for a permit based on family ties.
- Faster processing of applications for residence permits based on family ties.
- Improving the quality of language studies in integration training.
- Offering integration courses also for those who have moved here for work or study.
- Workplaces should be provided with operating models that improve the Finnish language skills of immigrants working in expert positions.
- The development of a qualification recognition system for those who have moved from abroad must be bettered and accelerated.
- Resources must be allocated for continuing education and courses aimed at experts already living in Finland, in order to make their own degree and competence recognized in Finland.
- The public sector's language proficiency requirements for the second domestic language shall be relaxed for certain employment relationships.
- The promotion of good relations between population groups must be at the heart of the integration. The authorities' objectives and responsibilities with regard to good relations between population groups must be clearer.

As we believe, an implementation of the measures included in this list may lead to a significant improvement in the labor market integration of foreign-born parents in intercultural families in Finland. Nonetheless, to allow all parents in Finland to equally and meaningfully exercise their right to care for their newborns, there are still many measures that can be devised, regarding the conditions and inequalities of intercultural parents, but also other parents in Finland. Particularly, another prominent form of inequality between parents in Finland is between men and women in the general society regarding the labor market conditions, and consequently also in the distribution of the family leave.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.familiarity.fi/objectives\\_elections-23.html](https://www.familiarity.fi/objectives_elections-23.html)

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This form of inequality, as well as others, must be addressed to produce a genuine equal possibility for all parents in Finland to care for their newborns.

Based on this report, another issue that needs to be addressed is the home care allowance. As shown, this allowance which allows parents to stay with their children up until they are three years old is quite popular among the intercultural families who participated in the survey, as 72% of them applied for it. Thus, this outcome arguably indicates a strong willingness of the parents in intercultural families to stay with their young for an extended period, longer than allowed through the other allowances.

Nonetheless, unlike the other allowances, the homecare allowance has a fixed, rather low sum, which therefore often puts the families who receive it in financial difficulties, and in a weaker position compared to other families. Indeed, this insufficient financial compensation provided through the home care allowance was brought up as an issue by a few of the respondents to this survey. Thus, to allow intercultural families to fulfil their desire of caring longer for their children without enduring financial difficulties, **this report's third concrete policy recommendation is that the sum of home care allowance must be increased. Alternatively, another recommendation would be to extend the length of the salary-tied types of family leave.**

Finally, the open questions section of the survey has brought up several straightforward policy recommendations to be adopted. Among those, a few that were arguably insufficiently adopted in the family leave reform in August 2022, are:

- **Better information shall be distributed about the allowances, to receivers and employers. This particularly applies to foreign-born receivers and employers.**
- **More flexibility should be allowed in dividing the allowance between the parents.**
- **Parents should be allowed to take the salary-tied family allowances partially more flexibly, alongside working part-time.**

Overall, we believe that adopting the policy recommendations mentioned in this section will bring a vast improvement to the family leave system in Finland. Nonetheless, we assert that further dialogue with the target audience of the family leave, particularly with intercultural families, is necessary to ensure that the needs of families in Finland are properly addressed. Thus, this report ends by calling

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for a further study of the situation of intercultural families in Finland, in regard to their usage of the family leave, but also other aspects of life.