

## Strategic Research Council's theme proposals for 2022 programmes

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### **1. Theme proposal: Children and young people – healthy, thriving and capable makers of the future**

This theme focuses on children and young people as members of society and as makers of the future. Research under the theme shall seek solutions to ensure equal opportunities for all children and young people for a good life and safe growth and development. The wellbeing of children and young people has become polarised. Although most children and young people are doing well, some are not. Crises lead to increased polarisation, and adverse consequences accumulate – structural discrimination increases situational vulnerability. The objective of this theme is to create, through multidisciplinary and interactive research, a broad knowledge base that can support the development of children and young people into diverse and forward-looking actors from their own conditions.

The theme seeks research-based solutions to reduce welfare differences and prevent inequalities. It is important to guarantee every child and young person the opportunity to learn diverse skills for living in a changing world now and in the future. In addition to child poverty and intergenerational transmission of social exclusion, violence and discrimination experienced as a child, such as racism, are significant risk factors for later wellbeing. High-quality and equal early childhood education, pre-primary education and education can at their best compensate for social, cultural and economic differences in welfare. Both science and the arts support children and young people in growing into independent, responsible and insightful members of the community and strengthen their faith in the future and their own abilities. From the point of view of population policy and public health, the health of today's children and young people, including their mental health and lifestyles, from eating habits to mobility, also build a foundation for the future wellbeing of the entire population as well as for the population's work and functional capacity. Social and health services and the benefit system play a key role in facilitating welfare and ensuring an equal footing.



The research, research-based solutions, interventions and multidisciplinary expertise produced under the theme shall support a sustainable, long-term and consistent child and family policy in accordance with Finland's National Child Strategy. Children and young people are active members of society whose opportunities for inclusion must be strengthened, above all by hearing what children and young people have to say. The theme emphasises a wide-ranging and phenomenon-driven systematic approach to research. Inclusion plays a key role in research under the theme, from the research questions through to the research methods and practices. The research should be designed taking into account not only the diversity of children and young people, but also the diversity of families and family models, as well as the perspective of future generations.

## **2. Theme proposal: Security and trust in the age of algorithms**

This theme focuses on security and trust in the age of information technology and hybrid influencing. In addition to more traditional security threats, our operating environments are being unpredictably shaped by threats and opportunities created by digitalisation and technological development as well as various crises ranging from biodiversity loss to climate change, financial crises and power-political conflicts. Citizen's trust in each other, in public authorities, in the welfare state and its safety nets and in the processes are key strengths of a democratic society that are being challenged by change. The better we understand the changes and their dynamics, the better we can combat the security threats and discern the range of new opportunities they bring.

The importance of trust and comprehensive security will be emphasised in the transforming information environment as smart technology, virtual reality, machine learning and other, more functional AI and cyber technologies increasingly redefine the areas in which we operate. Trust lays the foundation for the functioning of social systems and institutions. On the other hand, influencing through information also involves risks that concern misuse of trust. Trust requires predictability, ethics and fairness. These in turn require transparent processes, an ability to identify on which informed or unconscious choices and the values underlying them different technologies and operating models rely, and an ability to identify who has the power to determine these choices. At the same time, it is a question of individuals' safety and the ability to rely on the enforcement of their rights, not only in preparing for threats, but also in the activities of authorities in general. Trust is undermined by unpredictable processes and societal polarisation. Structural discrimination and inequality increase the vulnerability to crises and their harmful consequences, while goodwill among social groups contributes to strengthening trust and democracy.

Through multidisciplinary and interactive research, the theme seeks to build a wide-ranging knowledge base and expertise to identify and combat security threats that undermine trust and to strengthen crisis management and resilience. A comprehensive understanding of the logic

and interdependencies of the change factors supports risk management and enables new types of research-based, sustainable solutions to improve capabilities. Essential for the research carried out under this theme are both individual-level examinations and more comprehensive, societal and cross-national global perspectives. Co-creation with stakeholders will support the definition of relevant research issues and help in finding effective solutions and implementing the necessary measures.

### **Cross-cutting priority: Equality**

The cross-cutting priority in the 2022 strategic research programmes is equality, for individuals, groups and structures alike. Equality is a key value for a democratic welfare state. It emerges most clearly through its shortcomings, as inequality and discrimination. Inequality and structural discrimination make society weaker, with wide-ranging impacts, affecting areas such as the economy, security, wellbeing and cooperation. In the research to be carried out, the aim is to include an equality perspective both in principle and with regard to the effects of the solutions proposed.