

Mental health: mental wellbeing and mental disorders

Lapinlahti 1.4.2025

Kristian Wahlbeck

mieli.fi

mieli



FINLAND



- 5.5 million inhabitants
- 23 wellbeing services counties
- 308 municipalities
- Decision-making power largely decentralised to municipalities (with the exception of health and social care)
- Municipalities are responsible for arranging the basic services for inhabitants (child day care, schooling, libraries, city planning)
- Municipalities have the right to collect income taxes

MIELI – the national mental health CSO since 1897

55 local member organisations

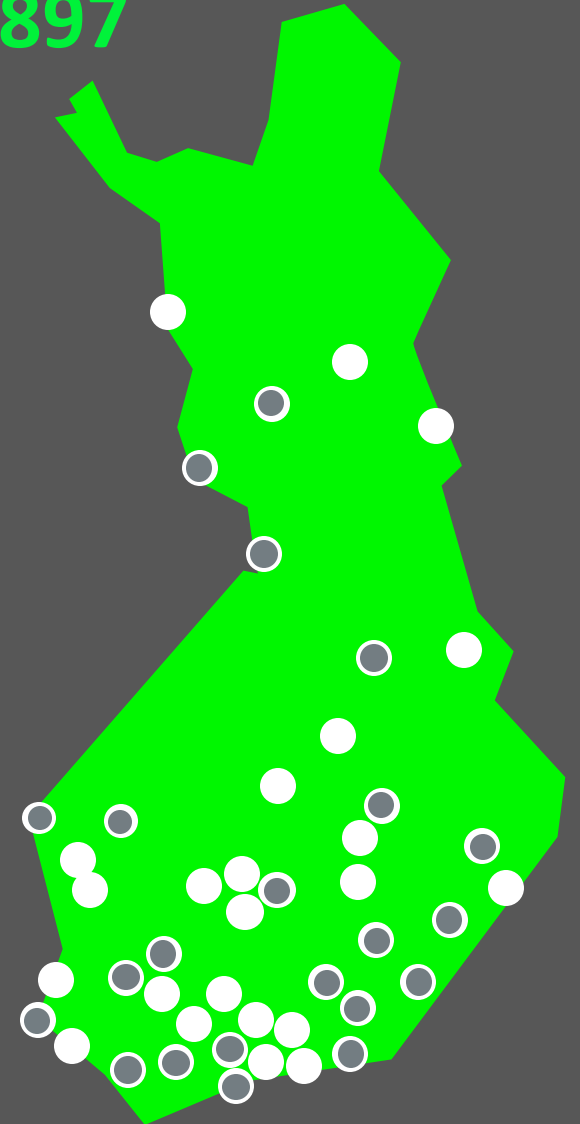
22 free crisis help centres around Finland

31 organisational members

130 employees

3500 volunteers

- Maintains the national Crisis Hotline, the youth chat Sekasin and provides mental health training around Finland
- Manages the operation of Victim Support Finland



The big picture

1. What is mental health
2. The socio-economic determinants of mental health
3. The negative trends in mental health
4. The role of participation and social inclusion

1. What is mental health?

A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. WHO 2015

Mental health is more than absence of mental health problems



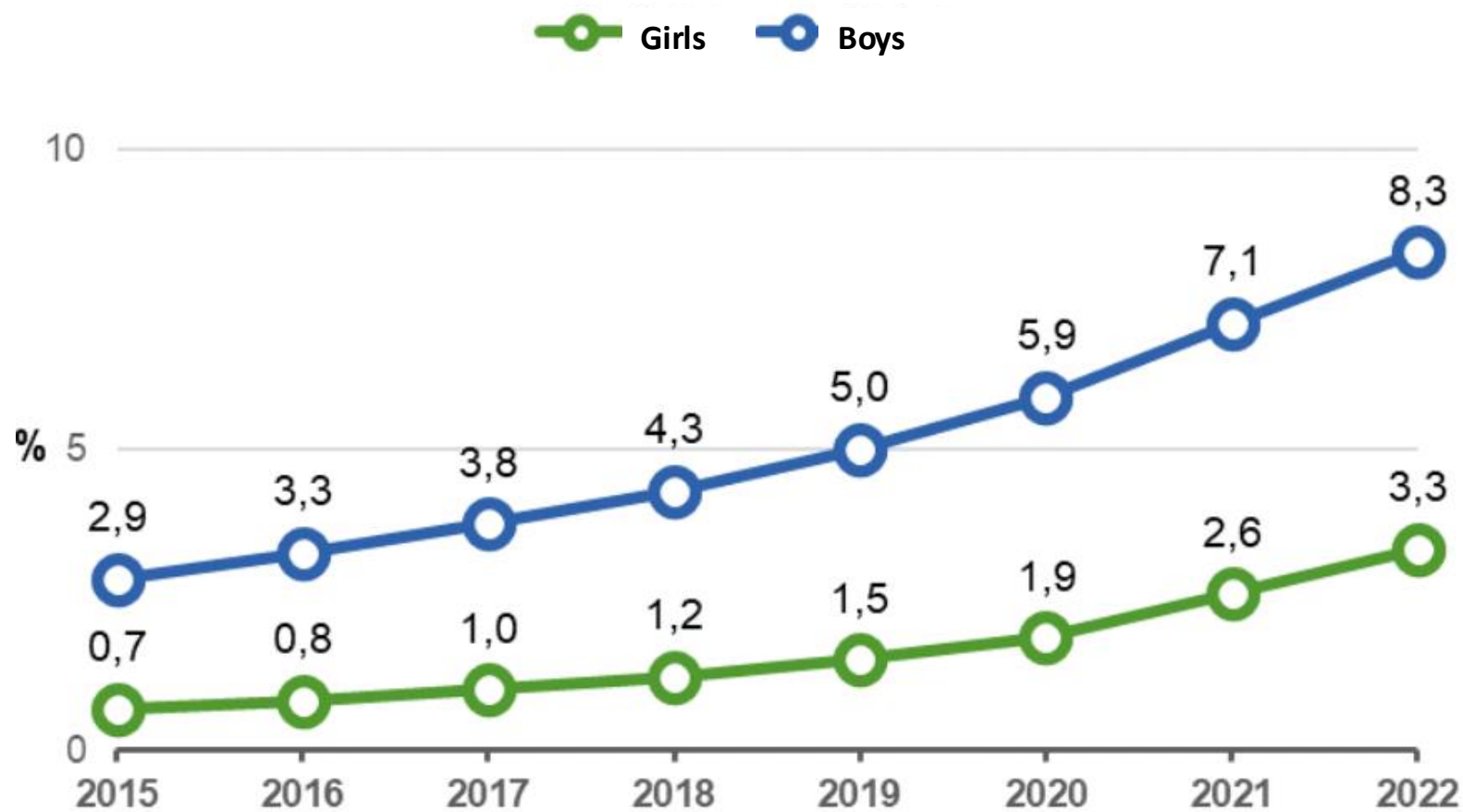


Mental health is context dependent

Mental health is deeply interconnected with societal structures, often influenced by stigma, accessibility, socioeconomic disparities, and cultural norms. Research highlights that barriers such as lack of mental health literacy, poverty, lack of access to services, systemic inequalities, and shortage of mental health professionals exacerbate the challenges.

ADHD cases among minors

Percentage diagnosed with ADHD in Finland, age 7-17 years



Mental health builds on early foundations

In a longitudinal perspective, mental health is highly intergenerational and formed during the early years of life.

Mental health is shaped early in life

Where and how we are born, grow, live, work and age
determines our mental health

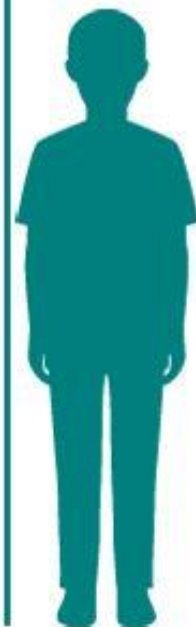


Children & young people

Mental health problems often develop early

1/10

children
aged 5-16 have
a diagnosable
condition



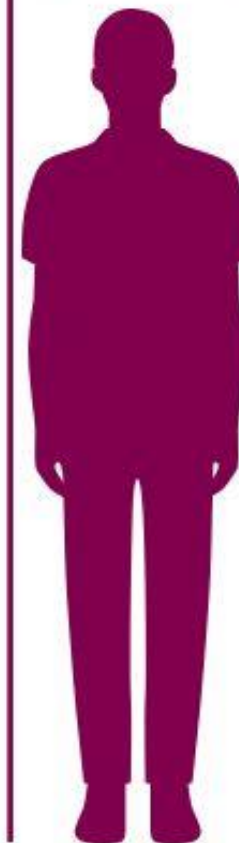
1/2

of all mental
health problems
are established
by the age of 14



3/4

of all mental
health problems
are established
by the age of 24



2. The socio-economic determinants of mental health



- **GOING UPSTREAM: STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH**



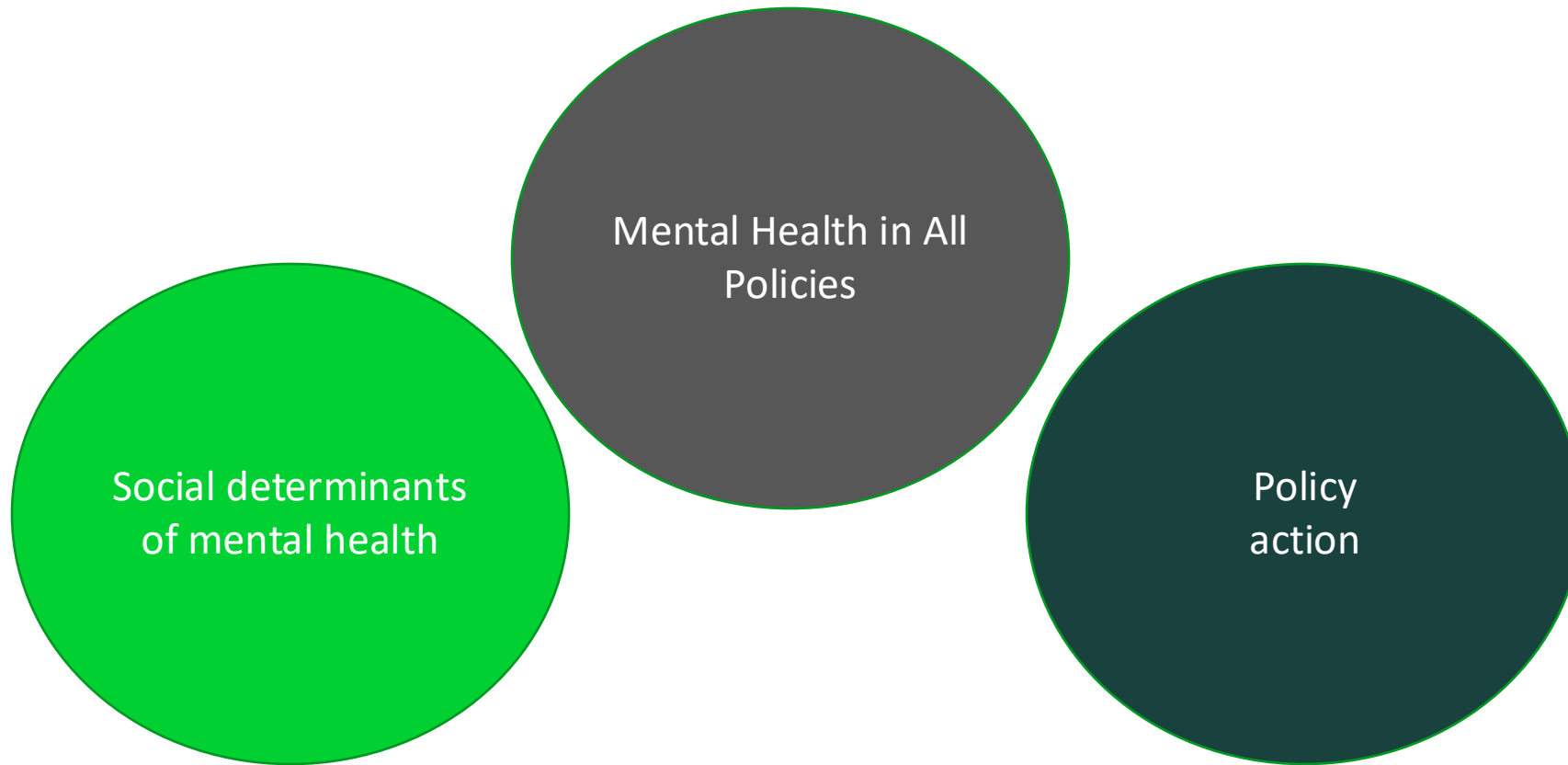
Poverty
Income inequality
Gender inequality
War and conflicts
Social exclusion



Most of the mental health determinants are outside the health sector

- families at struggle
- economic hardship
- low education
- social exclusion
- vulnerabilities





Mental Health in All Policies is an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the mental health implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful mental health impacts in order to improve population mental health and mental health equity.



EU MENTAL HEALTH POLICY PATHWAY

2005

Green Paper for Mental Health -“Improving Mental Health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union”

2008-2011

The European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

2011

Adopted Council Conclusions -“The European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being: results and future actions”

2013

The EU framework on mental health

2013-2016

The Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being

2015-2018

The EU Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being

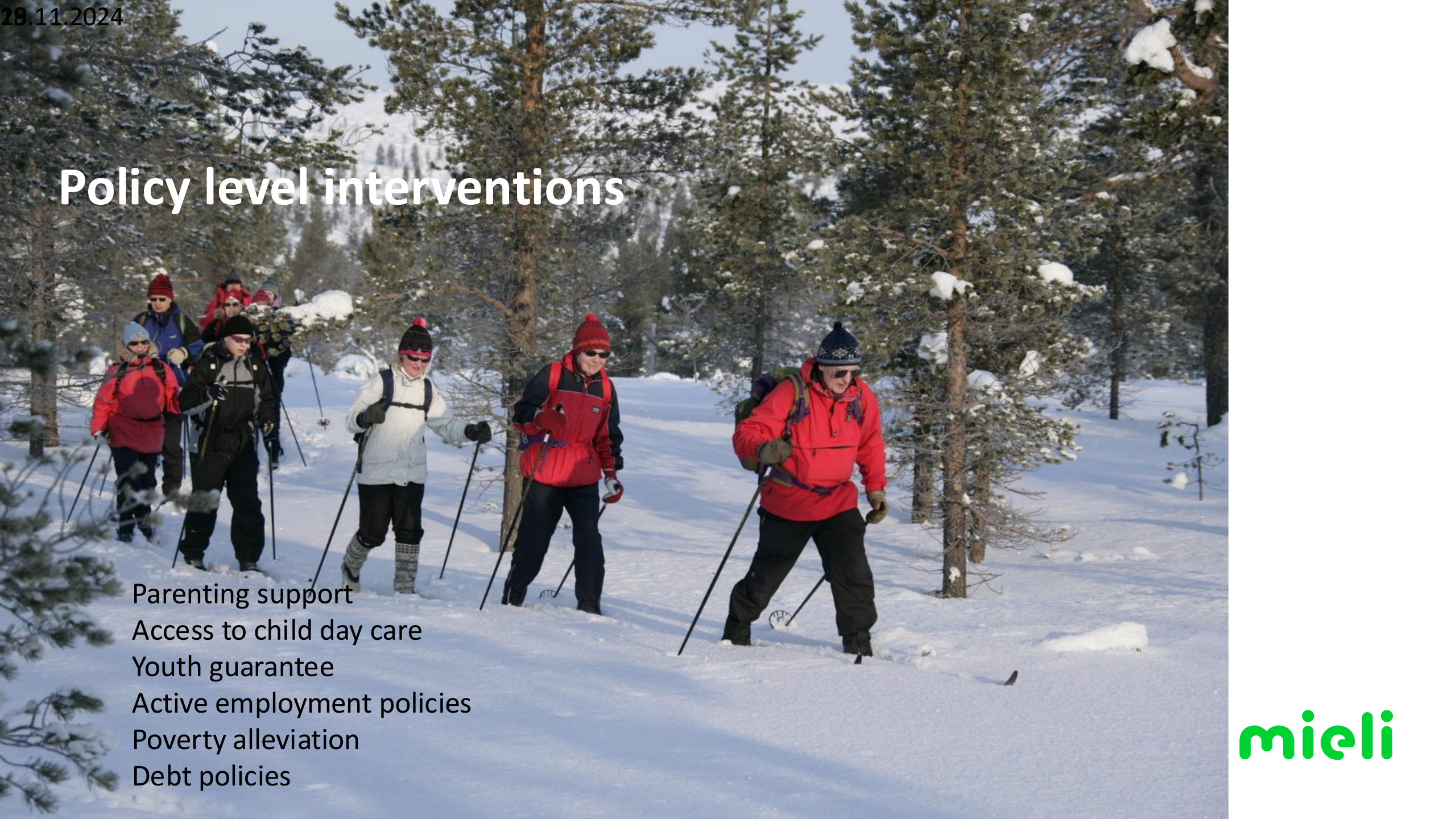
2020

Council decision on **EU Mental Health Strategy**

2023

EU Commission **comprehensive approach for mental health**

Policy level interventions

A group of people are cross-country skiing through a snowy forest. They are wearing winter gear, including jackets, hats, and gloves. The forest is filled with snow-covered evergreen trees. The skiers are moving from left to right across the frame.

Parenting support
Access to child day care
Youth guarantee
Active employment policies
Poverty alleviation
Debt policies

Finland: National Mental Health Strategy 2020–2030

Finland's Mental Health Strategy has five focus areas:

- [Mental health as human capital](#)
- [Children and young people's mental health](#)
- [Mental health rights](#)
- [Broad-based services meeting individual needs](#)
- [Good mental health leadership](#)

It also includes a programme for suicide prevention.

Available: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/162234>

Mental health rights

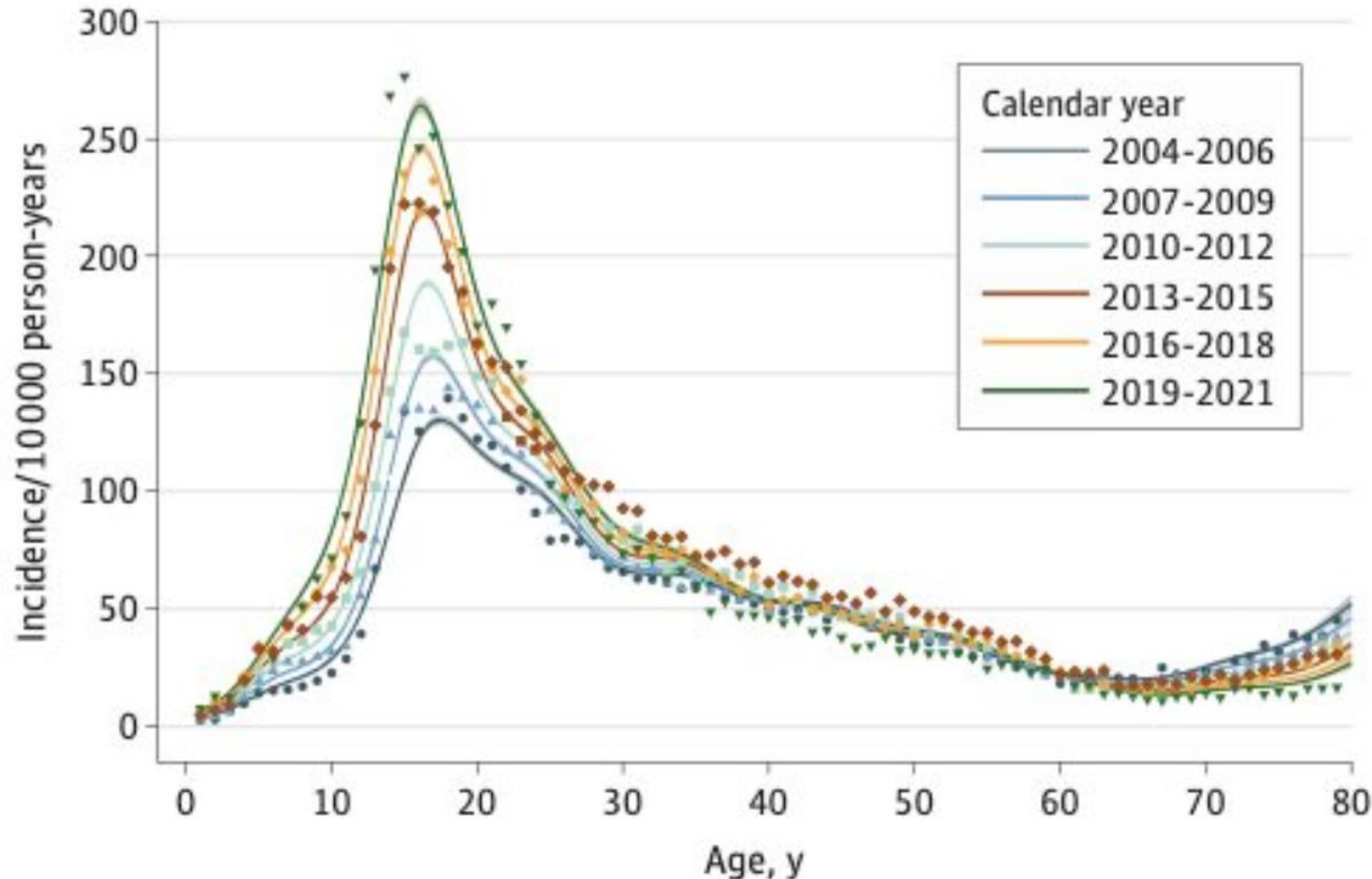
- Based on the UN Convention on Rights of People with disabilities (CRPD), the rights to
 - be accepted and not discriminated against,
 - enjoy respect for human dignity, and fundamental and human rights,
 - equal access to housing, studies, work, subsistence and social inclusion,
 - decide what supports coping with daily life and receiving support in line with these
 - civic engagement, to be part of the decision-making process, and action as peer and expert by experience,
 - good and effective care when necessary,
 - use Finland's national languages and other languages spoken in Finland, and obtaining sufficient interpretation and translation services in mental health services

3. Negative trends in mental health



Data across Europe indicate increase in psychological distress and growing demand for mental health services

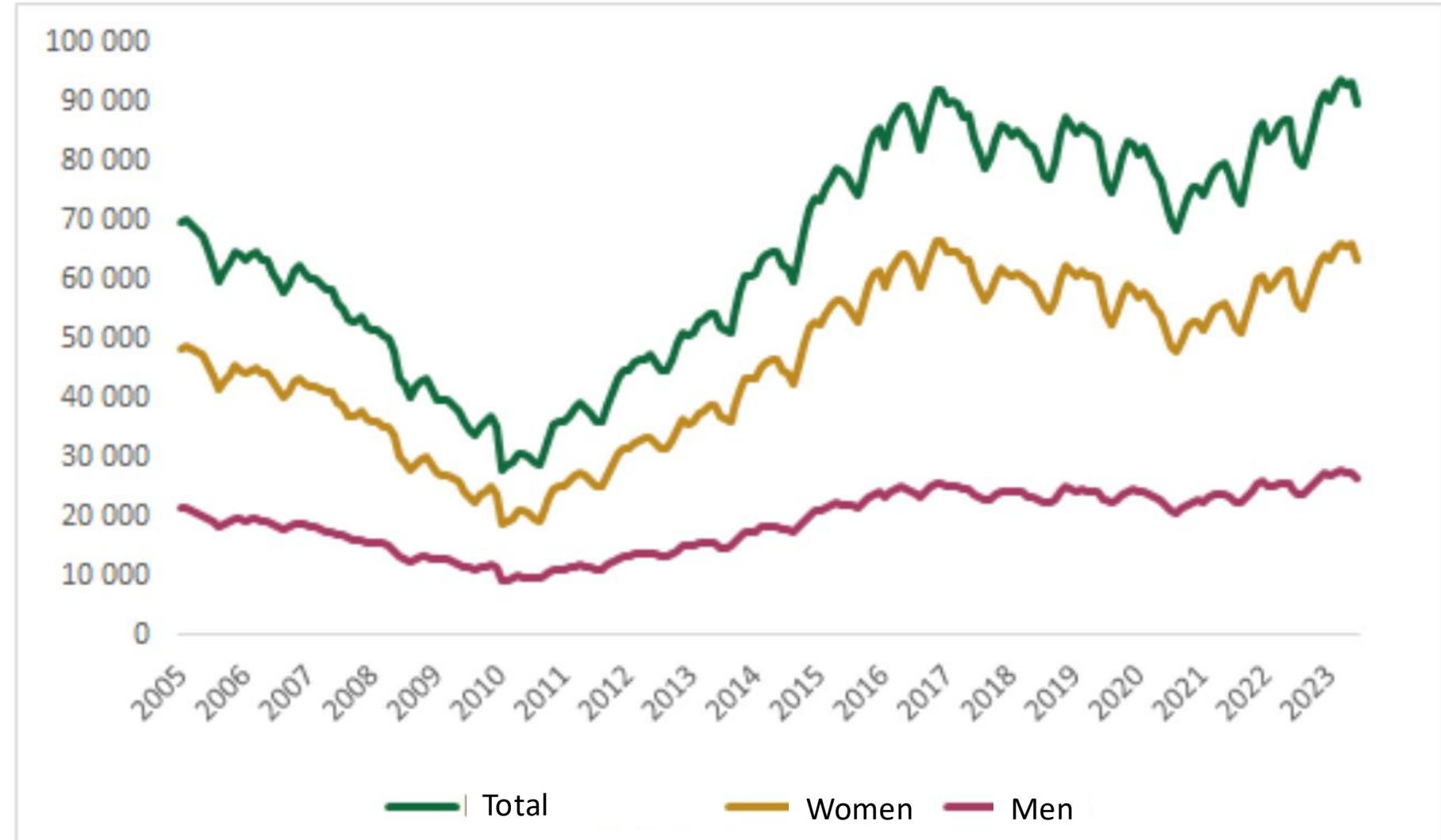
Denmark: Incidence data for women



Mental disorders are the most common reason for sick leave

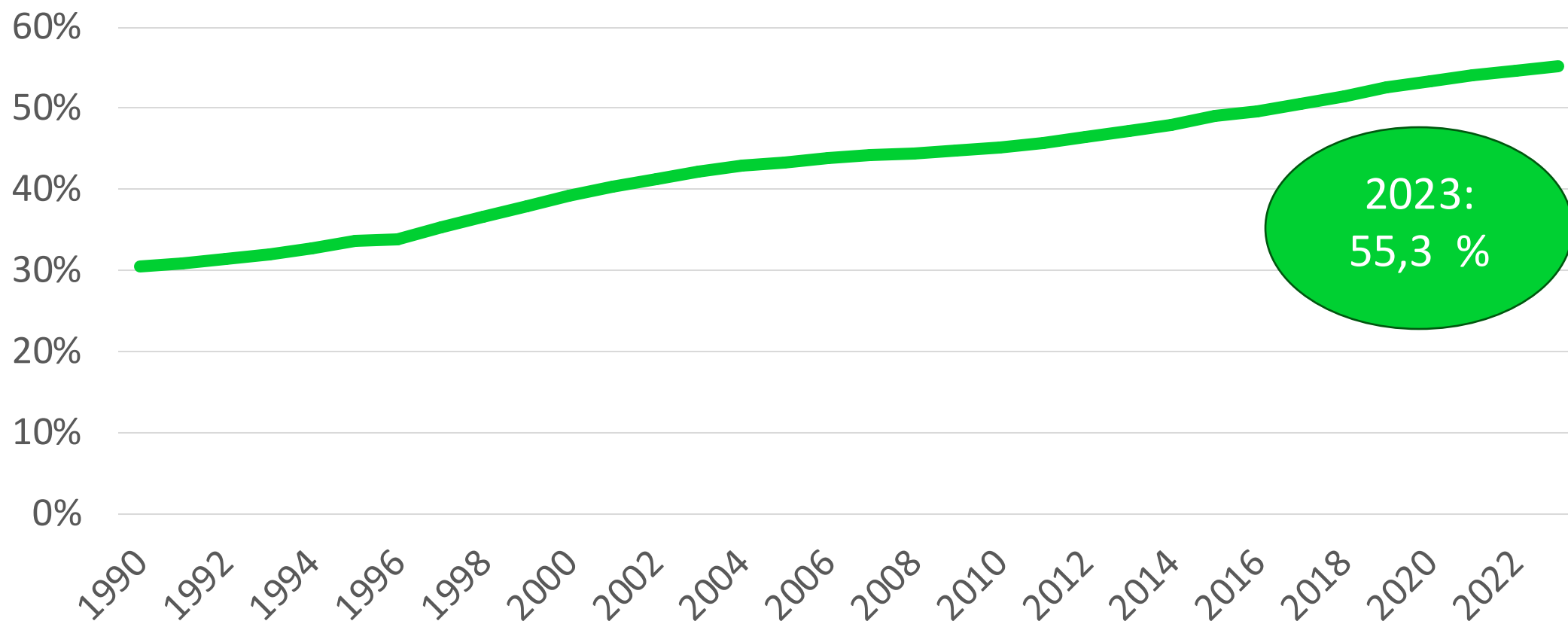
200 % increase since 2010

Sickness leave data from
Sweden



Disability pensions due to mental disorders

(% of all disability pensions in Finland)



An overlooked and overburdened mental health system

- Increase in demand for mental health services
- Increase in sick leaves and presenteeism due to mental disorders
- Increase in disability pensions due to severe mental disorders
- Increased unemployment among people with mental disorders
- Increased exclusion from labour market of people with severe mental disorders
- This means a growing negative economic impact of mental disorders (5 % of GDP in many countries)

Why do psychological distress and mental health problems increase?

- Digital media
 - less sleep, cyber bullying and harassment, social comparison stress and FOMO, harmful content
- Educational system changes
- Workplace stressors
- Urban stressors
- Aftermath of the coronapandemic
- Strong individualism

4. The role of participation and social inclusion



Mental health stigma and its impact on societal attitudes

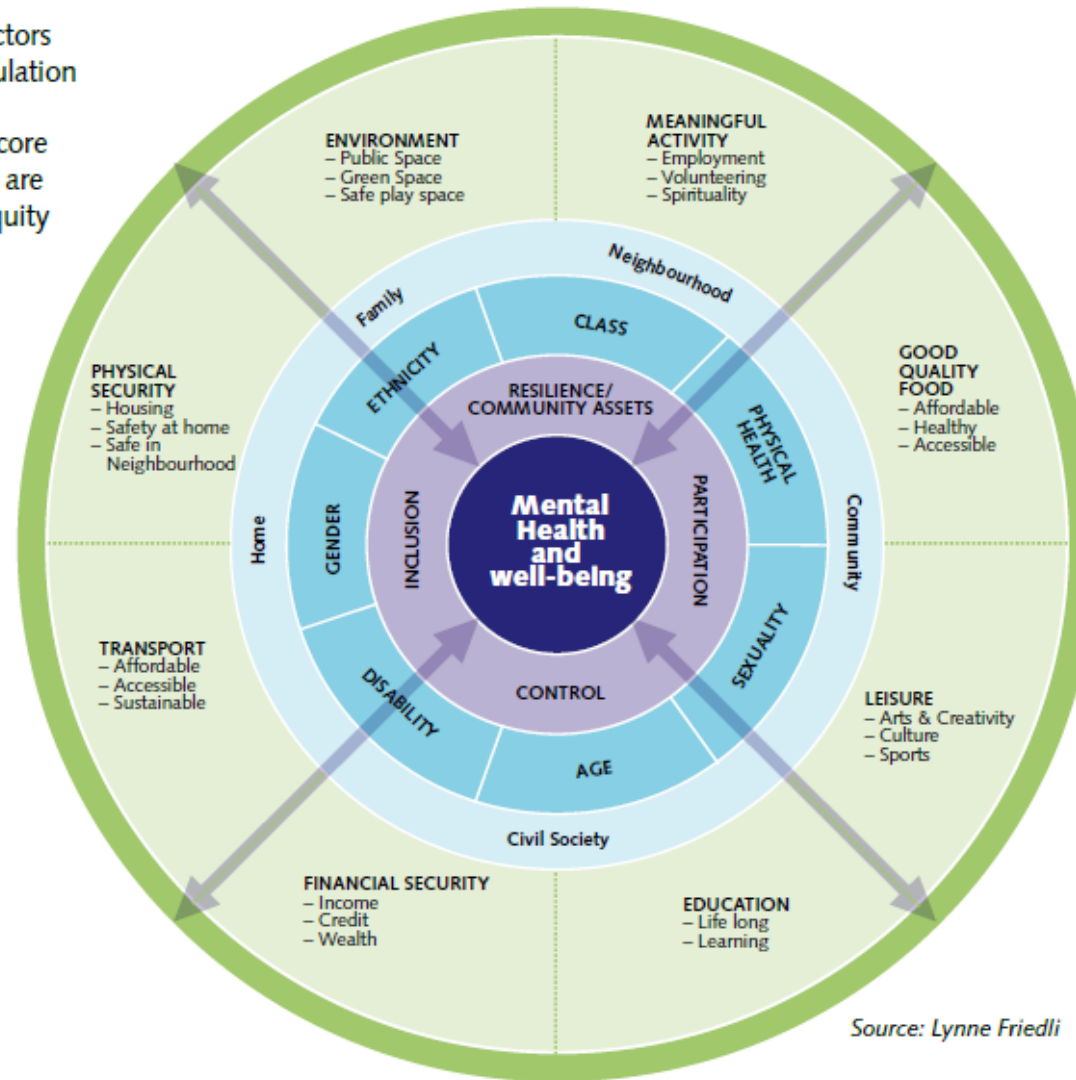
- Public stigma
 - NIMBY
 - stereotypes and social distance
- Self stigma
- Structural stigma
 - downward prioritisation of mental health
- Societal stigma is a barrier to seeking help (Corrigan 2014)



Four protective factors for mental health:

- participation
- inclusion
- control
- community

The four protective factors are influenced by population characteristics, wider determinants and the core economy. All of which are influenced by levels equity and social justice.



Source: Lynne Friedli

Actionable solutions to improve mental health

- Foster awareness of the value of mental health in social and economic development
- Minimize the severe demand-side constraints for mental health care caused by stigma and discrimination.
- Mental health needs to be protected by intersectoral public policies and actions including sectors in education, workplaces, social welfare, gender empowerment, child and youth services, criminal justice and development, and humanitarian assistance. These interventions should target social and environmental determinants of mental health.
- Mental health services should be scaled up as an essential component of universal health coverage in primary care and other established platforms of delivery.
- Mobilisation of the voices and skills of people with lived experience of mental disorders.
- Introduction of early interventions for emerging mental disorders

Successful mental health actions build on intersectoral collaboration

A shift in focus from
late curative
measures to
promotion,
prevention and
early intervention in
primary care



Kiitos!

mieli.fi

mieli

