

## Espoo – the most sustainable city in Europe

The Espoo Story is the strategy of the City of Espoo. Goals set in the strategy steer the city to provide better services to its residents and customers. Espoo wants to prove how growth that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable is possible. The Espoo Story allows us to have a shared view of our work and defines our values and direction. Espoo's number one value is its residents and customers – no one is left behind. We succeed when we get our residents, communities and partners involved in developing our city together. The message of the Espoo Story is doing things together. Cooperation is also a way to support the green transition of the economy and create sustainable growth.



This also applies to achieving the goals set in UN Agenda 2030. If we want to be a pioneer in sustainable development, we must focus on cooperation and partnerships. This means creating opportunities to develop a city that is wholly sustainable and resident-oriented. Espoo's role is to be a pathfinder at a local, national and international level. To succeed in this work, we need everyone to join. Only by working together can Espoo become larger than its size in building a sustainable future. The City of Espoo is committed to the UN's work on Agenda 2030 and its role as a pioneer.

**Jukka Mäkelä**

Mayor

**I**t is cities that play a key role in building a sustainable future. Whether it is global scale, in Europe or in Finland. In Espoo, this means doing things together with the whole community: citizens, businesses, academia and all others. Our goal is clear: Leave no one behind. At the same time, it is about our environment, biodiversity, climate and all these in a dynamic urban community.

This is the second time we have reviewed the City of Espoo operations according to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda. The VLR23 (Voluntary Local Review) is a compact overview of our urban community in relation to the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The review makes use of local, national and international metrics and data.

Time-wise, reading this review takes about as long as a refreshing bike ride along the coastal route in Espoo, from the Aalto University campus in Otaniemi, past the maritime Finnoo and towards Nuuksio National Park. Like the bike route, this publication gives you an overview of the city. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are presented in a clear format that is easy to understand.

Our city is the creation of our community and subject to continuous development. We hope that this review will encourage you to take an active part in building our shared future. You can scan the QR code to go to the City of Espoo website where you can find more data and information on how you can participate in developing our community.

We hope this publication inspires you to join action!

On behalf of the editorial team,

**Ville Taajamaa**

Editor

Voluntary Local Review VLR23, City of Espoo  
Espoo



# 1 NO POVERTY



**1 NO POVERTY**



**End poverty in all its forms everywhere.** *There is little life-threatening poverty in Espoo, but many have difficulties in affording children's hobbies, exercising flexibly, going to cultural events or even ensuring their electricity supply.*

Espoo measures poverty e.g. by the number of low-income persons and families with children who receive social assistance.

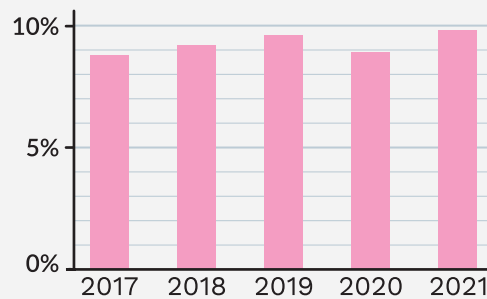
A low-income person is someone who lives in a household whose income is under 60% of the average income of a Finnish household.

Social assistance is granted to families with children whose own income is not sufficient for essential expenses and reasonable housing.

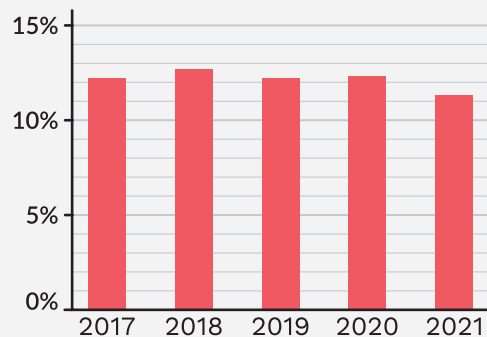
In 2021, 9.8% of the Espoo dwelling population, 28,500 persons, lived in a low-income household. The percentage of low-income persons in Espoo has grown since the previous year, but it remains clearly lower than in Finland as a whole or in Helsinki, for example.

The percentage of families with children who received social assistance decreased from 2020 and was at 11.3% in 2021. The percentage is higher than in the whole of Finland (9.4%).

**Percentage of low-income persons of Espoo population**



**Percentage of families with children who applied for social assistance in Espoo**



**2** ZERO  
HUNGER



2 ZERO HUNGER



**End hunger.** Free school meals have been offered in Finland for the past 80 years, but not everyone makes use of this benefit. Some Espoo residents even have to give up food, medications or medical appointments due to lacking funds. In Espoo, the Family Centre brings the services for families with children in one place.

» Espoo schools generate little food waste

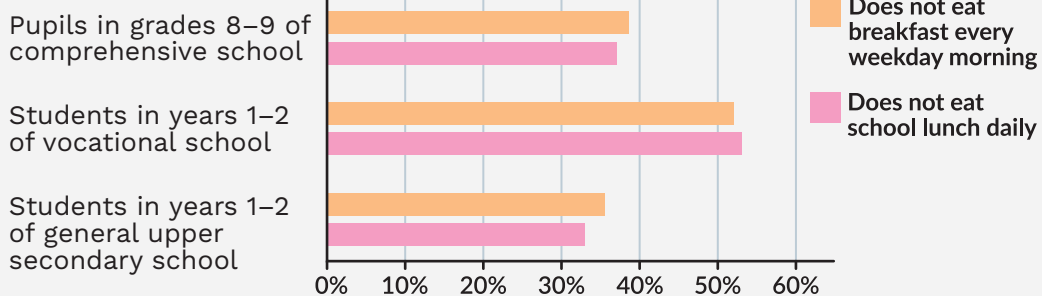


Even though things are generally good in Espoo, not all residents feel they have access to sufficient food, and they need to skip meals for one reason or another.



In 2020, about one in six working-age persons (age 20–64) had compromised on food or healthcare due to lacking funds. The percentage is lower than in Finland overall or in Espoo's neighbouring cities.

**Young people who do not have breakfast or school lunch (2021)**



# 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

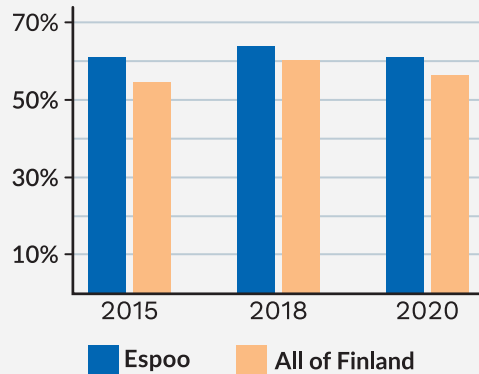


**Ensure healthy lives.** Satisfaction with life and quality of life are essential factors in wellbeing. Satisfaction with their quality of life is related to a person's living environment and expectations. A healthy lifestyle and reduced use of intoxicants are chosen by an increasing number of young people.

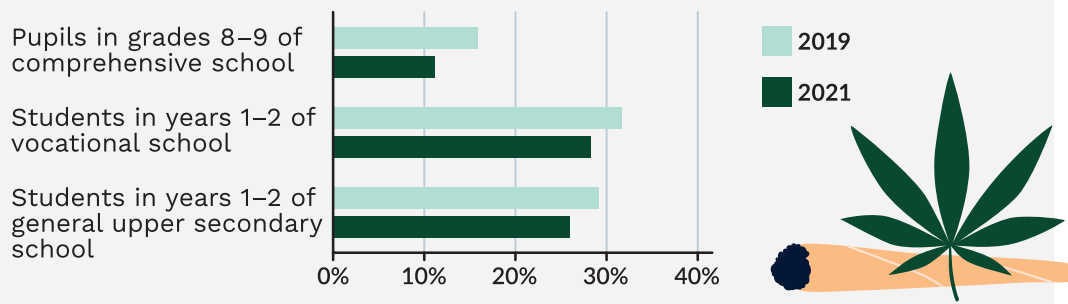
» The attitude of young Espoo residents towards drugs has become more negative in the past few years

People of all ages have a right to a good quality of life. Among Espoo residents over 20, satisfaction with quality of life has decreased somewhat since 2018. However, satisfaction remains significantly higher than the national average and the best out of large cities.

**Adults who feel their quality of life is generally good**



**A decreasing number of young people approve of their peers smoking marijuana (cannabis)**





# 4 QUALITY EDUCATION



**4** QUALITY EDUCATION



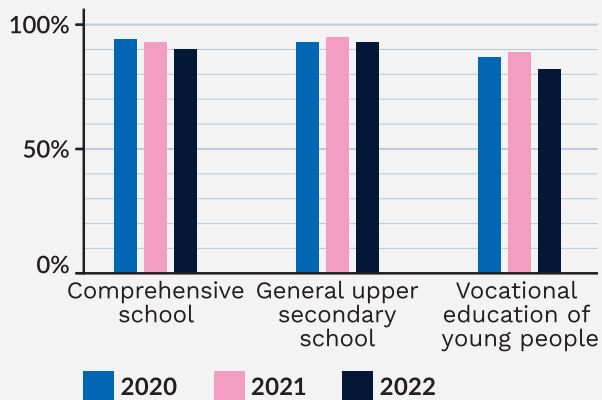
**Ensure inclusive and equitable education and learning opportunities.**

Finland employs a compulsory education model, which starts at the age of six and ends when a young person turns 18 or completes secondary-level education. A good education provides good conditions for a successful career.

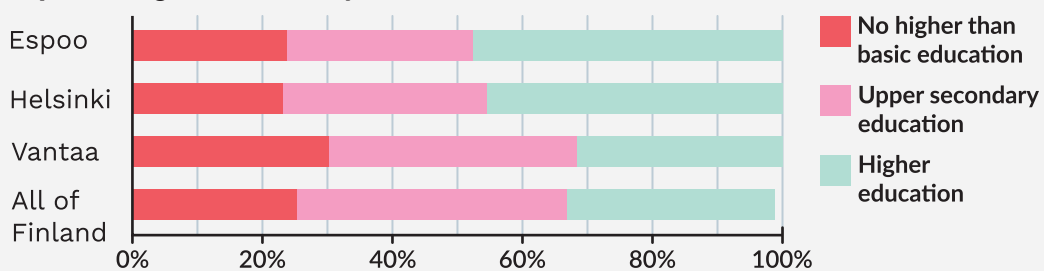
Espoo residents have a higher level of education than the overall population of Finland (and that of neighbouring municipalities). Almost half of Espoo residents have a degree from higher education.

Espoo residents are happy with education services, as over 90% of them believe the services are handled well or very well in Espoo. The only exception is early childhood education, where the satisfaction rate is 72%.

**How well are education services handled in Espoo?**  
(very well or well, % of respondents)



**Population aged 15 or older by education level (2021)**



**5**

**GENDER  
EQUALITY**

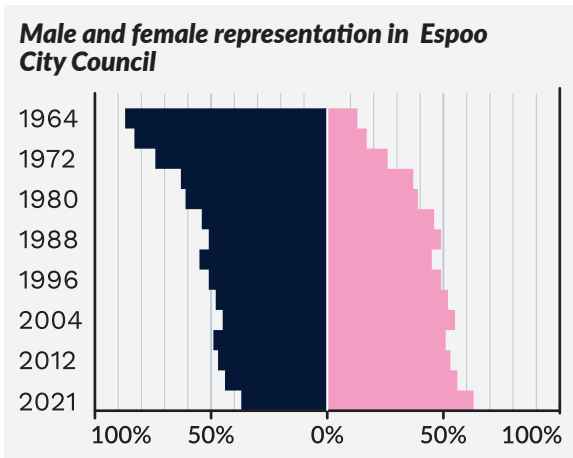


**5 GENDER EQUALITY**

**Achieve gender equality.** Democracy requires that everyone has the opportunity to influence their community, regardless of gender. Young women and minorities, in particular, face hate speech, which reduces their willingness to engage in politics.

It can be considered a manifestation of gender equality that everyone has the opportunity to reach the highest political positions. In a municipality, this would be the council, which wields the highest decision-making power.

Gender is a matter of self-identification for each person. The freedom to live your life without experiencing physical threat or sexual violence or harassment is an essential factor in realising gender equality.



**Physical threat and sexual violence experienced by young people (2021)**

	Physical threat		Sexual violence	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Pupils in grades 8–9 of comprehensive school	17.8%	12.2%	4.8%	11.9%
Students in years 1–2 of vocational school	20.4%	17.1%	3.2%	23.6%
Students in years 1–2 of general upper secondary school	12.5%	6.6%	2.1%	12.3%

# 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION





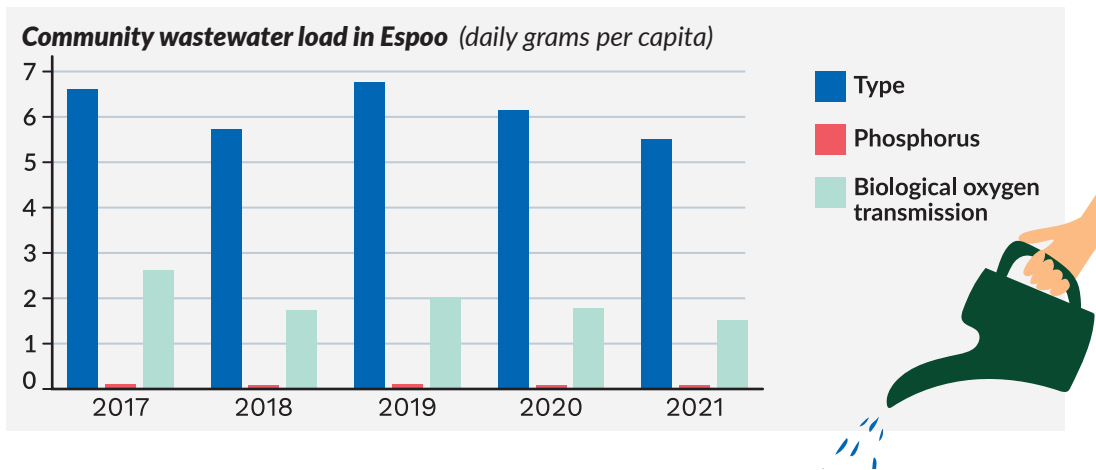
**Clean water and sanitation.** In a city, good water supply involves both easy access to clean tap water and good wastewater management. Water supply is at an excellent level in Espoo.

» Water supply is at an excellent level in Espoo

Almost all (98%) Espoo homes are connected to the municipal water and sewage network. The daily water consumption of Espoo residents was about 130 litres per capita in 2021. Consumption has remained at the same level for the past few years.

Wastewater load refers to the amount of various substances that the residents, companies and other operators in the area let into water systems along with wastewater. The most commonly monitored figures are the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen, and the amount of oxygen being consumed by the substances in wastewater. The aim is to reduce the wastewater load.

Wastewater load in Espoo has decreased since 2019.



# 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



**7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY**

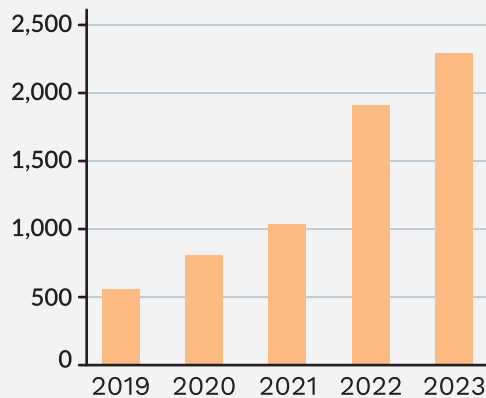


**Clean energy.** Energy involves e.g. heating and electricity production, distribution, energy efficiency and energy conservation. Aim is to provide citizens and companies with clean and reasonable priced energy. Communities are moving towards renewable energy production and sustainable and flexible consumption.

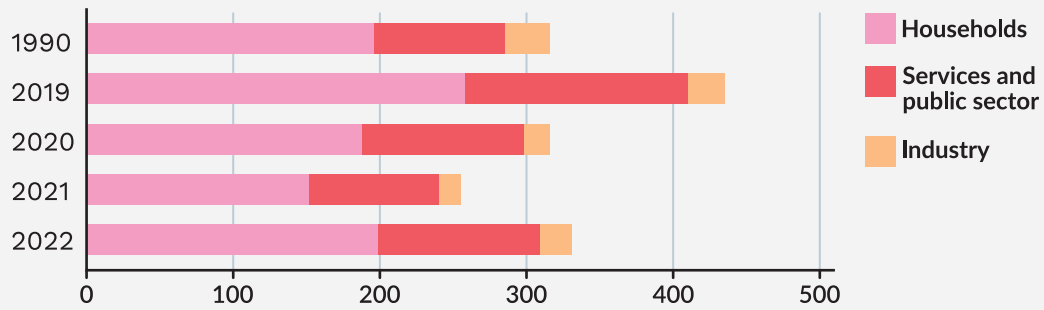
Energy production and consumption generates most of the City’s emissions. Most of these are generated from district heating. Espoo, along with the energy company Fortum, is committed to moving to carbon-neutral district heating in the 2020s (methods include using waste heat, renewable electricity, heat pumps and bioenergy).

Other uses of renewable energy are also a way to reduce emissions. By reducing energy consumption, we can generate savings and decrease the need for energy production.

**Number of solar panel systems in Espoo**



**Total emissions of district heating in Espoo (1,000 tonnes of CO<sup>2</sup>e)**

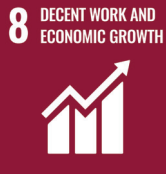




**8**

**DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH**



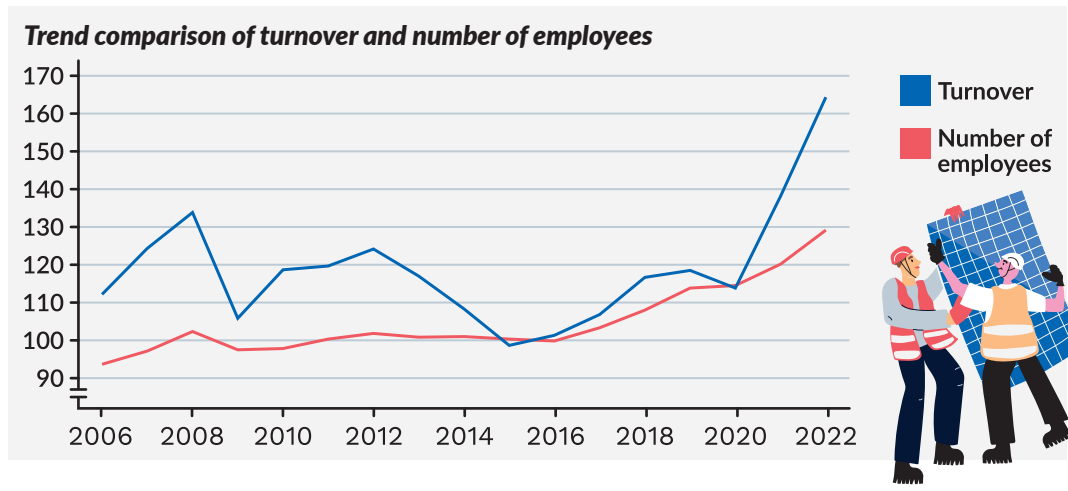


**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**  
**Work and economic growth.** The City of Espoo works actively together with local companies to create sustainable economic growth and more jobs. The City offers entrepreneurs and companies high-quality and effective services at a single point of contact.

Meaningful work, sufficient pay and good working conditions are important factors in an individual's wellbeing. Even though the City of Espoo is a significant employer, most jobs exist and are created in companies.

The percentage of unemployed persons of the workforce has been on a clear decrease for the past few years since the increase caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**EUR 400 million**  
» Funding raised by Espoo-based start-ups in 2022



# 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



**9** INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



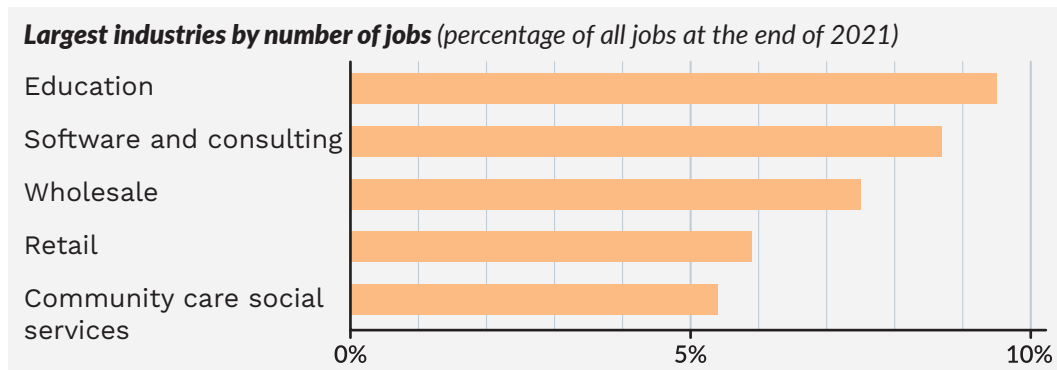
**Innovation and infrastructure.** *Infrastructure, meaning services and structures, will be needed to allow for a sustainable economic sphere. For example, company turnovers are on the increase in the area around the West Metro line. The Jokeri Light Rail, line 15, will contribute to sustainable mobility and increased vitality of the city.*

The City's measures in construction and steering construction work impact the building of sustainable infrastructure. Cooperation and partnerships with universities, other education and research institutions, organisations and businesses allow for new innovations and economic sustainability.

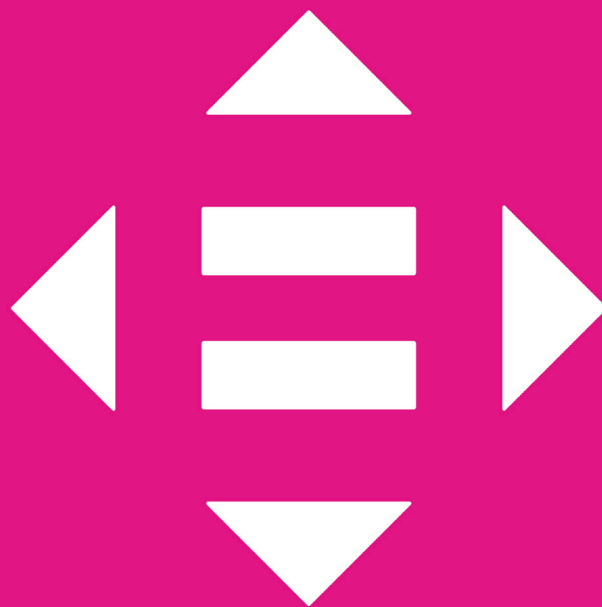
The City aims to rely on its support measures and generally business-favourable atmosphere to attract new innovative companies and investments to Espoo. This has succeeded, as Espoo was sixth in the comparison of patent

**1,200**  
» Patent applications  
submitted by Espoo  
residents in 2021

applications submitted in European cities in 2021, with its 1,200 patent applications.



# 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



**10** REDUCED INEQUALITIES

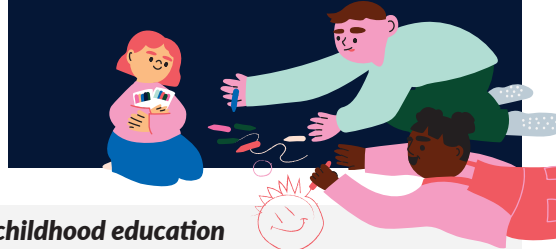


**Reduce inequality.** Metrics such as age, income level, education and health, are the best in Finland for Espoo citizens. The percentage of foreign language speakers will grow in the future. This is taken into consideration in City operations, especially in services related to education and employment.

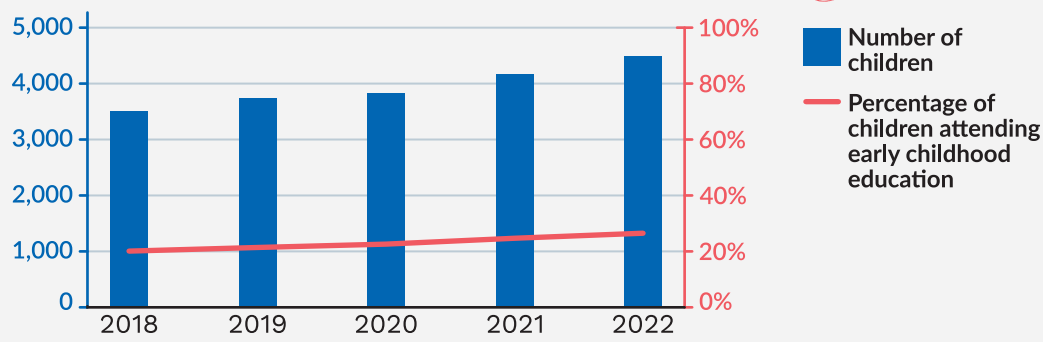
In 2021, 7% of the graduates of Espoo general upper secondary schools spoke a first language other than Finnish or Swedish. Among vocational school graduates, this percentage was 10%.

The number of children who speak a first language other than Finnish or Swedish attending early childhood education (daycare) has grown steadily over the past few years. In 2022, over one in four children in early childhood education spoke a first language other than Finnish or Swedish.

» Offering equal education opportunities to all population groups contributes to the development of the Espoo community



**Children speaking a foreign language in early childhood education**



# 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



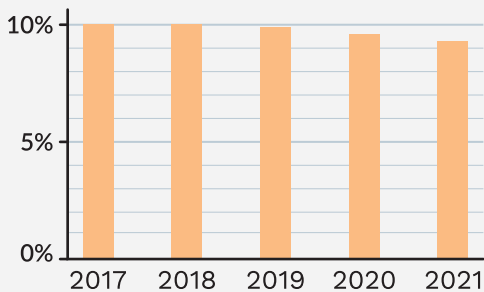
**Make the city safe and sustainable.** Rapid population growth, the ageing population and the increase in the foreign-language population will also increase service needs in Espoo and challenge both sustainable construction and service production. Facilitating mobility is an important aspect of a functional city.

**9.3%**

» Percentage of persons living in cramped homes of all households

In 2021, a little under one in ten households (= persons living permanently in the same dwelling) were living in a cramped home. The percentage is higher than the national average, but slightly lower than in Helsinki and Vantaa.

**Percentage of persons living in cramped homes of all households**



**Fully electric and hybrid cars**

**13%**

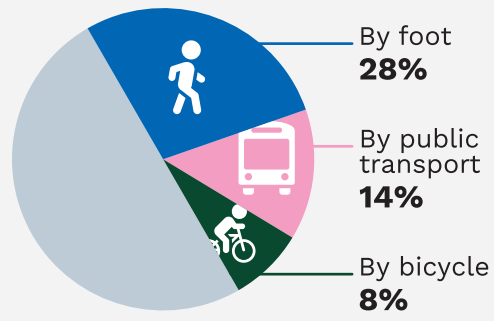
» of the vehicle population

**46%**

» of first registrations (2022)

Sustainable mobility is an essential part of Espoo's goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2030.

**Half of all trips are taken by sustainable transport modes**





**12** RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION





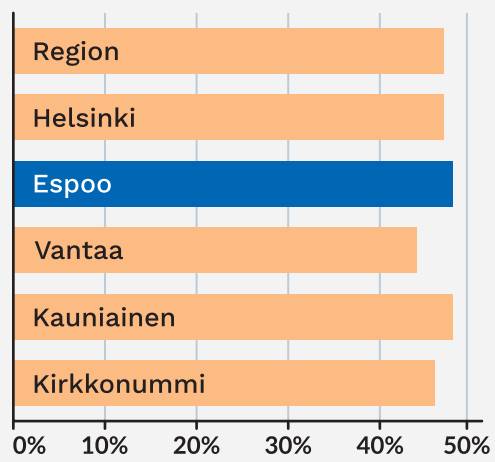
**Sustainable consumption and production patterns.** The City of Espoo promotes SDGs in procurement and encourages the whole community, businesses included, to operate the same. The consumption choices made by residents and housing companies are an important part of sustainable development and responsibility.

It is responsible to only buy new things when you need them, share products and services, and repair and reuse old things. Climate emissions show how we live and consume. Of consumption-based emissions, more than two thirds are generated by services, food and goods produced outside of Espoo.

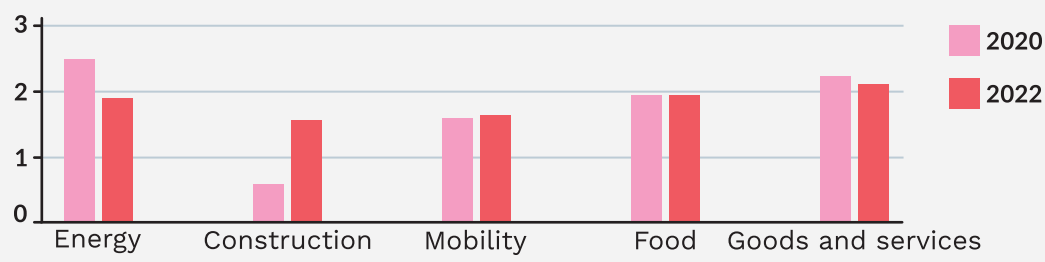
In 2022, Espoo households' amount of waste per capita was the lowest in the Metropolitan Area, with the highest recycling rate.

One third of consumption emissions came from energy consumption and construction.

**Recycling rate of domestic waste**



**Greenhouse gas emissions from consumption** (tonnes of CO<sup>2</sup>e per capita)



# 13 CLIMATE ACTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



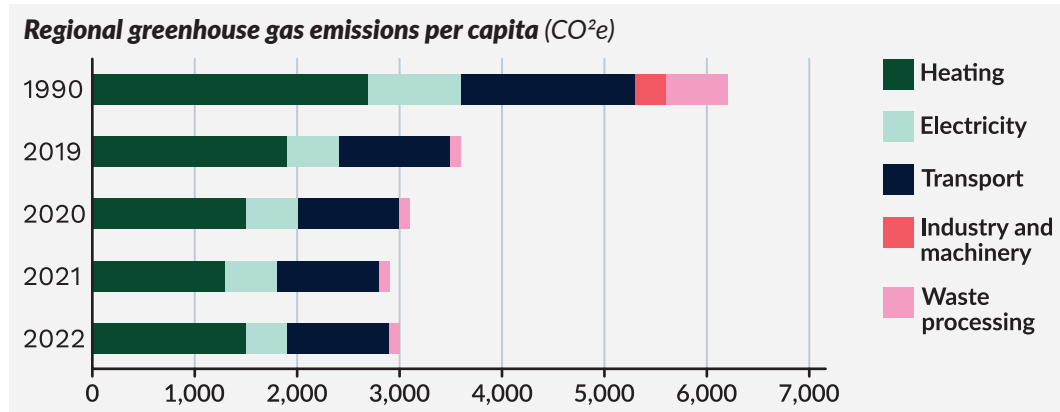
**Take action to combat climate change.** Espoo aims to become carbon-neutral by 2030. Espoo is actively working to combat climate change, prepare for it and adapt to it. By working together with residents and partners, we can create solutions that help solve global climate challenges, for their part.

The definition of carbon neutrality is that a city area only generates the amount of emissions that it can offset in a year. The greatest emission sources in Espoo are the heating of buildings, transportation and electricity for consumption. In the 2020s, the largest emissions reductions have been achieved in district heating production, in which the most significant climate action is ceasing the use of coal by 2025. The City's climate actions are compiled in the Climate Watch service.

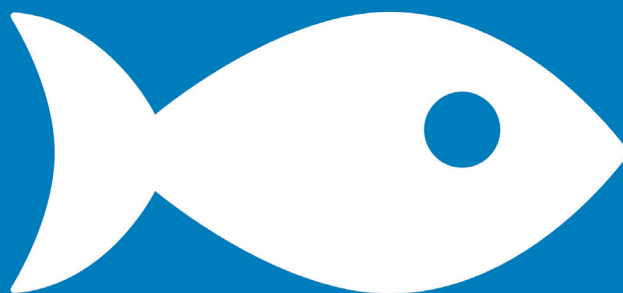
**+8%**

» In 2022, the emissions of the City of Espoo grew due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine

» Espoo's climate emissions per capita are the lowest in the Metropolitan Area for seven years in a row



**14** LIFE  
BELOW WATER



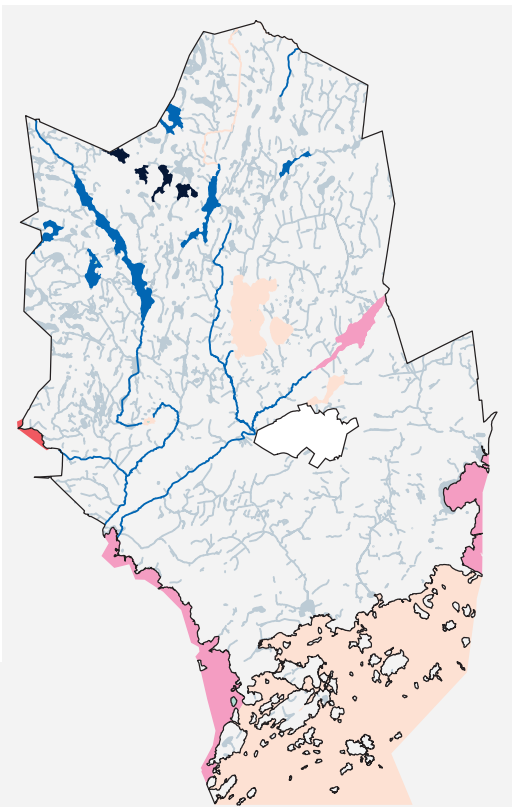
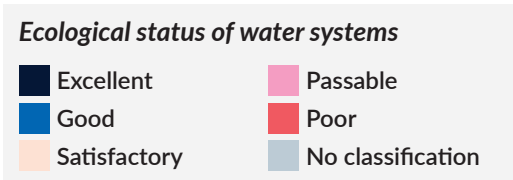


**Conserve oceans and seas.** Espoo is a maritime city. Almost half of the area, 216 km<sup>2</sup>, is water, of which the sea area makes up 158 km<sup>2</sup>. Espoo cares about protecting its waters. The Water Protection Action Plan for 2022-2027 lists the actions to improve water system quality in the next few years.



Changes in the environment threaten the water systems. We must work constantly to improve water quality and regularly monitor the ecological state of water systems.

Many Espoo lakes are in good condition, some even in excellent condition.



Materials: City of Espoo, Finnish Environment Institute

15

LIFE  
ON LAND





**Protect terrestrial ecosystems.** Espoo is growing and being built increasingly rapidly, and dense construction is being directed at areas that used to be in a natural state. To secure natural values and biodiversity, the Nature Conservation Measures project was launched in 2021.

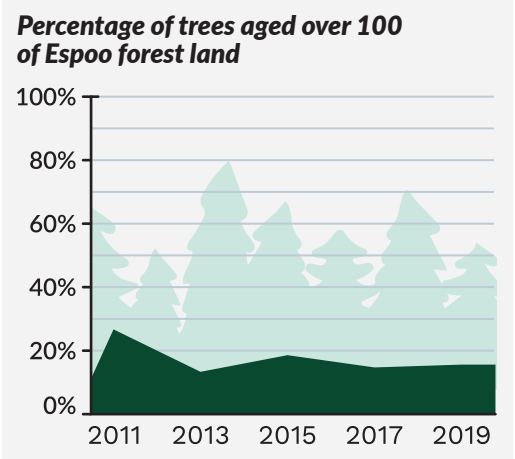
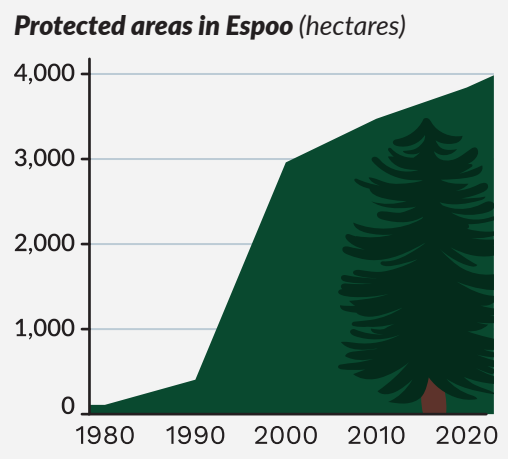
Local nature and conserving biodiversity are important factors in building a pleasant living environment. One way to preserve biodiversity is natural reserves. Nuuksio National Park is the largest single protected area in Southern Finland.

By the start of 2023, protected areas amounted to almost 4,000 hectares, which is 7.5% of Espoo's area.

**7.5%**  
» of Espoo's area is protected

 A dark blue rectangular box containing the text '7.5%' in large white font, followed by '» of Espoo's area is protected' in smaller white font. To the right is a stylized illustration of a green branch with several red berries.

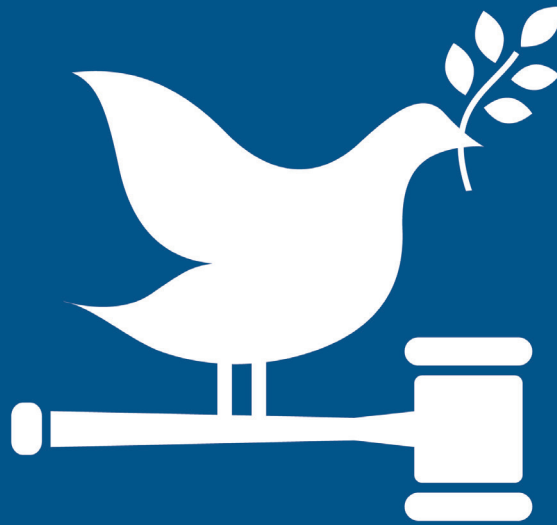
About one sixth of Espoo forests was over 100 years old in 2019. The number decreased in the 2010s.





**16**

**PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS**



**16** PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



**Build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.** Trust and involvement in political and social systems is essential in a functional democracy. We hope that the community's decision-making and activities would involve residents from various backgrounds.

The City of Espoo continues to employ over 10,000 people, even though the personnel of Espoo social and healthcare services moved to the Western Uusimaa Wellbeing Services County in 2023. In 2022, the City had 15,360 employees.

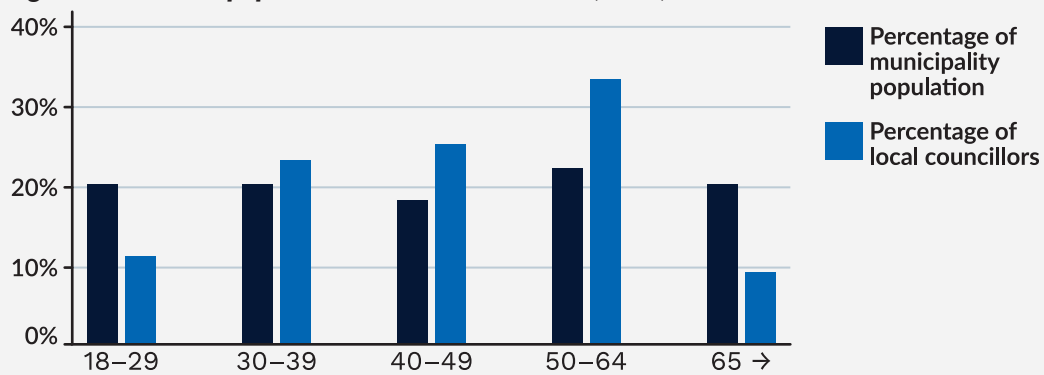
Younger age groups remain underrepresented in the City Council, but their proportion of councillors is higher than that of all local councillors in Finland.

**49.7%**

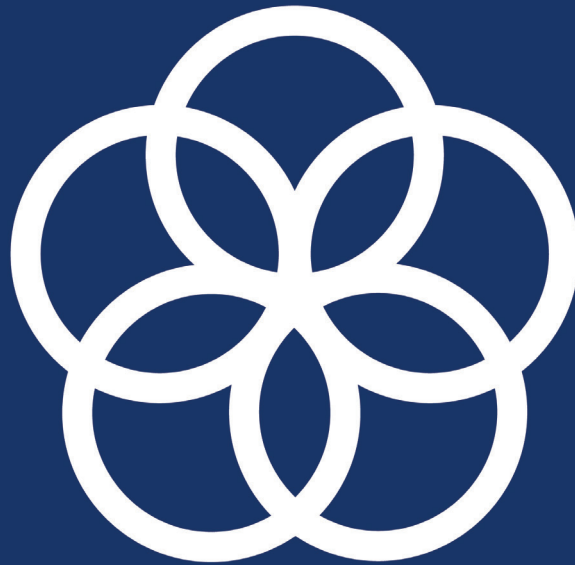
» of City of Espoo employees feel the organisation's decision-making is fair



**Age distribution of population and local councillors (2021)**



# **17** PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



**Implementation of sustainable development and partnerships.** Achieving the sustainable development goals requires partnerships, inclusion and cooperation. Networks between companies, organisations, other cities, universities and research institutes both in Finland and abroad will allow for efficient learning and exchange of information.

Espoo wishes to be a pioneer in the development of municipal services. Services are developed for residents' needs and in cooperation with residents. In 2022, the City supported organisation activities with 4.7 million euros.

Residents' satisfaction with services is monitored via an annual study on city and municipal services (Kaupunkija kuntapalvelututkimus). One essential figure being monitored is the home municipality index, which is a 'satisfaction average' (on a scale of 1-5) calculated from 51 factors being monitored.

» Doing things together is Espoo's advantage

