

33rd Session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Opening Statement by the Delegation of Finland

21 August 2025

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

In Finland, we have been looking forward to this review and dialogue with your Committee for a long time – and with great anticipation. It is so important for us to receive the Committee's baseline assessment of the implementation of the Convention (UNCRPD), so that we can use it as a foundation for considering our next steps. We value the opportunity to hear your reflections and recommendations that will guide our continued work.

Since the Convention's ratification and the submission of our initial report, the world has changed profoundly: the COVID-19 pandemic, the illegal war of aggression in Europe and the resulting shifts in our security landscape, global energy and economic turbulence, rising inflation and interest rates, and growing challenges to the international rules-based order.

For Finland, these years have also meant historic change – strengthening national security and preparedness and carrying out major structural reforms.

Despite these changes, Finland is proud to be a longstanding and active advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. Our vision is of a society – both globally and nationally – where no one is left behind, and where equality, inclusion, and human dignity are realised for all.

Disability Inclusion

Rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities, are a long-standing priority in Finland's foreign and security policy, including in development and humanitarian policies. For decades Finland has recognised disability as a human rights issue.

We work to ensure that disability inclusion is embedded across the UN system, humanitarian action, and sustainable development. For Finland, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) has been key in mainstreaming disability inclusion system-wide in the UN structures.

In 2024, Finland and partner countries highlighted the lack of responsibility for disability inclusion in the humanitarian system. Under Finland's leadership, a letter with 14 recommendations prompted the integration of the Disability Reference Group into the coordination structure, with representation for organisations of persons with disabilities.

At the Global Disability Summit in April, Finland made several national commitments – to continue our support to the UN Global Disability Fund, promote inclusive education, and advocate for disability inclusion in peace processes. We will also continue our pioneering work for disability inclusive trade.

Inclusion is also one of our priorities during our OSCE Chairpersonship this year. For example, we have prepared a checklist for organising accessible OSCE events.

This year, Finland together with Åland holds the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. During our Presidency, we are committed to advancing Nordic cooperation in the field of disability and to ensuring that disability perspectives are truly mainstreamed. Our goal is to raise awareness and to strengthen the knowledge base on the rights of persons with disabilities. In this way, we also seek to promote the full implementation of the UNCRPD across sectors and at all levels of society.

Finland is one of only a few countries in the world to have appointed an Ambassador for Disability Inclusion. The recruitment process for a new Ambassador is currently underway.

Madam Chairperson,

Now my intention is to focus on some key national issues.

Our national disability policy is grounded in human rights. We aim to build an inclusive society where equality, self-determination, and participation are realised in practice through accessible services, inclusive legislation, and cross-sectoral cooperation. However, while this work remains a priority, as in all areas of public policy, our actions must be planned and implemented within the overall framework of the State's economic development – a reality that requires prioritisation, efficiency, and innovation to ensure lasting results.

Government Programme

According to the Government Programme of *Prime Minister Petteri Orpo*, the right to self-determination and the human rights and equality of persons with disabilities must be honoured in policymaking throughout their lives, and the smooth running of their daily lives must be ensured when designing any services. Attention will be paid to guaranteeing inclusion and hearing the views of persons with disabilities. Everyone has the right to be happy and safe in Finland.

Equality Statement

In August 2023, the Government issued a Statement on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society. The Prime Minister's Office coordinates the implementation of its measures.

As part of this Equality Statement, in October last year, the Government – for the first time – reviewed the decisions, conclusions and recommendations issued to Finland by international human rights treaty bodies. This led to concrete follow-up measures, including the continued maintenance of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' public online database of treaty body recommendations. The recommendations of your Committee will also be available in this database, which is searchable by keyword, theme, monitoring body and year.

The Government has committed to a new review of recommendations later this year.

Human Rights Indicators

As part of Finland's third National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights, adopted in 2021, we developed a set of human rights indicators to strengthen transparent and evidence-based monitoring. These indicators, selected on the basis of international recommendations, oversight authorities' observations and expert consultations, also track the realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities, helping to identify progress, address challenges and ensure that no one is left behind.

Finland's Disability Policy

Finland's disability policy is grounded in human rights. The Constitution of Finland guarantees non-discrimination for persons with disabilities, and the UNCPRD provides a permanent foundation for our national policy. Our policy principles include equality, inclusion in society and decision-making, self-determination, independent living, and access to necessary services and support. The aim is an inclusive society where mainstream services are available and accessible for persons with disabilities, supplemented by special services where needed.

There is no single definition of disability in use in Finland: services are granted based on individual needs. This approach respects the human right based model of disability and intersectional approach since the individual situation of a person, including culture, gender and living environment, can be taken into account.

New Disability Services Act

The new Disability Services Act entered into force on 1 January 2025. It unifies services for all persons with disabilities under one Act. Its implementation is a key ongoing task, monitored by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in 2025–2027, with input from disability NGOs.

The new Act promotes equality, independent living and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The right to access disability services is not based on diagnosis, but on individual need for assistance and support resulting from long-term or permanent limitation of functional capacity due to injury or illness. The basic principle of the Act is that every person with disability must have access to services that meet their individual needs.

National Action Plan

At the national level, each government term sees the adoption of a cross-sectoral National Action Plan to advance the UNCRPD. Coordinated by the Advisory Board on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (VANE), the Plan sets objectives and measures to which ministries are committed.

The current, third Action Plan for 2023–2027 contains 13 thematic areas and 75 measures. It is monitored throughout the period and evaluated at its end. The Plan emphasises inclusion and equality of persons with disabilities, with a particular focus on the rights of women and children with disabilities, an intersectional approach, and raising awareness of disability rights.

VANE brings together representatives from ministries, disability organisations, and other key stakeholders to make sure that persons with disabilities are not just consulted, but actively involved at every stage of the Action Plan. And it keeps the conversation going – fostering ongoing dialogue among all the key players to drive forward the implementation of the UNCRPD.

Truth and Reconciliation Process for the Deaf and Sign Language Users

The truth and reconciliation process for the deaf and sign language users – the first of its kind in the world – began on 5 June 2025 examining both historical and current impacts of public authorities' actions. Its aims include identifying discriminatory structures, increasing awareness of sign languages and culture, and proposing changes to improve the situation of the deaf and sign language users.

Labour Market

Much has taken place in the Finnish labour market over the past five years. The COVID-19 pandemic shook the labour market, yet the recovery was unexpectedly swift. The situation, however, changed in the spring of 2023: since then, employment has declined, and unemployment has increased. According to the latest EU statistics, Finland now records the second highest unemployment rate in Europe, after Spain. At 9.3 per cent, Finland's unemployment rate is significantly higher than the EU average of 5.9 per cent. This challenging development also affects the employment prospects of persons with disabilities.

Public Employment Services Reform

In Finland, employment services underwent a major structural reform at the start of 2025. Responsibility for organising public employment services (TE services) was transferred from the State Employment and Economic Development Offices to the municipalities, making them a statutory part of each municipality's basic services.

The reform brings services closer to customers. With employment, municipal education, and business services under one organiser, municipalities can better provide targeted, tailored support that meets the needs of both jobseekers and local labour markets.

A key element of the reform was a new funding model that encourages municipalities to develop and deliver services efficiently.

Learning Support

Finland has recently reformed its system of learning support across all levels of education, with particular emphasis on early childhood, pre-primary and basic education. The reform shifts the focus to individual needs rather than medical diagnoses, strengthens inclusion, and ensures early access to support. It also clarifies support measures and reinforces pupils' legal protection. To make this possible, the Government has allocated nearly 100 million euros in additional annual funding. The new provisions entered into force on 1 August 2025.

At the same time, Finland is shaping a national vision for higher education and research to respond to societal changes and set long-term priorities. This work aims to improve accessibility, widen participation for under-represented groups, and promote wellbeing across higher education communities, ensuring equal opportunities at every level of our education system.

Accessible Transport

Finland's National Transport System Plan for 2026–2037 sets out how our transport system will be developed over the twelve years, covering all modes of passenger and goods transport. Accessibility is a key priority. A recent study highlighted the need to improve both the physical accessibility of public transport travel chains and the availability of accessibility information, which now guide our national accessibility target state to be shared with transport operators.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications has also published a vision for an accessible transport system. Its core principle is that accessibility must be integrated into all planning. Covering infrastructure, mobility services, means of transport and data, the vision ensures smooth, safe and independent travel, and supports implementation of the UNCRPD in legislation, policy and practice.

Accessibility in Media Services

In the communications and media sector, Finland has efficiently implemented EU accessibility regulations, such as the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Accessibility Directive. We have also introduced a one-stop-shop model, with a single authority – the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency – responsible for monitoring accessibility, advising stakeholders, and handling reports of non-compliance. Operators are required to prepare accessibility plans to ensure continuous improvement in their services.

National Climate Change Adaptation Plan

Finland's National Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2030 was published in 2023. It can be seen as an important tool for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. The plan includes a risk and vulnerability assessment based on up-to-date scientific knowledge, which serves as a basis for developing adaptation measures.

Civil Society

One reason why disability rights hold such a central place in our policies is the active role of our civil society, including organisations of persons with disabilities, which for decades have worked tirelessly for better inclusion. We thank them for their steadfast dedication.

Madam Chairperson,

Our delegation to this dialogue includes experts from eight ministries and from our Permanent Mission here in Geneva. In Helsinki, a large group of colleagues from across ministries are closely following the review.

As has now become a tradition, our delegation also includes independent observers from Parliament's Constitutional Law Committee – Member of Parliament, Ms. Mira Nieminen and Committee Counsellor, Mr. Lauri Koskentausta.

Madam Chairperson,

We look forward to responding to your Committee's questions.

Thank you.