

69th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**Opening Statement by the Delegation of Finland****17 February 2021**

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

To begin with, on behalf of the delegation of Finland, I want to thank the Committee for organising this virtual hearing in the current exceptional circumstances.

Finland finds the simplified reporting procedure a very positive development. The procedure is inclusive, it focuses the reporting on concrete questions, and it also speeds up the reporting process considerably. This time, we had the privilege to get lists of issues prior to reporting that were coordinated by two Committees: your Committee and the Human Rights Committee. The questions formed a whole where the different issues were looked at from the perspective of implementing the two Covenants. We do hope that the Committees can continue to follow the same procedure in the future, as well.

Mr Chairman,

One clear cross-cutting objective in the Government Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government is to promote the realisation of human rights in Finland. The programme underlines that human rights and human dignity belong to us all. The Government pledges to build a Finland that is tolerant, equitable and committed to a rules-based human rights system.

We are preparing the third National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights. It will focus on developing the monitoring of fundamental and human rights. One of the objectives of the Government is to develop the impact assessment of proposed legislation. Particular attention will be paid to developing the assessment of fundamental and human rights impacts.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Finland in spring last year, the Government took rapid measures. Jointly with the President of the Republic, the Government declared that Finland was in emergency conditions, and introduced the Emergency Powers Act on 16 March 2020. The purpose of the Act is to protect the population and to secure its livelihood and the national economy, to maintain the legal order and fundamental and human rights, and to safeguard the territorial integrity and independence of the state in emergency conditions. When the epidemiological situation improved, the emergency conditions were lifted on 15 June 2020.

Efforts have been made to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure the capacity of the healthcare system by means of different restrictions, such as quarantines, facial mask recommendations, hygiene guidelines and stricter restrictions on entry into the country. Furthermore, the Government has taken supportive measures to alleviate the economic consequences of the pandemic. Thanks to the measures taken, Finland has managed to keep the epidemiological situation at a reasonably good level. For instance, Finnish authorities have not become aware of any wide-scale COVID-19 infections, exposures or deaths at housing service units for persons with disabilities.

The Government has invested extensively in the availability and accessibility of information. Information on COVID-19 has been available in many languages, including in sign language and Braille. Moreover, during the pandemic, public authorities have had a dialogue with, for instance, disability organisations and studied the impacts of the pandemic on the Roma population.

In order to strengthen social security in the exceptional conditions, Finland has enacted a number of legislative amendments concerning social security benefits. For example, the amount of pay that unemployed jobseekers can earn without an effect on their unemployment benefit has been increased, and the right of entrepreneurs to unemployment security has been expanded.

Mr Chairman,

Next, I will highlight some projects under the Government Programme that are important for the implementation of the Covenant.

During the current government term, the Non-Discrimination Act will be partially reformed. Achievements and challenges of the current Act were identified in an evaluation study completed in November 2020.

We are preparing a national action plan for combating racism and discrimination and promoting good relations between population groups. The action plan will be issued as a government resolution this spring.

Compulsory education in Finland will be extended starting from August this year. The aim of the extension is to raise the age of compulsory education to 18 years and to extend compulsory education to upper secondary education, thus improving conditions for learning and wellbeing among young people and increasing their employment rate. In addition, student guidance and student welfare services will be improved, along with the capacity of comprehensive schools to provide everyone with the skills to complete upper secondary education.

Finland considers it important to ensure fair transitions in the labour market when green economy and digital working methods are being promoted. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government is making efforts both to support the ability of companies to continue to employ people and to help the re-employment of those who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic. Improvements will be made to employment services, such as lifelong counselling and guidance, to support rapid employment. Particular efforts will be made to improve employment among those in the weakest labour market position, for instance persons with partial working capacity, migrants, and young and aged people.

The Government Programme includes many initiatives and measures that specifically target gender inequality, such as an equal pay programme and a parental leave reform. One aim is to advance pay transparency. The Government has issued an Action Plan for Gender Equality that collates the Government's objectives and measures to promote gender equality, fight against discrimination and advance gender mainstreaming.

For the first time ever, Finland has prepared a national Child Strategy. We pledge to assess the child impacts of decisions, improve child budgeting, strengthen knowledge about child wellbeing and foster the inclusion of children and young people. One of the key objectives is to ameliorate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people.

The Government has launched a comprehensive social security reform. It aims at a clearer and more streamlined system, where people can balance work and social security in changing life situations.

Also other important legislative reforms are under way: a healthcare and social welfare reform package, a partial reform of the Act on Client Charges in Health and Social Services, and a reform of the Act on Supporting the Functional Capacity of the Older Population and on Social and Health Services for Older Persons. The Act on Services and Assistance for the Persons with Disabilities, legislation on clients and patients' right of self-determination and the so-called Trans Act will be reformed, too.

Last year, we launched an intersectoral national Programme on Ageing 2030, intended to ensure the functional capacity of elderly persons, age-friendly housing and a socially and economically sustainable service system.

When it comes to promoting the rights of Roma people, the primary objective of our National Policy on Roma (ROMPO 2) is to support the positive progress seen in the social integration of the Roma and in Roma linguistic, cultural and social rights.

Mr Chairman,

In Finland, the situation in the implementation of Agenda 2030 is good regarding many objectives related to social sustainability, economy and work. However, not all goals have been achieved yet. We have reported twice on the implementation of the Agenda and - as the first country in the world – also included non-governmental representatives to participate in drafting the report.

The Government takes the challenges posed by the climate change with the utmost seriousness: the national climate targets aim high, and the Government will work to ensure that Finland is carbon neutral by 2035. The domestic climate policy is largely based on the Climate Change Act, which is being reformed. In addition to setting ambitious emission reductions targets, it is essential to strengthen the fundamental and human rights elements in the Act. We want to guarantee that climate actions set by the planning scheme are fair and just.

Mr Chairman,

The delegation of Finland participating in this review includes representatives of seven Ministries and of the Permanent Mission in Geneva. We are prepared to answer your questions and supplement the information provided in the seventh periodic report.

Thank you.

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