**Submission to the United Nation’s Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women  
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Submitted by the Coalition of Finnish Women’s Associations (NYTKIS)

FINLAND

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# Foreword

**This is an unfinished parallel report** prepared by NGOs for the eighth periodic report of Finland concerning the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 81 pre-sessional working group.   
  
**This report does not cover all the crucial details of discrimination against women and it is going to be updated for the 81th session of CEDAW committee.**

This parallel report was compiled and prepared by the Coalition of Finnish Women’s Associations NYTKIS on the basis of materials and comments provided by five associations. The NGOs that provided content for this report are Exit Prostitution Association, Monika-Naiset liitto ry, Multicultural Women’s Association, Women’s Line, Left Women and the Finnish Social Democratic Women. In addition, the report uses statements and material provided by the Feminist Association Unioni, the National Council of Women of Finland, and Rusetti – Disabled Women's National Association, as well as the parallel Beijing+25 report.

With this report, we wanted to highlight the topics that are, in our opinion, the most important and the themes that require measures. Many of these were already noted by the CEDAW committee in the last periodic report. Although some progress has been made in equality, areas such as preventing violence and protecting victims have not received enough attention and resources in political decisions made in recent years.

# Article 2

## Minority women

Finland submitted its fifth report[[1]](#footnote-1) on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in January 2019. The extensive report contains very little gender-based information or recommended measures. The minorities are discussed in gender-neutral terms, although it is well known that, for example, violence and hate speech are extremely gendered phenomena in Finland. In the case of some minorities (such as the Sámi and Roma), stereotypical gender roles are slightly stronger than in the majority population.

Minority women are exposed to multiple discrimination, which could be prevented through positive action to achieve non-discrimination in practice. The problem is that the authorities responsible for enacting and applying the laws are not sufficiently familiar with the concept of multiple discrimination.

## Gendered hate speech against minorities

According to the 2017 Gender Equality Barometer, minority women experience inappropriate behaviour or sexual harassment, gendered hate speech and underestimation clearly more often than men. In addition, 27 per cent of the women and 9 per cent of the men who classified themselves as being part of a minority had experienced gendered hate speech. One-fourth of the women and one-fifth of the men had limited their evening activities for fear of violence. The number of respondents who had changed their behaviour was almost as high as the number of respondents who had experienced hate speech.

## Roma women

Discrimination against the Romani population is still common in Finland. In 2014, the Minority Ombudsman conducted a survey on the [[2]](#footnote-2)discrimination encountered by Roma. The survey revealed that 35% of respondents with an employment relationship had experienced discrimination or harassment at the workplace by a member of the work community or another person who they are closely associated with at work. Women had experienced discrimination or harassment at work more often than men (40% of women and 28% of men). The Roosa survey on Romani wellbeing by the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) in 2017–2018 gave similar results[[3]](#footnote-3). It concluded that the younger population, young women in particular, have more discrimination experiences and feelings of insecurity.

Based on the survey, Roma women encounter similar serious intimate partner violence and domestic violence as women in the majority population. However, the violence experienced by Roma women might remain hidden, because Roma do not always trust the authorities, such as social workers or the police, or they might not talk about the violence for fear of stigmatising their community. The same survey revealed that severe symptoms of depression and anxiety are up to five times more common among Roma women than the general population. One-third of the women felt that they had not received enough services that support their mental wellbeing, and in general, their perceived health was lower than average.

## Sámi women

The research data available on Sámi people in Finland is gender neutral, and there is little research data available on Sámi women and girls.

According to a research by the University of Lapland[[4]](#footnote-4), women often experience discrimination within minority communities because of their gender, and emphasising the rights of women when advocating the rights of indigenous people can feel problematic within the community. The realisation of the autonomy of indigenous people is based on patriarchal structures that are reflected in, for example, participation in decision-making and the practising of traditional livelihoods.

The Beijing+25 report[[5]](#footnote-5) reveals that elderly Sámi women have difficulties accessing social and health services due to long distances. In addition, Sámi people who are part of a sexual or gender minority feel that their right to receive mental health services, for instance, is not satisfied because of a lack of expertise in gender and sexual minority issues in the Sámi culture.

There are no shelters for victims of violence in the Sámi homeland; the only shelter in Lapland is located in Rovaniemi, which is hundreds of kilometres away from the area inhabited by the Sámi. Long distances to shelters makes it difficult to get help for victims of violence. The Istanbul Convention requires the states to set up enough shelters, and the implementation of the Convention should be ensured also with regard to national minorities.

## Immigrant women

The EU minority and discrimination survey (EU-MIDIS II, 2017[[6]](#footnote-6)) revealed that immigrant women and men experience a lot of discrimination in Finland, women even more than men. Racism and discrimination was encountered in public and private services, education, working life, and job seeking.

Professionals working with immigrant women recognise how violence against women is connected with racism and misogyny in Finland.

There are no topical surveys on the extent of violence against immigrant women in Finland. Based on Monika-Naiset Liitto Multicultural Women’s Association statistics, immigrant women experience violence from both the native Finnish population and immigrant men and communities. According to a survey by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy (2014[[7]](#footnote-7)), the risk of assault is two and a half times higher among immigrants compared to the native Finnish population.

[According to THL,](https://thl.fi/fi/web/maahanmuutto-ja-kulttuurinen-moninaisuus/kotoutuminen-ja-osallisuus/tyoelama) finding employment is more difficult for immigrant women than Finnish women, and the most typical fields of employment among immigrant women are the care, cleaning and trade sectors. The [2019 Integration review](http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162005/TEM_oppaat_10_2019_Tutkimusartikkeleita_kotoutumisesta_20012020.pdf) of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment concludes that the labour market position of immigrant women is poor and only half of immigrant women work outside the home. Immigrant women have difficulties finding employment, even when they are highly educated[[8]](#footnote-8). High education in the country of origin does not always help in finding employment, and according to the Integration Survey, the employment rate of women becomes as high as the employment rate of men only after 15 years of living in Finland. In addition to employment seeking, immigrant women experience discrimination, abuse and unequal pay also in working life, and according to the Statistics of Finland [in 2014](https://www.sak.fi/ajankohtaista/uutiset/maahanmuuttajanaisen-euro-62-senttia), employed immigrant women earned 62 cents for every euro earned by men.

## Women with disabilities

The Finnish Disability Forum and the Human Rights Centre carried out a survey on the realisation of the rights of people with disabilities in 2018. More than 1,500 disabled persons responded to the survey, and two-thirds of the respondents were women. In the survey, the particular issues brough up by female respondents were inappropriate conduct in relation to parenting and family planning, motherhood, and personal relationships. Infertility treatment might be refused. The working life discrimination experienced by disabled women and their difficulties in finding employment cause poverty. The survey revealed that disabled women (57.1%) reported poverty more than disabled men (47.1%). Poverty increases the risk of not having access to sufficient healthcare, the necessary medications, healthy food, and moving outside the home.

# Article 5 – Violence Against Women

Violence against women is one of the most significant human rights violations related to women. According to Statistics Finland, 76.5% of the victims of domestic violence and intimate partner violence were female (in 2009–2018).[[9]](#footnote-9)According to a survey by the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)[[10]](#footnote-10) (2015), 47% of Finnish women have encountered physical and/or sexual violence after turning 15 and 53% have experienced psychological violence in their current or previous relationships. According to the statistics on homicides[[11]](#footnote-11), a total of 131 Finns were killed by their intimate partner in 2011–2017. Of these, 78% were women and 22% men.

Finland is not doing enough to eliminate violence against women, although several human rights bodies and advocates have remarked on the insufficiency of Finnish anti-violence action and funding. The implementation plan for the Istanbul Convention was prepared by the authorities, and NGOs are not represented in the committee that coordinates the implementation. As stated in the Beijing+25 report[[12]](#footnote-12), no separate financial or personnel resources have been allocated to performing and coordinating the measures required by the Convention, which endangers the implementation of the Convention. The report also states that although shelters have been established in areas that had too few shelters or too little capacity to meet the demand, the number of shelters and their capacity is still too small considering the demand and recommendations. Finland’s shelter capacity should be 550, in 2020 shelter capacity was 211. Since 2012, disability organisations have demanded an accessibility survey at shelters from the authorities, but it is still not known if this has been carried out, and no extensive accessibility data is available.

There are also challenges related to living arrangements after leaving the shelter: difficulties finding an apartment and the risk of homelessness might force the women to return to the violent relationship. Minority women are in a particularly vulnerable position. They are subject to prejudice and stereotypical thinking that make finding an apartment on the free market significantly more difficult.

## Low-threshold services

Support services for victims of violence are mainly provided by NGOs, and their long-term funding is often uncertain. With regard to violence against women, the services should be female-specific and take into account the diversity of women.

## Sexual harassment, abuse and violence against girls

Sexual abuse is common among young people. According to the 2019 school health survey[[13]](#footnote-13), 32% of girls and 8% of boys in the 8th and 9th grades of comprehensive school had experienced abusive sexual proposals or harassment. Experiences of sexual violence were reported by 10% of the girls and 4% of the boys. These figures are strongly gendered, and it is particularly worrying that the amount of sexual harassment and abuse had increased from the 2017 school health survey. Sexual harassment of girls over the telephone and online had increased the most.

A survey by Save the Children[[14]](#footnote-14) revealed that there is commercial sexual abuse of children and sexual violence against children in Finland, particularly on digital media, but it is not adequately recognised.

Rape legislation   
For a long time, several NGOs have demanded that Finland should amend its rape legislation so that all forms of sexual intercourse without the other person’s consent would always be regarded as rape. The current legislation defines rape as sexual intercourse under physical violence or threat of physical violence. This definition fails to take into account that the victim is not always able to resist or express their will, even when there is no threat of violence involved.

In 2009–2018, approximately 97% of the victims of rape crimes known to the police were women. [[15]](#footnote-15)Amnesty International Finland carried out an analysis on the realisation of the rights of rape victims. In 2017, over 1,200 suspected rapes were reported to the police.

Around 70 per cent of the reported cases proceeded to prosecution, but a conviction was reached in only 209 cases. Only 17% of the cases concluded with a conviction. In addition to the outdated legislation, also the authorities need further training on how to encounter the victims with respect. Negative rape stereotypes continue to affect the treatment of the victims and the processing or rape cases.

## Sexual violence and particularly vulnerable women

Sexual violence and its underreporting are linked to multiple factors that make the victim more vulnerable. Immigrant women encounter sexual violence more often than the general population. (National Research Institute of Legal Policy 2014, 186). The risk of rape is almost twice as high for immigrant women compared to majority women. (KPMG 2018[[16]](#footnote-16)) Being in a vulnerable position can affect the victim’s opportunity to protect one’s self against sexual violence and receive help and justice. For example, asylum seekers and those without identity papers have difficulties getting justice. The offenders might threaten them that reporting the crime will prevent them from being granted a residence permit.

Research shows that disabled women and girls encounter sexual violence more often than others. Women with disabilities in institutions and hospitals are a particularly vulnerable group. Disability organisations have pointed out that in the Criminal Code, the risk of sanction is notably lower for sexual abuse compared to rape, even if the intercourse would be forced. This must be taken into account when revising the legislation in order to ensure that the level of legal protection provided by the Criminal Code in cases where a disabled person’s sexual right of self-determination is violated at a hospital or institution is not significantly lower than in other cases of abuse.

The revised, consent-based rape legislation is currently being prepared.

## Female genital mutilation (FGM)

It is crucial to strengthen national measures that seek to prevent FGM and improve the well-being of mutilated girls and women.

The action plan for the prevention of female genital mutilation, released by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, was effective in 2012–2016. However, it was not fully implemented, particularly with regard to training different professionals. The problems with implementation were also noticed in the final assessment of the action plan[[17]](#footnote-17) by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The new, updated action plan was released at the start of 2019[[18]](#footnote-18). It is extremely important to implement all the measures included in the action plan. In particular, professionals working in different sectors must be provided with training on their obligation to speak up and report the issue and on sensitive ways to address the phenomenon. Separate resources must be allocated to this.

A positive thing is that national anti-FGM measures have increased in recent years, particularly in the form of collecting data. FGM undergone by parturients have been recorded since 2017 and pregnant women since 2016. The new action plan by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare includes instructions on what to do if one suspects FGM or a threat of FGM and how to treat pregnant women who have undergone FGM. The action plan also estimates the number of girls and women living in Finland who have been mutilated (approx. 10,000) or are at a risk of being mutilated (approx. 650–3,000).

A question on FGM was added to THL’s school health survey for the first time in 2019. According to the school health survey, 0.2% of the girls in general upper secondary schools and vocational schools who responded the survey last year have undergone FGM. 51% of these girls were born in Finland.

## Digital violence

Technology has changed and will change the ways and nature of violence significantly. Our increasingly digital lifestyle and the availability of data enable extensive and serious violations of privacy. The internet and social media open up a new field and public arena for violent behaviour, on which maximal audiences can be reached with minimal resources.

According to research by Amnesty International (2017), 23% of women have experienced harassment online, and around 40% of those who had experienced harassment felt that their physical safety was threatened.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Based on research, women are at a notably higher risk of being harassed online, and women also feel more threatened by the harassment than men. However, the problems are not only limited online, but a more extensive discussion on the effects of digitalisation on the human rights and safety of girls and women is necessary.

Digital abuse means violence or stalking with the help of digital technologies, such as phones, social media platforms, computers, or positioning devices. Digital abuse is a form of psychological violence.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The situation of women who live in a violent relationship or are stalked by their former partner is particularly alarming, and professionals and authorities do not have, in the NGOs’ view, sufficient resources for helping victims. The understanding of the use of technology as a tool for violence must be increased among professionals and authorities, and access to help and support must be made easier for the victims of digital abuse. The Turv@verkko 2020–2022 project by Women’s Line provides training on digital abuse to authorities and professionals and organises low-threshold services to victims, but its funding is project-based with no guarantee for continuation.

## Mediation of intimate partner violence

In Finland, violent crimes can be settled without prosecution at the initiative of the police or the prosecutor. The prosecutor may decide to (under Chapter 1, Sections 7–8 of the Criminal Procedure Act and certain special provisions) waive prosecution, in which case the conciliation and the suspect’s willingness to settle are taken into account by applying the so-called reasonability principle. If the prosecutor decides to press charges, the court can take the settlement reached between the parties into account as a mitigating circumstance (Chapter 6, Section 6 of the Criminal Code). The Act on Conciliation in Criminal and Certain Civil Cases does not exclude any offences from the scope of application of the Act, but its provisions and preparatory materials contain some limitations regarding crimes against minors, intimate partner violence crimes, and serious crimes, stating that these crimes are poorly suitable for mediation and settling them through conciliation requires particular discretion. This is not the case in Finland.

Intimate partner violence is often settled through conciliation in Finland. According to the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL),[[21]](#footnote-21) the percentage of intimate partner violence cases was 16% of all criminal and civil cases referred to conciliation in 2017. A total of 14,471 criminal cases were referred to conciliation, of which 2,482 were intimate partner violence cases. The majority of these concerned violence by a man against a woman in an intimate relationship. In 2011, the percentage of intimate partner violence cases was smaller, at 14.75%[[22]](#footnote-22). This suggests that the mediation of intimate partner violence is becoming more common. One reason behind this is that petty assaults were moved under public prosecution.

The THL working group decided to recommend soft measures, such as providing guidance and training. The working group did not hear comments from NGOs that are critical towards the mediation of intimate partner violence for its report. It did not assess the need to revise the Act, although this is required in the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality. In its statement on the report, the Ministry of Justice has also criticised THL for neglecting the assessment requirement. The report did not pay attention to the interests, legal protection, safety, or welfare of the victim.

In its 2019 report, GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) expressed its concern for the mediation of recurring violence and the legal protection of women in cases where the mediation might have an impact on the incentive to investigate. GREVIO questions the power of the police to refer cases to mediation.[[23]](#footnote-23)

# Article 6 – Trafficking in Women and Prostitution

## Human trafficking

Finland has been found to serve as a country of destination and transit in human trafficking. Victims of trafficking are brought to Finland from other countries and transported through Finland to be exploited in other countries. Human trafficking also takes place within the Finnish borders, including cases where both the victim and the perpetrator are Finnish or permanently or temporarily residing in Finland. In Finland, [the majority of victims of trafficking who receive help within the assistance system for victims of human trafficking and those who have been officially identified as victims of trafficking have an immigrant background](http://www.ihmiskauppa.fi/materiaalipankki/tilastot_ja_tilannekatsaukset). The number of identified victims and those covered by the services has increased strongly, both in terms of the official assistance system and the services provided by NGOs.   
  
The most common form of officially identified human trafficking in Finland is the exploitation of labour where most of the victims are foreigners. Human trafficking that is related to sexual abuse is the most common form of human trafficking reported within the EU, and approximately 95% of the registered victims are female.

In 2019, the assistance system handled more potential forced marriage cases than ever before, and the number of people who had become victims in Finland was higher than before. In 2018, the assistance system for victims of human trafficking handled more cases that featured elements of sexual abuse than before. The NGOs that work to support victims of human trafficking have reported that although the majority of the crimes they are aware of took place in Finland, making the perpetrators responsible for their offences and the criminal procedures have been extremely difficult. Many of the cases are never reported to the authorities. Women and girls who become victims of human trafficking have invariably experienced other forms of gendered violence, either in the past or as part of their exploitation.

The Government Programme contains a large number of entries and planned measures that are aimed at improving the status of victims of human trafficking. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health launched a legislative project in spring 2020, concerning assistance to victims of human trafficking, as well as a survey on arranging safe, supported housing services for victims of human trafficking (THL) and establishing a specialist unit within the police. The working group appointed by the Ministry has no NGO representatives, apart from Victim Support Finland.

In 2019, the Deputy-Ombudsman asked the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to provide a report on the measures[[24]](#footnote-24) taken by the Government at the Parliament’s request (ensuring the non-discrimination of victims of human trafficking in providing assistance, analysing the need for legislative amendments concerning the assistance of victims of human trafficking). The report stated that anti-trafficking work requires clear structures and permanent resources, and the system must be harmonised in order to ensure equal services in all municipalities. In addition, measures to identify trafficked children and prevent human trafficking and prostitution must be enhanced.

## Prostitution

The European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council see a strong connection between trafficking in human beings, prostitution, and other forms of sexual abuse. Groups that are particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence are underage girls who are in a difficult situation in life and immigrant women who have no access to education and decent work for supporting themselves and their families. Wars and conflicts, poverty, absence of identity papers and other vulnerability factors expose girls and women to a situation in which they are forced to prostitution or see it as their only option. Girls and women with substance abuse problems are more susceptible to sexual abuse, violence, and sex against payment.

The partial ban that prohibits buying sex from minors and victims of procuration and human trafficking has not been efficient in curbing the demand for prostitution, and very few sentences have been given for breaking the ban.

The purchase of sex should be prohibited in Finland altogether. It is important not to punish the sellers, because this would make the position of the people in prostitution more difficult. All prohibitions on selling sex should be repealed. Finnish legislation should also be revised so that suspected selling of sex or prostitution would not be a valid reason to deny entry.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking, supplementing the United Nations’ Palermo Convention, requires the states to implement or strengthen their legislative or other measures that reduce the demand, because it increases the exploitation of human beings, especially women and children, which can lead to trafficking. Criminalising the purchase of sex is one way to curb the demand, as required by the protocol. In its 2016 resolution, the European Parliament stated that women in prostitution are at a greater risk of becoming victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes. The Parliament also points out that prostitution has decreased in countries that have criminalised the purchase of sex.

The NGOs support the recommendations given by the CEDAW committee in its previous periodic report.

# **Article 7 –** Participation in Political and Public Life

## Women in politics

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, women gained more seats than ever before, 94 of 200, which made the percentage of female MPs 46%. This marked the new record for equal representation, and also the percentage of female ministers increased to 58%. Six of the party leaders are women (in September 2020).

According to the Equality in Parliamentary Work survey[[25]](#footnote-25), men are perceived as having more power than women. When Members of Parliament were asked to name persons who have a lot of power within the party, 74% of these were men. The survey also revealed that the division of power was strongly gendered according to the respondents. Moreover, female MPs felt more often than the men that their original ideas were taken by others and they were interrupted.

In the European Parliament, seven out of the total 13 Finnish MEPs are women (53.85%). In 2019, Finland received its first female Commissioner.   
  
Communal election is held in 13th of June, statistics will be offered in the later point of parallel reporting.

Although the percentage of female decision-makers has increased, it is crucial to pay attention to the diversity of women, such as the political representation of minority women. The CEDAW Committee has expressed its concern for the underrepresentation of Roma and Sámi women in political decision-making. Immigrant women are also underrepresented in both central and local governments. Moreover, disabled women should be provided with more opportunities to participate in decision-making, in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

Hate speech  
  
Hate speech is one of the major obstacles to women’s political participation. The 2017 Gender Equality Barometer[[26]](#footnote-26) included for the first time questions on gendered hate speech, which was defined as derogatory or threatening speech or writing. It was discovered that women experience hate speech almost twice as much as men (15% and 8%, respectively). More than one-fifth (27%) of women who identify themselves as belonging to a minority had experienced hate speech.

Another recent study analysed the hate speech encountered by people of different genders in municipal politics.[[27]](#footnote-27) Hate speech is common in politics, and one-third of municipal decision-makers had been subject to hate speech. Almost one-third of the respondents who had experienced hate speech (28%) said that it had deterred their motivation to participate in municipal decision-making. The respondents said that hate speech and other forms of harassment increase significantly right before and during elections.

According to the study, women (42%) encounter hate speech significantly more often than men (28%) in Finnish local governments. The particular feature of hate speech targeted at women is the threat of sexual violence and, in some cases, its link to sexual harassment. Being a member of a minority (racialised, immigrant background, sexual minority, Sámi, language minority) also made people more susceptible to hate speech.

Hate speech can be impulsive and spur-of-the-moment, but often, it is deliberate and systematic, aimed at silencing certain individuals and points of view. Hate speech affects women’s – especially minority women’s – willingness to become politically active and run in elections. Since women and minority women are still underrepresented in political decision-making, the inability of society to control hate speech weakens democracy. Silencing women is a serious issue, because in a functional democratic society, politicians must be able to participate in public discussion and citizens run in elections without fear.  
  
Gender is not listed as an aggravating criterion in Chapter 6, Section 5 of the Criminal Code of Finland that lays down provisions on hate speech. The new Government Programme rules that gender must be added to the aggravating criteria. Gendered hate speech also has an impact on the willingness of public figures or professions such as journalists, researchers and activists to participate in public discussions.

# Article 10 – Training and Education

Finnish working life and educational fields are strongly segregated by gender. Gender segregation is evident in subjects and educational fields, teaching, learning results, evaluation of students, and teaching staff. One-fifth of girls and slightly more than one-third of boys think that gender is likely to affect their choice of profession. Segregation and gendered expectations can limit the people’s perceptions of suitable career and study paths.

In 2018, almost 84% of students in the health and wellbeing sector were women and 65% in the arts and humanities field. In the same year, 89% of students in data processing and data communications were male and 80% in the technical sector. Similar segregation is evident in both secondary education and high education.

The gender bias of education is well known in Finland, but little progress has been made in ending it. The representation of gender in learning materials is still stereotypical, and an equality and gender aware perspective needs to be introduced in early childhood education and primary education. The Segli development project was implemented in Finland in 2016–2019 (Promoting equality and reducing segregation in education and working life)[[28]](#footnote-28). The results were positive, but as with many equality promotion measures, the results and experiences cannot be implemented nationwide due to insufficient financial and human resources. There is high-quality learning and supportive material available on reducing segregation and teaching human rights and equality matters to children, but the coverage of these themes still depends on individual teachers.

# Article 11 – Equality in Working Life

Finnish working life is strongly segregated by gender. There has been some progress in recent years, as women have entered previously male-dominated educational fields to become, for example, lawyers and doctors. However, men have not shown notable interest towards female-dominated fields. The majority of employees in the public sector are women, while more men work in the private sector. The most female-dominated fields are the social and health sector, education, and hospitality. The most male-dominated fields are constructions, transportation and storage, and industry. Less than 10% of employees work in a sector where the representation of men and women is equal (at least 40% each).

As with the segregation of education, the segregation in working life has not been reduced effectively.

## Equal pay

In its responses to Finland’s country report, the CEDAW Committee has recommended that Finland launch immediately an equal pay programme in order to reduce the gender pay gap to 15%, as required in the ILO’s Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value. However, several of the measures taken in recent years have had the opposite effect on women’s income, and there have been political decisions that affect, for example, the future pensions of women. Narrowing the pay gap is till extremely slow, and effective measures to reduce the difference are needed.

The Overall Evaluation of the Equal Pay Programme 2016–2019[[29]](#footnote-29) states that during the programme period, the pay gap has only decreased to 16% (from the 17% it was during the 2014 CEDAW report). Based on experiences, the Equal Pay Programme has had a relatively small effect on the narrowing of the pay gap. However, according to the overall evaluation, other measures, such as the gender impact assessment of collective agreements, were effective. As noted in the overall evaluation, not all labour market parties seem to support the measures that aim to improve equal pay systematically.

According to the overall evaluation, some of the planned measures of the Equal Pay Programme 2016–2019 were not implemented, which means they are regarded as experiences with little impact.

In 2016, Finnish labour market organisations agreed on a competitiveness pact that was intended as a temporary agreement, the purpose of which was to improve Finland’s competitiveness and employment. The pact included salary freezes, working hour extensions, cuts on holiday pay, and reductions on employer contributions. According to Statistics Finland[[30]](#footnote-30), the pact increased the weekly working hours of women by approximately 30 minutes, while there were no similar effects on men. Holiday pay was also cut. Women were affected by the competitiveness measures more than men, because there are more women working in the public sector.

## Pregnancy discrimination

In its report to Parliament (2018)[[31]](#footnote-31), the Equality Ombudsman concludes that pregnancy discrimination is still a notable equality issue in Finland. The number of pregnancy discrimination cases are based on the number of people contacting the Equality Ombudsman and trade unions, which has remained unchanged. However, not all cases are known by the authorities, which means that the actual number of discrimination cases is presumably higher. Discrimination is common particularly with regard to temporary employment relationships and contract work.

Pensions

Women’s weaker labour market position also affects their pensions. The pension gap has reduced slowly, by 2.2% from 2002 to 2018. Over the long term, women’s earnings-related pensions have increased by 61% (compared to an 33% increase among men), but according to Kela (the Social Insurance Institution of Finland), women’s pensions are still on average one-third lower than men’s pensions.[[32]](#footnote-32)In the statistics overall pension, which comprises survivors’ pensions and guarantee pensions, the difference is smaller – one-fifth. Based on Kela’s statistics from 2019, women outnumber men in the elderly beneficiaries of guarantee pension. No improvements were made to the pension accrued during family leave in the 2017 pension renewal. In Finland, the risk of poverty is twice as high among elderly women compared to men.

Reconciliation of work and family life  
  
According to a recent survey[[33]](#footnote-33), up to one-third of the working-age population has problems with the reconciliation of work and family life. Up to 40% of respondents aged 28–37 had encountered problems, and these problems were more pronounced among women. The 2011 survey revealed that practices regarding remote work, flexible working hours, and the opportunity to run one’s personal errands during the workday vary significantly. The nature of the work determines whether flexible working hour arrangements can be used, and because the Finnish working life is strongly segregated, the flexibility of working life is also gendered.  
  
Single-parent families had more problems with the work-life balance than two-parent families[[34]](#footnote-34). Of all single-parent families, 85% consist of a mother and children. In 2017, the unemployment rate of single parents was 15.4%, which is twice as high as the overall unemployment rate. Single parents with atypical working hours often resort to unofficial networks in order to be able to work, and they also take more unpaid leave. Single-parent families are at a higher risk of poverty compared to two-parent families.

# Article 12 – Health

## Depression/mental health issues

Mental health problems have become more common, particularly among young women. Based on the School Health Survey, anxiety increased from the previous survey, particularly among girls in 8th–9th grades and girls in general upper secondary school. Absences due to mental health issues increased in all age groups, especially among young women (aged 16–34).

Sickness-related absences that are caused by work-related stress have become more common. The need for mental health services has increased among young people in recent years, and more people are seeking help. It is a positive thing that the stigma of mental health problems has been partly lifted and people have the courage to seek help, but the healthcare organisation is unable to meet the growing demand, which results in long care queues.

## Sexual and reproductive health

According to the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), around 50 municipalities offer contraception to young people free of charge. Offering free-of-charge contraception and increasing birth control guidance have reduced the number of abortions, especially among young people. However, the number of abortions has increased among 30–39-year-olds in Finland in the 2010s. According to the Government Programme, free contraception should be offered to all persons under the age of 25 in a national pilot project. The current situation places young people in an unequal position, because their access to free contraception depends on their municipality.

## Sterilisation Act

In its previous conclusions, the CEDAW Committee urged Finland to take measures to abolish Section 2 of the Act on Sterilisation that enables sterilising disabled women whose legal capacity is limited or who are legally incapacitated without their own consent. The current Act is from 1970, and it is outdated in many respects, but no measures have been taken to revise it so far.

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