

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW 27TH SESSION: FINLAND

Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Joint Submission of the Finnish National Youth Council – Youth Cooperation Allianssi
and the European Youth Forum (YFJ)

Key words: violence against women, Youth Poverty and Low Income of Youth, Rights of immigrant children and youth

1. Introduction

1. Finland has a strong institutional structure and the opinions of the civil society are heard in decision-making processes. However, there are issues that need to be taken into consideration and improvements to be made. The Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi wishes to convey to the Universal Periodic Review working group the following comments regarding the challenges of violence against women as well as increasing problem of youth poverty and the discrimination against people with immigrant backgrounds. The Finnish legislation on the age of the youth defines youth as 0-29 year olds.

2. Violence against women

2. *Recommendation 89.14. Undertake further measures aimed at protection of women's rights, including prevention of violence (Ukraine).*

3. *Recommendation 89.16. Take effective legal and practical measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and children, in particular women and children with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and children, and women and children from ethnic and religious minorities, especially Muslims and Roma (Iran);*

4. Violence against women exists in every society. It is aggressive physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Any violence against women is against fundamental human rights. In April 2015 Finland ratified the **Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence** (Istanbul convention). The Convention entered into force in August 2015. A recently published EU survey [2] on violence against women shows that in Finland a total of 47% of women have experienced violence. In EU countries this is the second highest rate. According to this survey, most of the women who have experienced violence have the highest prevalence in the youngest age group of 18-29.

5. In Finnish development policy gender equality is one of the main goals. Thus, Finland's Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security for the period 2012-2016 [3] recognizes the importance to combat violence against women. However, according to recent Amnesty International report [4], Finland has not taken further steps for the effective implementation of the convention. Collaboration between different administrative offices and coordinated national financing still remain absent. Furthermore, services, such as 24/7 helpline, account of shelters or walk-in services for women who have experienced violence, remain still insufficient.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Prepare a national finance plan with allocated targets to combat violence and discrimination against women.**
- b) Provide access and financial aid to support services, such as, 24/7 helplines and walk-in services.**
- c) Strengthen cooperation between different government agencies and municipal administrations**

Sources:

[1] https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/publication/Finland_2014_05_02_Beijing_20_National_Report_FINLAND.pdf

[2] http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-factsheet_en.pdf

[3] http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/finland_nap_2012.pdf

[4] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/finland/report-finland/>

3. Youth Poverty and Low Income of Youth

7. The Bank of Finland's statistics [1] show that the rising standard of living acquired during the last generation has not benefited the younger generations at all. Between the years 1990 and 2013 the income level of under 35-year-old adults has collapsed in comparison to the rest of the society, while the income of older generations and especially pensioners has risen. This development is due, among other things, to the poverty of students, youth unemployment and the financial crisis.

8. The amount of young people living under the poverty threshold has increased significantly. According to Statistics Finland 30% of young people have incomes of less than 60% of the median for households' equivalent disposable monetary income. The amount of people living in poverty is higher among the 18 to 30 year-olds than in any other age group. The poverty is deepest among young people, as one third of the low-income youth are amongst the poorest section of the population. Their income is under 40% of the median for households' equivalent disposable monetary income. [2]

9. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Include an assessment of impacts on young people and intergenerational justice in each policy process. Invest especially in the youth guarantee, the education system, student grants and preventive services.**
- b) Allocate funds to support youth employment and create financial incentives for employers to recruit young people. Provide support for unemployed young people at an early stage to avoid prolonged periods of unemployment as they increase the risk of social exclusion.**
- c) Grant youth and students access to an equal standard of welfare support as other age groups.**

Sources:

[1] <http://www.eurojatalous.fi/fi/2016/artikkeli/pitkittynyt-taantuma-heikentaa-nuorten-sukupolvien-asemaa-suomessa/>

[2] http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/tjt/2014/01/tjt_2014_01_2016-03-18_tie_001_fi.html

4. Rights of immigrant children and youth

10. Recommendation 89.50. Give more attention to asylum-seekers and unaccompanied minors in cases of family reunion (Iraq)

11. In 2015 Finland received 32 476 asylum seekers, one fifth of them (7624), being children. Criteria for family reunification has been made more stringent three times since 2010. The latest government's proposal for amending the Aliens Act (HE 43 / 2016 vp) was approved in June 2016 by the parliament. [1] The government proposal widened the financial criteria of "secure means of support" to apply also to cases where family reunion is requested by an underage child who has been granted international protection. Exception is granted if the person in question is a family member of a quota refugee or a person who has been granted asylum and the application has been submitted within three months from the submission of the sponsor's positive decision.

12. The limit for secure income is defined by the Finnish Immigration Service's internal guidelines. [2] The Constitutional Law committee emphasized (PeVL 27/2016) that the income requirement should be deviated from when it is in a child's interest. [3] However, the law was not amended to exclude children who have been granted international protection. For example, a child applying for family reunion with a sibling and two parents would need "secure means of support" of 2600 euros per month.

13. The three months limit for applying for family reunion is almost impossible to reach, as family members need to be present at interviews in person at a Finnish embassy before the application can be processed. It is not possible to apply from abroad by post or e-mail. Finland does not have embassies for example in Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia, so the applicants family members from Iraq need to travel to Finland's embassy in Turkey, where strict visa requirements toward Iraqi citizen prevent many applicants from participating in an interview within the required three months' time period.

14. The amendment also violates the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 2 (1)** which states that States Parties shall respect the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's social origin, property or other status. [4] [5]

15. Requiring unaccompanied underage children, who have been granted international protection, to earn almost as much as the median income in Finland in order to bring their parents and siblings to Finland is against the child's interests and against Finland's international commitments under **the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child** and under the **European Convention on Human Rights**. Special regard should be paid to the *right to family life, right not to be separated from parents against the child's will and positive, humane and expeditious treatment of family reunification applications.*

16. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Exclude underage children and youth under international protection, who are applying for family reunification, from secure income requirements.
- b) Plan and implement an electronic submission system for family reunifications as soon as possible to protect the rights of applicants who are unable to access Finnish embassies due to visa problems.
- c) Ensure that the treatment of all family reunification applications submitted by children and youth comply with the requirements set by UN Convention on the Rights of Child, especially with regards to Article 2(1) and Article 10 (1)

Sources:

[1] https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Sivut/HE_43+2016

[2] https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Lausunto/Sivut/PeVL_27+2016

[3] http://www.migri.fi/moving_to_finland_to_be_with_a_family_member/income_requirement

[4] <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

[5] <https://www.unicef.fi/tiedotus/uutisarkisto/2016/lahes-50-miljoonaa-lasta-joutunut-jattamaan-kotinsa-konfliktien-ja-koyhyiden-vuoksi/>

5. About the Contributing Organisations



Finnish Youth Cooperation – Allianssi is a national service and lobbying organisation for youth work. It is a non-governmental, non-profit umbrella organisation for 126 youth and youth work organisations and **acts as the** National Youth Council of Finland advocating for the rights of young people.

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The **European Youth Forum (YFJ)** is an independent platform of 102 youth organisations in Europe, to which Allianssi is a full member. Founded in 1996 and bringing together National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, YFJ represents the common interests of tens of millions of young people in Europe.

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