

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare's submission of Finland's human rights situation

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human rights situation

For The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Toinen linja 17
PL 141
00531 Helsinki, Finland
tel. +358 75 324 51
Fax +358 75 324 5403
www.mll.fi
mll@mll.fi
Y-tunnus 0215204-0



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The Mannerheim League is a 1920 founded NGO and its membership is open to everyone. It promotes the wellbeing of children and of families with children, increases respect for childhood and seeks to make it more visible, and sees that children's views are taken into account in public decision-making. The league communicates with the Parliament, ministries, the Ombudsman for children, trade unions and other interest groups and NGO's. The Mannerheim League is the largest child welfare organization in Finland. It has 92 000 members and 567 local associations throughout the country. The work of these local associations is supported by the League's 13 district organizations. The league aims to ensure that, children are equal members of society, every child enjoys good and happy surroundings, parenting and education are respected and supported and volunteer work, helping, caring and joint responsibility increase.

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Mannerheim League for Child Welfare would like to comment Finland's human rights situation in children's point of view as follows:

MLL states that the general principle of protecting the best interest of the child should be taken in consideration in all legislation, judicial decisions and acts of social services that concern children, youth and families.

At the end of 2010 there were 1 084 296 children (age 0-17) in Finland. It is 20,2 % of population(5 375 276) (Source: Statistics Finland). Most of the children in Finland are doing well in many ways. However the wellbeing of children is polarized. Problems are accumulating to some children while others are doing well. For some children multiple problems and simultaneous difficulties are characteristic.

Declining economic situation has diminished the resources for providing preventive services. This has happened for example in child welfare clinics or early intervention. This increases the need for special services. The real value of the home care subsidy and child benefit is lower than in year 1995. Too large groups in schools and in day-care centers are also a risk for children's wellbeing.

There is also a reason for concern over the fact that consultation and support services for minors are not equally distributed in different parts of Finland. There is inequality in providing services for different sections of the population and among different municipalities. The insufficient resources for families with children and the lack of equality in the allocation of those resources among municipalities are due to the weak state control system. In Finland the municipalities make independent decisions on the sourcing of the services.



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Children tend to be at risk particularly during transition periods, such as moving from basic education to upper secondary. The unemployment figures of the young have grown in recent years. In 2008 there were 57 800 young (age 15-29) who were not in working life, studying, military service or even unemployed job applicants. In order to prevent social exclusion, the young unemployed should be offered diversified forms of support and training opportunities. Outreach youth work needs increased resources because through this activity it is possible to reach the young not actively seeking support.

Child poverty has grown from 4 % in 1995 to 13 % from until now, and the child poverty rate has remained stable for the last few years. Children aged 0-6, children from single-parent homes, and children from families with more than 3 children are at higher risk for belonging to a low-income household. Until now, the government has not had any special program for reducing child poverty, However some concrete actions have been undertaken. Reducing child poverty and social exclusion should be a key concern for policy making in Finland.

One flaw in Finnish legislation is that it is not compulsory to arrange basic education for asylum seeking or refugee children that are not constantly living in the municipality. Law should be immediately amended in order to provide equal right and access to basic education for every child living in Finland. Overall, specific attention should be made to make sure those children representing different ethnic backgrounds or with special needs are treated with equality in terms of school, health care and services.

Children and youth should be protected against the negative effects of the widespread alcohol use and misuse in Finland. Finland needs to strengthen the regulation of marketing alcohol especially to protect young people, and to undertake actions for reducing alcohol consumption and change harmful drinking habits.

Governments periodic Policy Programme on the wellbeing of children, youth and families (2007 – 2011) organized and co-ordinated the co-operation between different administrative sectors. Aims of The Programme were increasing awareness of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, developing indicators for the evaluation of children's wellbeing and to improving the services offered to families. It is important to make sure that the co-operation between the different administrative sectors continues.

According to Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's cabinet (2011-) programme government will reduce disparity in income, wellbeing and health. In addition to this the government will confirm and reform the basic services. These aims are encouraging. However, the real effects of these actions remain to be seen.

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In Helsinki

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The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Mirjam Kalland
Secretary general

Maarit Paivike
Lawyer

Toinen linja 17
PL 141
00531 Helsinki, Finland
tel. +358 75 324 51
Fax +358 75 324 5403
www.mll.fi
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