

**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

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Introduction

This report is parallel to the Finnish Government's sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (October 2007) addressed to the United Nations' CEDAW Committee. Finnish women's organizations and associations have critically examined and commented the Government's report. The Coalition of Finnish Women's Association (NYTKIS) is now gathering these comments together and, in common agreement, preparing this parallel report to be presented to the CEDAW committee in June 2008. Since the last report, the Finnish Government has made some progress in equality issues and the Finnish women's organizations and associations do recognize the effort the government has made regarding equality work. However, in the context of this parallel report, it is necessary to concentrate on examining things critically and thus to highlight the deficiencies present in the Finnish equality work.

The report at hand has been prepared based on comments of 11 Finnish organizations. These organizations are: Amnesty International Finnish Section, The Coalition of Finnish Women's Association, The Federation of Mothers and Child Homes and Shelters, The Feminist Association Unioni, National Council of Women of Finland, Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities, The Multicultural Women's Association MONIKA, SETA Sexual Equality, UN Association of Finland, UNIFEM Finland, Women Together Against Addictions and YWCA of Finland. The statements of these organizations have clearly concentrated on some issues raised in the Government's report. Most of organizations raised the same problem areas in their statements. Thus, this parallel report is not going to discuss all the issues and articles approached in the Government's report. However, it will concentrate on specific issues that seem to be the central problem areas according to Finnish organizations.

The report is structured as follows: to start with, six central problem areas will be discussed. These areas are selected based on the comments and the emphasis of the organizations. Secondly, other important issues are raised and discussed shortly. There will be the organizations' recommendations of how to improve the situation of the topic under discussion listed in the end of each paragraph. Finally, a short summary will be provided of the most important issues raised.

Central problem areas in Finland

As stated above, there seem to be a number of issues that receive central attention in the statements submitted by the Finnish NGOs. These are issues that most of the organizations contributing to this report emphasize in their comments and which they consider to be the most important. These problem areas are:

- Legislation and, especially, the plan to consolidate the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act
- Rights of women belonging to minority groups

- Violence against women
- Trafficking in women and prostitution
- Equality planning in educational establishments
- Inequality in the labour market and inequality in political and public life
- Gender budgeting

These problem areas will be discussed under the relevant article of the Convention. The order of the issues reflects the order of the governmental report. The only exceptions will be gender budgeting and the general equality climate in Finland, and these will be discussed as issues affecting all the other issues and circumstances.

Article 2 – Legislation

The Finnish Act on Equality between Women and Men was reformed in 2005. This reform was an improvement resulting in a higher level of protection against violations of the law. However, from the viewpoint of Finnish organizations, this better trend is now being forgotten. As the Government states in its sixth periodic report, there has been discussion about the future of Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act that came into force in 2004. Officially, the discussion is about how these Acts could be made more efficient and, especially, how the Non-Discrimination Act could be reformed. However, Finnish NGOs fear that actual aim of this discussion is to finally consolidate these two Acts. This would have serious consequences for Finnish equality work. In January 2007, the Ministry of Justice set up a Committee to reform the Finnish legislation on non-discrimination. Finnish organizations consider that the direction the Committee has taken so far is alarming.

Although the Committee has not officially spoken for the consolidation of the Acts and claims to be open for all possible options regarding the reform of Non-Discrimination Act, it still seems that the work the Committee has done is constructing a basis for consolidation. The Council for Gender Equality and the Finnish NGOs feel that this would be a serious setback for all equality work done in Finland. First of all, equality between genders is not commensurate with issues of minority rights. Gender is a part of life of every single human being regardless of their age, ethnic group, religion etc. Also, discrimination based on gender is often structural, indirect and hidden and especially hard to identify. Thus, it would be irrational to treat gender as a ground for discrimination of the same kind as ethnic groups, for instance. In addition, there are still many flaws in the Non-Discrimination Act, considered quite incoherent as a whole. Thus, it would be a severe mistake to integrate the Act on Equality into the Non-Discrimination Act as the Act on Equality is much more evolved and provides a better level of protection. Based on international comparison, it can be said that consolidating the Acts and forming one common council for both of them would lead to fewer resources. This would naturally lead to a need of prioritization between different grounds for discrimination and, finally, to a lower level of protection.

There are a few central problems in the work of the Committee. Firstly, the Committee justifies the idea of consolidation by arguing that, in that way, it would be easier to combat multiple discrimination. The Council for Gender Equality states, however, that multiple discrimination is a phenomenon that is still little known and that there is not enough experience to combat it as a whole. Instead, the only way to target it at the

moment is to concentrate on one ground for discrimination at a time. Secondly, the Committee is preparing a reform of Acts that would, to a high degree, affect the work of all equality officers. However, the Committee has no participant from the unit for gender equality in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. From the point of view of different actors in the field of equality work, it is difficult to understand why they are excluded from the work of the Committee.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- Gender can not be seen as one ground for discrimination among others. It is part of every person's life regardless of whether they are part of the majority or of a minority group. Thus, it should be treated as a ground for discrimination needing special attention.
- The Committee should hear the opinions of different actors and officers working in the field of gender equality. It is also of vital importance to have an expert of gender issues participating in the Committee.
- The Non-Discrimination Act should be improved and reformed so that better protection could be provided to different minority groups. In Finnish NGOs' opinion, this should be done independently and not involved with the Act on Equality between Men and Women as this would harm the level and efficiency of current equality work.

Article 2 – Minority Groups

Different minority groups of women are still facing double discrimination in Finland. They face discrimination due to their sex or gender but their rights are also trampled on because they belong to certain minority groups. This causes double discrimination, a major problem for these women's human rights. The largest minority groups in Finland facing these problems are women of traditional minorities like the Roma and the Sámi, immigrant women, disabled women and women of sexual minorities. It would be essential to pay attention to equality between these different groups of women and also to their equality with the majority of women in Finland. At the moment, the equality policy is concentrating too much on women's rights in general and, unfortunately, lumping different kinds of women together under a same label. This problem of homogenization should be better addressed in the Finnish equality policy.

Roma

Roma women are one of the groups of women that suffer from double discrimination. They face discrimination based both on their sex and their ethnic background. They have been discriminated against for a long time and they have faced discrimination both in the wider Finnish society and in their own Roma community. As stated in the Government report, although Roma women nowadays are more aware of their rights than before, many ways of discrimination still remain. They often face discrimination in the labour market, and it also seems to be more difficult for the Roma to have access to services in the private sector. Unemployment among Roma women is higher than that of the main population, according to the government report as well. Problems in

housing also worsen the situation of Roma women in Finland. Roma population in general has very unstable living conditions and this clearly affects the position of Roma women and children in the society. As the situation of the women is closely linked to the situation of the Roma children, more attention should be paid to the children's access to day care and schooling. Arranging day care that takes into account Roma children's distinctive cultural background is a key condition for Roma women to become more independent and to enter the labour market. Roma community itself discriminates against its women. Many harmful traditional practices among the community make the women's position worse. It may well be questioned whether these harmful traditional practices of the Roma community itself are degrading to the Roma women.

Prejudices against Roma women are still strong. Discrimination against Roma women wearing their traditional costumes and denial of their access to public places is still common in Finland. It does not help the situation that authorities are often poorly educated to solve situations of discrimination based on both gender and ethnic background.

Sámi

Sámi women can be seen as an example of a group of indigenous people where women are the transmitters of culture and traditions. They are the passers of knowledge, values and customs that are essential to the indigenous culture of future generations.

Sámi women, just as all indigenous women, should be provided with a real access to the society, services and decision-making. This should be done by Government measures such as quotas in decision-making bodies, for example. Due to bad experiences in the past and discrimination experienced by women, Sámi women seldom seek top positions in their community or in the wider society. It is a historical fact that the political community of Sámi people has been predominantly male (Politics of Gender, 2006). This fact still seems to be true. It is often stated that gender has no significance in Sámi politics or Sámi community as a whole. This is a clear example of absence of gender recognition in Sámi community. Indigenous issues of land and livelihood rights are of primary concern to the Sámi community (and the Finnish Government in matters concerned with Sámi people). It is the young and the women who pay the price for this one-sidedness of Sámi politics (Politics of Gender, 2006). In addition, this perception of gender issues only seems to be enforced by the Finnish society. Studies of the social life, politics, organizational activity and working life of the Sámi have completely ignored the gender perspective (Politics of Gender, 2006). Thus, the issue of gender equality among the Sámi people is understated by the Finnish society.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- Continuous housing problems among the Roma community should be targeted by the Government. This would greatly help the women and the young to improve their position in society and acquire education and work.
- General attitudes of the Finnish society against the Roma must be combated. Negative stereotypes must be replaced by new and positive ideas of the whole Roma community.

- Although Sámi people as a group face many problems because of their indigenous relation to the rest of the Finnish society, gender issues should not be ignored by the Government or the Sámi people. Gender issues should not be pushed to the background when concerned with land and livelihood rights. Both the Sámi community and the Finnish Government should take into consideration that promoting Sámi welfare actually requires involving both genders in the society and the decision-making (Politics of Gender, 2006).

Immigrant Women

It seems that there are services provided for immigrant women in Finland in order for them to integrate better into the Finnish society and to be able to enjoy their basic human rights in the new environment. However, these services often remain unsuccessful in improving immigrant women's position in the new host society. Problems often arise from a lack of full understanding of the specific situation of immigrant women. There are also cultural obstacles that prevent immigrant women from taking full advantage of the services provided for them. Traditional gender roles are often limiting immigrant women more than the Finnish women (Friidu, 2004). It seems clear that the Finnish Government and the policy makers should revise their methods of reaching the immigrant women in Finland. This problem is very apparent in the Finnish language courses that are offered for immigrant women as part of their adaptation programme. These courses are not working as well as they could because they are not reaching all the adult immigrant women. Getting all the adult immigrant women to participate in language courses would clearly increase their ability to act as full members of society in the new cultural environment. What also seems to be an obstacle in integrating immigrant women into different programs in Finland is the technological gap that exists between the emphasis on technology in the Finnish society and the incapacity of immigrant women to use new forms of technology. A technological alienation forms a problem among some immigrant women and thus prevents them from taking advantage of certain services provided by the Finnish Government. This problem should be addressed when new services are planned for immigrant women.

All this affects the immigrant women's access to the labour market. It should be taken into account that, in the Finnish society, work is the factor that defines a person. Also, the Finnish system of social security is job-centred. Thus, to be able to fully integrate and to feel integrated, it is essential for immigrant women to enter the labour market and the Finnish government should do more to enable them to achieve this. Immigrant women also suffer from the limitations of traditional gender roles that make it more difficult to acquiring independent employment and finance, and this is not taken into account by the Government (Friidu, 2004). There are plenty of educated and highly educated immigrant women in Finland but their skills and knowledge are almost totally unnoticed in the Finnish society. There are no initiatives to find ways to exploit this know-how. At the same time, the Finnish Government is claiming that Finnish society is about to face a serious labour shortage.

Clearly, it is important that the services provided for the immigrant women are provided in a language that is understood by the service user. It should be made possible to use

services in one's own language if it is not possible to use them in Finnish or in English. There should be adequate possibilities to use interpreters.

Women can have special needs as asylum seekers. Their reasons given in an asylum application might differ greatly from men. The Finnish government is not taking this into consideration in its asylum policy but is treating women and men with the same criteria and assumptions. It would be of high importance to chart special reasons for women to become asylum seekers. These reasons should be taken into consideration in the Finnish asylum policy.

Immigrant women are in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to violence against women (Friidu, 2004). They often suffer from violence but their situation is rarely recognized as needing special attention by the authorities. The issue of honour-related violence is one of the most urgent problems among immigrant women. Honour-related violence is a complex problem of traditional male dominance in the collision of two cultural environments and world views. In cases of honour-related violence, immigrant women suffer from violence because they are thought to have violated the virtue principals of their community and thus defamed their family's honour. Finnish officials and authorities are still quite uninformed about the backgrounds, causes and effects of honour-related violence and they are not provided with enough tools and resources to combat it. This is something that must be targeted as soon as possible in the Government's planning and budgeting. Most essentially, the special situation of immigrant women in the field of VAW must be recognized.

Finnish organizations also bring up a possibility of organizing gender and culture sensitive education directed to immigrant girls. According to Finnish NGOs, this would improve their place in society. This kind of education would help the girls to grow up as full members of society and would improve their readiness to recognise and report violence in the future, for example. This strategy would be an investment in better gender and cultural integration of immigrant girls and show its rewards when these immigrant girls are adult women.

Violence Against Immigrant Women

There exists no comprehensive data on violence faced by immigrant women in Finland. The data available is gathered from the police reports and information from shelters. However, the data shows that immigrant women are more marginalized than immigrant men in Finland: Immigrant women report on violence two times more often than women who are native Finnish. They also seek for help from shelters nine times more often than native Finnish women. Immigrant children and teenagers face violence three times more often than native Finnish children and young people¹.

There is a great need for special services for immigrant women and children who face violence. Immigrant women often face difficulties within the normal service system. They e.g. may not know that violence is a criminal act in Finland or do not know their

¹ Haarakangas, Tanja, Ollus, Natalia & Toikka Sini 2000: Väkivaltaa kokeneet maahanmuuttajanaiset – haaste turvakotipalveluille Suomessa. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus. Tasa-arvo-julkaisuja 2000:3. Helsinki.

rights in a case of violence, they may not have comprehensive understanding of the Finnish service system or do not know Finnish language well enough.

There is a special concern about those immigrant women who live in small cities. For them it is even more difficult to get help and services in their own language as services are located mostly in bigger cities that have larger immigrant populations. There is also a lack of multicultural know-how among the service providers to prevent and recognize the special features of violence against immigrant women and children.

According to practical experience, violence against immigrant women remains at present often undetected; only the most serious cases of violent situations are more likely to come into the open. Barriers for immigrant women to seek help are, in many ways, related to lack of language and civic skills. Women are not necessarily familiar with the Finnish legislation and service system.

Immigrant women are also victims of honour related violence. Honour related violence consists of actions perpetrated by those who feel that a woman's behaviour has hurt the honour of her husband or family. The Finnish government authorities and officers do not always know how to investigate the cultural factors behind these acts of violence. Neither the Finnish penal nor civil code mention specifically honour related violence or forced marriages. Also social services, the police and the wider public do not have the know-how, information, strategies, rules and regulations to take the appropriate action.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- It would be highly important to brainstorm and develop new ways and methods to reach the majority of immigrant women. These new methods should be used to improve the services directed to immigrant women.
- In order to improve the level of participation of immigrant women in society and the benefits they receive from services directed to them, it would be important to provide them with technological education. This education should also pay attention to cultural differences that affect technological alienation.
- The Finnish government should secure adequate services of interpretation for immigrant women. This requires more resources for the work done with women immigrants and asylum seekers.
- Honour-related violence must be combated by the Government. The Government must educate its authorities and officers to recognise honour-related violence, and provide them with knowledge and tools to understand the situation and to help the victims.
- Immigrant girls should also be taken into consideration when planning the immigration policy. Gender and culture sensitive education should be provided for them in schools and in off-school activities in order to facilitate their equal integration in the Finnish society.
- The Finnish government should consider the future aspects of their immigrant policy and its effects on immigrant women especially. There is a new

organization for immigrant policy within the Ministry of the Interior. The Finnish NGOs hope that the new organization will bring an improvement in the situation.

- Breaking the chain of violence requires the expertise and cooperation of various professionals. Network resources can best be utilised by developing practices for different actors in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and authorities. An immigrant client may need concrete help, which organisations are often able to provide more flexibly in the form of special services than the municipal service system.
- Immigrant women are more marginalized than immigrant men in Finland. Minorities must be taken into consideration when local operational models are designed for combating violence. Professionals, such as those within the employment and social authorities who are in contact with immigrants, play a central role.

Disabled Women

Disabled women often face discrimination because they are part of the disabled minority in Finland. However, they also face discrimination because they are disabled *women*. Thus, they should be seen as a group with special needs both as disabled and as women. It is important that this special condition is acknowledged and special services, measures of support and benefits that are directed to disabled women especially are seen as ways of realizing their human rights. As yet, not enough attention is being paid to these special needs by the Finnish Government. There are no sufficient and targeted services for disabled women that would take into consideration their special status as women and as full members of society.

Firstly, a disabled person does not need care but assistance as disability is not to be compared with illness. However, the situation of assistance services has only got worse during recent years. The previous Government was promoting a system of personal assistants for disabled persons but no progress was made during its last period of office. Thus, the system of personal assistants is still far from adequate in Finland.

Organizations for disabled women emphasize the importance of the principle of access. This principle covers all aspects of life. The principle declares that disabled women have the right of access to adequate assistance, adequate and targeted access to health care, access to adequate transportation and possibility to unrestricted life in all areas of their everyday life. It also includes the idea of openness of attitudes. This refers to the change in the attitudinal climate in the Finnish society that still considers disabled women as not fully capable participants of the society. All these perspectives of the principle of access are meant to increase the possibility for disabled women to act as full members in the society. They are entitled to live a full life participating in working life and different activities and they are entitled to assistance for easier use of services.

Disabled women suffer from violence three times as often as non-disabled women. This is of special concern in Finland where violence against women is of especially high level. It seems that domestic violence against disabled women is still a taboo in the Finnish society. This seems to be true also with prostitution and human trafficking that

involves disabled women. The first (and so far only) conviction in court on trafficking in human beings resulted from a case, in which a disabled woman from Estonia was lured to come to Finland to work as a nanny but ended up as sexually abused in prostitution. Denial of these issues is a serious problem as it is fact that disabled women do suffer from violence and sexual exploitation. It is important to take these issues into consideration in the policy decisions and also in programmes opposing violence against women. It is important to remember that disabled women do suffer from the structures of violence and they also have a special position in these structures. Work should be targeted against discriminating attitudes as well. As long as violence against disabled women is considered a taboo and remains hidden, there is not much any actor on the field can achieve. Thus, it is of high importance to raise awareness of this situation and to emphasize the equal rights of the disabled women when suffering from violence. It seems that domestic violence against disabled women is still a taboo in the Finnish society.

In Finnish family policy, too, an attitudinal problem seems to remain when it comes to disabled women. Disabled women have an equal right for parenthood and family as have non-disabled women. This right should be protected by the state. The Finnish legislation does not limit the rights of disabled people for parenthood per se but, in practice, it is often more complicated. There are not enough mechanisms of support for disabled women to help them towards and in motherhood. Thus, the right for equal parenthood is often not realized. In addition, general attitudes often affect disabled women's possibility to adopt for instance. Due to her condition, the disabled woman is often considered less capable as a mother or an adopter.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- The Government should make a distinct investment in the system of personal assistants. Proper execution of this system would greatly improve the situation of disabled women in all areas of life.
- The principle of access should be taken into consideration in all policy decisions and national action plans. The Finnish government should more openly acknowledge the importance of this principle and apply it to all its measures.
- The situation of disabled women suffering from violence must be recognized and preventive action must be taken. Awareness of this discriminating situation must be increased.

Sexual Minorities

Sexual minorities are not clearly included in the Finnish equality work. The Finnish equality policy is still very hetero-normative, renewing the stereotypic view of sexes and sexuality. Equality work is based on assumption that human beings can be unequivocally divided into women and men. It does not recognize the flexibility and diversity in forms of sexuality but sees female sexuality as a standard. Some amendments have been included in the Act on Equality when the issues of sexual minorities have been put under the authority of the Equality Ombudsman and when the sex of a transsexual person has been recognized. The existence of non-hetero women

and their special needs as women, however, are still mainly invisible to the official equality work. There is no national authority in Finland in charge of coordinating equality work linked to issues of sexual minorities. This is a weakness of Finnish strategy for equality. There is also a problem with budgeting as there are not enough resources targeted directly to the issues of sexual minorities. Thus, it would be of vital importance to acknowledge the diversity of possible forms of sexuality in the equality work done by the Government and by other actors. This is important, too, in order to reduce general stereotyping in the society. There are still strong stereotypes about expressing one's sex and sexuality in the Finnish society. Schools, the media and the labour market are strongly involved in renewing these stereotypes.

As yet, Finland has not solved the issue of families with same sex parents. At the moment, adoption within the family is not possible. Nor is it possible for a partner, of the same sex as the biological parent of a child, to become a juridical parent. This is a major problem especially in lesbian relationships. All women regardless of their sexuality should be entitled to parenthood. Thus, there is much more to be done in the adoption rights and family rights in general in respect of women living in partnerships with women.

Like all women's minorities, women belonging to sexual minorities also face double discrimination. This is clear in the labour market as well. They face the same discrimination as all women do, such as lower wages and fixed-term employment. However, they also face discrimination based on their sexuality. More should be done in order that women belonging to sexual minorities should be equally treated in the labour market. Double discrimination can be seen in use of services, too. In fact, women belonging to sexual minorities are in a less advantaged position when using services than, for example, immigrant women. Their specific needs are not taken into consideration and they often face strong prejudices if and when their sexual orientation is brought up during the use of service.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- The Finnish government should establish and execute a comprehensive policy dealing with the issues of women belonging to sexual minorities.
- It should be of central concern that a specific authority would be appointed to take care of equality matters of sexual minorities specifically.
- The promotion of non-discrimination in the matters of sexual minorities and the surveillance of equality should be enacted in legislation. The Finnish government should also take action in order to plan a research and development strategy that would chart and develop the situation of sexual minorities in Finland.
- Adoption rights should be reformed so that they would better protect the rights of same sex parents. Adoption within the family should be made possible.
- Industrial Safety Districts should train their personnel to be more aware of the rights and affronts that women belonging to sexual minorities have and might

face. They should also inform different professions and workplaces of support available in situations of discrimination.

Article 5 – Violence against Women

It can be said that violence against women is the most severe violation of human rights in Finland. It is also a problem that has not been sufficiently addressed in the Government's policies. A follow-up study (Naisiin kohdistunut väkivalta 2005), conducted in 2005, revealed that violence against women (VAW) had not decreased during the last seven years (the previous research 'Usko, toivo, hakkaus' was completed in 1998). Also, violence committed by a person outside one's own family had actually increased. Previously, the CEDAW committee has pressed the Finnish Government to take action in order to come up with a national action programme against VAW. It has strongly emphasized the state's obligation to take action against all kinds of violence against women by enacting laws and protecting the victims. It is also the state's responsibility to provide supporting services for victims and offenders alike.

However, there has been no major government initiative for a comprehensive programme. There has only been willingness to initiate small-scale programmes in different ministries, with funding insufficient from the beginning. The work is fragmented and has not been effectively coordinated. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health introduced a small-scale programme for the years 2004-2007 but this programme, too, was insufficiently financed. Thus, taking into consideration the large scale of the problem of domestic and intimate partner violence in Finland, it seems that the measures taken by the Finnish Government to improve the situation are quite moderate. There is not a real national plan to combat VAV as the governmental plan does not fulfill the requirements of an official plan. Also, there has been no real inclination to speak about violence with a gender perspective. Basically, the work done by the Government to prevent violence against women has been based on separate projects. This has, naturally, led to insufficient continuity. Also, resources directed to these projects have been too small. Overall, it has mainly been the Finnish NGOs that have been responsible for the work against domestic violence, intimate partner violence and for the care and support of their victims. This work is done in form of projects and unfortunately the NGOs seldom receive enough funding for these projects. Often, the fundamental problem of funding has even made organizations compete against each other. Naturally, this does not help the situation of coordinated combat against VAW. In conclusion, the work done against domestic violence constantly suffers from lack of resources and is not effectively coordinated by any Government body. Since the year 2002, there has been no Government institution working with the issue.

In recent reforms of legislation, some amendments have been made. Sexual harassment has been defined as a form of discrimination. One fifth of the women in Finland have experienced sexual harassment. This sexual harassment includes suggestive jokes, inappropriate comments, physical approaches and proposals of sex. There has also been an extension of the Restraining Order, known as The Act on the Inside-the-family Restraining Order. Both of these reforms were made in 2005 and they have been a step to the better. Especially the Inside-the-family Restraining Order has been considered efficient in the combat against violence against women.

There are many issues, however, that have not received enough attention or have even deteriorated. One of the issues, considered the most severe by Finnish organizations, is the new law on the conciliation procedure that came into operation in 2006. This law is unusual in Europe. In most European countries, conciliation is prohibited in cases of domestic violence and of violence in a partner relationship. There can be no equal negotiation between two parties of a relationship where the other party is using physical violence against the other one. There can be no equal conciliation if the starting point is so unequal. Thus, conciliation in cases of domestic and intimate partner violence should be proscribed by law. In addition, according to the Finnish criminal code, all lenient assaults are considered to be so called complainant offences. As cases of domestic violence are often considered cases of lenient assaults, they end up as complainant offences. In these cases it is completely up to the woman whether she wants to press charges or not. Support services for victims of domestic violence and violence in a partner relationship seem quite inadequate in Finland. There are, for instance, no feminist refuges in Finland

Sexual violence

The Finnish police estimates that, each year, between 6 000 to 10 000 women become victims of rape (Friidu, 2004). Over the past decade on average 532 cases of rape were reported annually to the police. A total of 5408 rapes or attempted rapes were notified to the police during the period from 1997 to 2006. Approximately 15 percent of the rape cases recorded by police in 1997-2005 have lead to charges with rape as the main criminal offence². In 88% of the cases the reason for non-prosecution in rape crimes was “no evidence”.(Crime Trends Yearbook 2006).

The statistical data shows that the legal reform³ has increased the number of rapes reported to the police, and that they have been solved to a higher degree than before. Rapes have been reported to the public prosecutor in greater number than before the reform. Also prosecutors have brought more charges for rape or attempted rape than during previous years and more offenders have been sentenced. But the study also revealed that many problems prevail in connection to police investigation, prosecution and court handling. For example the police have more often than before labelled rapes as non-crimes, the prosecutors have waived charges due to lack of evidence, and there has been increase in decisions to dismiss a charge in trials. In view of this, closer attention should be paid to the consideration of charges and matters pertaining to the legal proceedings.

Services targeted to victims of sexual violence are almost non-existent. This is a clear sign of the fact that sexual violence is not considered a primary issue in Finland. However, there is no network of support services for victims of rape. Also, definitions of sexual abuse are highly gender-neutral in Finland.

² Honkatukia & Kainulainen (2007): Crime Trends in Finland 2006 (77-84). Publication available in internet: <http://www.optula.om.fi/40495.htm>

³ The chapter on sexual crimes in the Finnish Penal Code was completely reformed in 1998, and came into force 1999. The old regulation on rape was designed to protect general sexual morality. An important goal of the reform was to attain neutrality in relation to different expressions of sexuality and to ensure the right to sexual self-determination of each person. In the 1998 reform sex-neutral language was used to underline the law's neutrality.

More attention should also be paid to the situation of sexual minorities. In general, domestic violence in gay relationships is very similar to that in hetero relationships. However, intimate partner violence that takes place between partners of same sex is seldom considered as severe as violence that is committed by a man. It is still more of a taboo and it is more difficult for the victims of violence in these situations to get professional help. Women belonging to sexual minorities can also be victims of crime of hate. This means that they become victims of a crime, abuse or violence due to their belonging to a certain group. There is no concept of crime of hate in the Finnish criminal code. In addition, it would be necessary to pay extra attention to the situation of immigrant and disabled women. It is undeniable that they have special needs and special difficulties in getting help in case of violence. Cultural and physical causes of violence should be targeted.

It seems, somehow, that it is difficult for Finnish authorities to see Finnish women in the role of a victim. It is, however, essential for the improvement of the situation that this fact is acknowledged as well as the fact that that violence against women forms the most severe violation of human rights in Finland. More political will is needed in order to create and finally implement a national action plan against violence against women. Political will is also needed in order to get sufficient resources for this work.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- There should be a comprehensive, interdisciplinary national action programme to combat violence against women. It would also be of vital importance to establish a permanent expert body that would coordinate the implementation of the programme. The action plan should include measures that improve the human rights of the victims of sexual violence.
- More resources should be directed to work against domestic violence. Municipalities, too, need more resources in order that they could better prevent violence against women. At the moment, the municipalities do not receive enough financial or mental support from the Government in respect of their preventive work.
- The law on the conciliation procedure should be reconsidered. In its current form it only makes it harder to work against domestic violence. In general, it would be important that more cases of domestic violence would be tried in court and the offenders would be brought to account. This requires more training, guidance and directions for the authorities, the police and the prosecuting authorities. It also requires more resources.
- It would also be very important to target the violent men during the elimination process of domestic violence. By developing better means to help violent men it is possible to reduce the amount of domestic violence.
- More attention should be paid to the violence faced by women in minority groups.
- Making sexual harassment a form of discrimination has been a step to the right direction, but there are still problems in this as well. Sexual harassment is only

considered a crime in health and safety legislation (tyosuojelulaki). Thus, it does not apply in the criminal code. It would be important to get it included in the criminal code as well.

- Better services should be created and enforced for supporting and protecting the victims of domestic violence. Laws are not enough to improve the situation but a network of sufficient services must be provided and funded by the Government. These services should be available regardless of the place of one's residence.
- Finally, an effort should be made to change the general attitudinal climate in Finland. As domestic violence is often a result of the traditional gender conceptions in the society, domestic violence can be regarded as one of the visible forms of power structures in the society. It is important that Government takes action to break down these traditional structures.

Article 6 – Trafficking in Women and Prostitution

Along with violence against women, human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls form one of the most urgent human rights issues in Finland at the moment. It is also clear that the geographical location of Finland will not help to bring down the level of prostitution and trafficking in women in the future. The deepest gap in living standards in Europe is the border between Finland on one side and Russia and the Baltic countries on the other side. This gap forms a fertile ground for the increase of human trafficking and prostitution and should only increase the obligation of the Finnish Government to take real measures against them.

Although, in the recent years, prostitution and trafficking in women have been widely discussed in the Finnish media, prostitution, for instance, has not been seen as a form of violence targeted against women. Neither has it been considered a severe violation of human rights. Prostitution has not been considered an issue of major importance and this can be seen in the administration of the Government. There is no official post in the state administration that would take the responsibility for issues of prostitution. This is problematic as Finland is a participant in international agreements that demand protection for victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Finland's deficiencies in issues of prostitution and trafficking in women, however, do not end here. In addition, the national action programme designed for combating trafficking in women is poorly resourced. Due to this lack of resources, recognition of victims of trafficking for instance is difficult for Finnish authorities. This is a grave deficiency in the work against trafficking in women. In 2006, the central ministries made a strategy plan for a system of assistance for the victims of human trafficking and granted 1,4 million euros to build up the system. The plan did not advance, however, and the resources directed to this strategy were deleted from the budget draft of 2007. It is clear that, without specific and sufficient budgeting, Finland can not fulfill its commitment to combat human trafficking and help its victims.

The issue of prostitution is complicated, too. Firstly, there is not enough official and objective information of the issue. There have been no major studies conducted on this area. The discussion about prostitution in Finland has been of very limited scope as there has been not enough information. It is unfortunate, from the perspective of the

Finnish NGOs, that a small group of people involved in voluntary prostitution work (SALLI ry - United Sex Professionals of Finland) has managed, to a great extent, to influence the discussion. Their point of view has risen to a dominant position in the discussion. These people engaging in prostitution voluntarily do not represent the majority of people engaged in prostitution in Finland. As in any other country, the majority of prostitution in Finland is strongly connected with organized crime and human trafficking. In the overall picture, persons pursuing prostitution independently are only in a marginal position. Thus, it is unfortunate that a small and marginal group is dominating the discussion about prostitution. This can be seen, especially, in a Bill whose purpose was to criminalize the act of buying sexual services. This Bill was raised in 2005 but was not passed by the Parliament due to the heavy lobbying by SALLI ry. They strongly criticized the Bill by appealing to the right to have prostitution as a profession. Thus, instead of criminalizing all buying of sexual services, the Parliament accepted a Bill that criminalized only buying of sex from victims of human trafficking and procurement. This kind of limited prohibition of buying of prostitution services does not conform to the requirements of the CEDAW convention. It is also the Finnish organizations' view that it is truly unjustified to emphasize a small minority's point of view in public discussion and legislation. The association of people carrying on prostitution voluntarily has very few members compared to all the girls and women who are forced to prostitution involuntarily. Also, the law that finally criminalized the buying of sexual services from victims of human trafficking and procurement is very difficult to put into action. It is very difficult to provide evidence in court cases, and the police and the social workers do not have enough resources to track down and investigate the cases. One of Finland's deficiencies, also, is the fact that there are no so-called exit programmes for people wanting to get out of the prostitution. These programmes exist in almost all other European countries.

In addition, there is an alarming attitude towards prostitution present in the Finnish society. According to Tasa-arvobarometri 2004, the general attitudes of ordinary people towards prostitution are surprisingly positive. Taking into consideration the severe link that prostitution has with organized crime, it is unsettling that one third of women and half of the men consider prostitution acceptable. If the mainstream society holds on to these opinions, sex trade, prostitution and pornography might begin to become normalized in the society. They will become so familiar to ordinary people that they do not seem worth resisting. This will, in time, redefine forms of sexuality and the understanding of gender and relations between couples. (Politics of Gender, 2006.)

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- Firstly, the national action plan for strategy against trafficking in women must be properly funded. Otherwise, there will be no efficient work either by the Government or by the authorities to combat trafficking.
 - The Government should establish an office to deal with the issues of human trafficking. A post of a special rapporteur should be founded. In other countries, this has been a successful method in the fight against human trafficking and trafficking in women.
- The state budget should include funds for a system of assistance for the victims. This system should be made more efficient and less complex. It should be

critically assessed. Also, more resources should be directed to training different authorities to make it easier for them to recognize the victims of human trafficking and to act consequently.

- Extensive and objective studies of the situation of human trafficking and prostitution in Finland should be conducted. Only in this way it is possible to acquire enough information on which to base decisions. It would be important that the debate about prostitution and human trafficking would continue with broader perspectives based on new information.
- The Finnish NGOs are working actively in order to help the victims of human trafficking and prostitution. The Government should acknowledge this work as well as the importance of the experiences and information of the organizations. At the moment, organizations are building networks in order to organize their work better. This development should be backed up by the Government.
- It would be important to increase the level of international cooperation in order to secure safe returns of victims of trafficking to their own countries after being trafficked.

Article 7 - Inequalities in Political and Public Life

There still remain inequalities in the level of political and public participation between women and men in Finland. The issue of professional promotion is still problematic for women. Traditionally, judicial administration has appointed women to significant international posts. However, this development has not spread to other fields of administration. Women also face difficulties in promotion in a career in the private sector. It is very difficult for a highly educated woman to get to a top position. Half of the people acquiring a PhD degree, for example, are women but they still face serious problems in their careers after the public defense of their doctoral thesis. Thus, it must be concluded that, although the issue of women acquiring or not acquiring top posts in the public and the private sector has been long discussed from the perspective of gender equality, no real improvement has taken place. The proportion of women in top positions in both sectors is still comparatively small.

Involvement in different associations and organizations is a typically Finnish way of civic participation. Women have always been active in this field. The oldest women's association, for example, was founded in 1855. A diverse and extensive field of women's organizations is also typical for Finland. State and society as a whole should support these organizations equally compared to other organizations. It would also be important to acknowledge the knowledge the women's organizations have of women's issues. Representatives of women's organizations should be used more as consulting parties and they should be included in international delegations of different administrative branches.

Article 10 – Equality Planning in Educational Establishments and Specific Measures in the Area of General Education

Education is a way to establish and re-establish structures of society. Thus, it would be of vital importance to avoid presumptions of stereotypic gender roles in education and promote equality between women and men from day care and early childhood education all the way to university education. There are deficiencies in this in Finland. There is no gender perspective included in the early childhood education and thus it is strongly influencing the current gender stereotypes. Also, Finnish educational curriculum and teaching materials are not in consensus with the equality work promoted by the Finnish Government.

Officially, the general education in Finland has gender neutrality as its guideline. Based on this principle, gender is not brought up in education, teacher training or learning materials. However, this so-called neutrality is, in practice, a form of gender blindness. It forms the basis of stereotypic attitudes and boosts existing role differentiation between women and men. This gender blindness is most obvious in learning materials. There is no official body that would scan the teaching materials available in the market in order to detect discriminating practices. It is worth pointing out that Morocco has established an institution that examines all teaching materials from a gender perspective. In addition, the gender blindness that controls the Finnish educational system does not provide teachers with any tools or information for solving situations of discrimination based on gender. Thus, it is essential to mainstream a gender perspective in all educational establishments and the national curriculum in Finland.

Although Finland is part of the Beijing Platform of Action, it has not followed the commitment to equalize its educational establishments, educational methods and the information given in schoolbooks. Going against the Beijing Platform of Action, Finland has also ignored the requirement to promote gender sensitivity in teacher training. This is a clear violation of the Beijing Platform of Action. As there is no equality education in schools, teachers and professors do not receive any training for taking gender into consideration. Discussion about equality is practically absent, and the educational system is only reinforcing the stereotypic conceptions of women and men and their roles in the society. In schools, clear attitudinal problems can be seen in the general atmosphere. Frequently, a better-than-average school performance is considered a norm for girls. Their good results are often not even worth mentioning while boys performing well receive extra attention. The case is the same with underachievers as here it is the boys who receive the attention. Not enough attention is paid to underachieving girls at school. (Politics of Gender, 2006.) Also, it is common that one sex, usually boys and men, gets more attention in conversations, and their coursework might be marked in a more positive way (Tasa-arvobarometri 2004).

Bullying in schools is often sexual or at least gender-based. It is often repetitive and raises the question of the difference between playful banter and offensive teasing. (Politics of Gender, 2006.) If there are not enough measures or will to stop this kind of teasing at school, young people start taking it as a part of everyday life and an acceptable form of acting. Thus, teachers must be fully trained to stop gender-based teasing at school.

One reason for all these deficiencies is that the Act on Equality and its amendment in 2005 do not cover basic educational establishments. In the opinion of the Ministry of Education, teasing, for example, in primary schools should not exactly be categorized as gender-based (Politics of Gender, 2006). However, this inability to see and to

acknowledge the gender segregation already in primary schools is the basis of one of Finland's deficiencies in the Act on Equality.

Sexual minorities have raised the point that the Finnish educational system is highly stereotyped in dealing with different forms of sexuality. This stereotyped system should be questioned and resources should be directed to dismantling these stereotypes.

All in all, Finnish educational institutions would need reforms from early childhood education to vocational training and university education. Promotion of equality must be included in the everyday life of schools and educational institutions and equal opportunities between girls and boys should be firmly established.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- A reform of the gender-segregated educational system must be seen as of high priority and a principle of gender neutrality should be questioned.
- The Ministry of Education should take action in order to support and promote the production of new and more equal learning materials. These materials must acknowledge the gender-segregated nature of education and try to lessen its stereotyped categorizations. Materials now used in schools often enforce stereotypic images of womanhood and manhood. Instead, they should present a view of the woman as an equal and active agent in society. Materials should also give a more realistic and equal picture of different minority groups.
- It is essential to include the gender perspective in teacher training. At the moment, there are no gender issues included in the degree requirements of nursery school teachers or class teachers. Youth workers, too, should be trained to be more gender sensitive. It is important to train teachers and youth workers alike on specific forms of discrimination based on gender. These include verbal molesting, sexual harassment, domestic and sexual violence etc.
- There have been programmes in which girls have been encouraged to head for male branches in the labour market. More effort should be invested in encouraging boys to head for female branches and so to decrease the segregated nature of education and labour market later on.
- Also, adequate and different forms of media education should get some attention in the Finnish educational establishments. Media education should be provided for both girls and boys. Schools should work as a forum where children and young people are educated about the stereotyping nature of media and advertising today.

Article 11 – Unequal Opportunities between Men and Women on the Labour Market

Deep inequalities between women and men still remain in the Finnish labour market. The main problem areas have remained the same since the first shadow report of Finnish NGOs (in 2000). These are the differences of pay based on sex, the gender-

based segregation of the labour market and the fixed-term employment concentrating on women.

Finnish women doing the same jobs as men still receive lower salaries. Studies have shown that women receive around 80% of the men's salaries for jobs of equal value. The Government has introduced a programme for Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value (in 2006) to correct this problem. The aim of this programme is to reduce the difference of the salaries between men and women by 5% by the year 2015. The programme has proved to be problematic, however, and, as yet, no real results have been seen. The programme has been mainly used for finding good proposals and efficient agreements. The actual practice of negotiations in the labour market has been very little affected. It has not succeeded in bringing about actual wage increases or any amendments in the collective bargaining contracts of labour market organizations. It seems that the current labour market negotiation system does not provide enough actual possibilities to correct the differences in salaries.

Strong gender-segregation is characteristic of the Finnish labour market, clearly divided into male branches and female branches where especially the men's mobility towards female branches is very small. The field of technology, for example, is highly dominated by men. It can be said that segregation in Finnish labour market comes about in two ways. Firstly, as mentioned before, jobs have been segregated into men's jobs and women's jobs. Secondly, women more often face great difficulties in getting promoted in their careers even if they are higher educated than men. This can be seen especially in professions requiring a high level of education. In general, work done by women is not as respected as work done by men. Professions of female branches often have wages below the average and no real improvement in this will take place unless the salaries of these professions are raised at every term of the incomes policy negotiation process. This seems highly improbable, and that means that segregation will remain.

Fixed-term employment among women is also a very "Finnish" problem. Compared with other European countries, Finland has a very high level of fixed-term employment among the women of childbearing age in the public sector. Fixed-term employment has also increased in the municipal sector. Thus, the problem concentrates on the public sector and on women in their most fertile age. It also seems to be a problem of highly educated women. Fixed-term employment is clearly connected with discrimination based on pregnancy. In the current system, it is the woman's employer who pays most of the costs of parental leave and parent's allowances caused by pregnancy and childcare. This is an important factor in the gender based discrimination on the labour market and thus requires a closer look.

The current system of parental leave in Finland is very complicated. The total of all parental leave is divided into many short periods, and only a small share of the total is earmarked exclusively to men. In practice, 95% of parental leave is taken by women and the division of childcare and housework in families has remained unequal. This is one of the reasons why women's position in the labour market is not equal to that of men. The gender ideology i.e. attitudes towards fathers' take-up of leave, and conceptions of separate parental responsibilities is quite significant for the actualisation of parental leave rights in families.

Because the parental leave is almost entirely used by women/mothers, the costs end up being paid solely by the women's employers who receive no compensation for the expense. This, naturally, makes it a financial risk for an employer to hire a woman, and they avoid employing women in permanent positions. At the beginning of 2007, a new law came into operation, aiming to improve the position of women in the labour market and also to encourage fathers to use more of the parental leave. The law alone, however, was not sufficient as no amendments have been made in the system of compensating for the expenses.

Finnish NGO's recommend so called 6+6+6 model to be adopted as the new model for sharing parental leave between mother and father. The mother-, father- and parental leave system is being reformed to a new parental leave system, that is going to be longer than the old one. The leave consist of three 6 months periods from which one is for the mother, one is for the father and one can be shared between the parents. This reform gives men the chance to have a longer parental leave but women can also choose to have their mother leave to be of the same length as previously. Experience in Finland and other Nordic countries shows that fathers are more likely to use the leave that is directly designated to them. The reform encourages men to take longer parental leaves. The six month period where the father takes independently care of his child builds stronger father-child relationship and gives the child two primary caretakers. In a demanding and stressful working life, also many fathers of young children desire a break from work.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- More political will must be shown in order that concrete actions will be taken to narrow the gap between women's and men's salaries.
- It would be possible to promote salary equality by making public the information on women's and men's salaries.
- It would be highly important to soften the gender segregation of the labour market. This must be linked to reforms at educational establishments. Educational institutions promoting gender equality as well as dismantling stereotypes of gender roles and branches segregated by gender play an important role on the way to structural change of the labour market.
- More parental leave should be allocated solely to men/fathers. This would probably improve the position of women of childbearing age in the labour market as the cost of children would be more equally divided by employers of women and men.
- Also, the state should amend the system of compensation of the costs that are now entirely the employer's responsibility. The state should support employers in the expenses to them from pregnancies and childcare of their employees. This would also lessen the possibility that women end up in fixed-term employment only because of the costs of pregnancy for the employers.

Gender Budgeting

Unequal structures and practices in society do not change on their own accord. Changing them and promoting equality requires measures by the state and this requires sufficient budgeting and resources. According to the comments of the Finnish NGOs, it has become clear that, in Finland, not enough resources have been targeted directly to equality work. This problem affects all forms of equality work and is apparent in the implementation of the articles discussed above. It is also a trend that continues with the topics to be discussed later.

The issue of resources can be viewed from three different perspectives. Firstly, the state should ascertain that its work for equality is receiving enough resources. Secondly, the state should direct enough funds to women's associations and organizations working with issues of equality. Thirdly, the state should also monitor the general distribution of resources in the society and try to promote equality in this distribution.

The problem of gender budgeting is especially difficult in the municipalities. In the Finnish system of providing services, it is the municipalities that provide basic services for their citizens. Thus, special attention should be paid to gender budgeting in municipalities in order that equality in basic services can be guaranteed.

Finnish NGOs demand that the Government secure adequate resources for all kinds of equality work and action to promote equality. In addition, the NGOs have brought up two extra issues concerning sufficient funding. They emphasize the fact that it would be important to secure funding for the international co-operation of women's organizations. Also, they stress that the budgeting of the Council for Gender Equality has been reduced by one third during the last eight years. For the NGOs, the Council for Gender Equality is an important forum for influencing the discussion and decisions made in equality issues. Thus, a shortage in its budgeting also affects the scope for action of the organizations.

Other Issues Requiring Special Attention

Girls

One can not separate the situation of the women from that of the girls and the same human rights apply to both women and girls. However, girls also need special attention in the enforcement of their rights. They do have special needs that differ from those of the women. Although the situation of girls in Finland is very good in comparison with many places in the world, there are still deficiencies in securing opportunities for the girls to grow up equal to boys.

In Finland, girls suffer from depression more than boys. 18% of girls in secondary schools and 14% of high school girls are depressed. However, it is often harder to detect depression with girls as they more often withdraw themselves. Boys' depression frequently shows in external symptoms. This complicates the girls' access to therapy

and often they do not get any treatment at all⁴. It is a sad fact that suicides by young women have increased in recent years. Finland is now second in the world when it comes to statistics on young women's suicides⁵. In addition to depression, eating disorders are becoming more common among girls. The media has an impact on this as it concentrates on the outer appearance and idealizes slimness.

The Finnish Government acknowledges that there has been an increase in the use of alcohol and drugs by girls who are adopting a masculine culture using alcohol and drugs. In the last 20 years, the number of girls drinking in order to get heavily drunk has considerably increased. No special attention, however, has been paid to the special needs of girls when it comes to alcohol and drug use nor has the Government targeted special services to girls with substance abuse. Girls and women do have different needs concerning prevention of substance abuse than men. However, there are no special services or measures targeted at girls to support them in giving up the abuse of alcohol.

Girls face a lot of sexual harassment but it is often considered to be normal teasing among teenagers. This harassment takes place especially in school environments. 41% of girls under fifteen have experienced sexual harassment of some sort (Friidu, 2004). However, teachers or other adults are rarely stepping in to the situations to stop the harassment.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- More attention should be paid especially to girls and their situation in the Finnish society. One of the most urgent issues is the mental wellbeing of girls, and the Government should do all it can to reduce the number of girls suffering from depression, eating disorders and other mental problems. The suicide rate of young women, as of all young people, must be brought down.
- It would be important to reduce the number of alcohol and drug abusers among girls. This could be done by designing support services directed exclusively to girls and their special needs.

Article 5 – Stereotyping in Media and Advertisement

Concern has been expressed about the images of women portrayed in the Finnish media and advertising business. It has become clear that, in the last few years, media and advertising have become more pornographic and focused on the outer appearance. The image of women transmitted by the media has narrowed. More and more often, women are seen as sexist objects in the media and the advertisements. Especially young girls and their image of themselves are affected by the media concentration on women as objects and on their appearance. The media is putting forward a very one-sided beauty ideal and emphasizing the importance of slimness. This beauty ideal might lead to a distorted perception of the body and to self-criticism among young girls. Thus, the media can be seen as one of the causes behind the increase of eating disorders among young women. In the opinion of Finnish NGOs, this is something against which the Government should take action. There have been no efficient measures by the

⁴ http://www.mll.fi/ajankohtaista/kannanotot_ja_lausunnot/?x41070=2134245

⁵ http://www2.lapsiasia.fi/toimintakertomus2006/lasten_hyvinvoinnin/itseurhat.html

Government to prohibit and/or reduce sexism in the media and the advertising business. The Act on Equality should cover discrimination in advertising. Advertisements can no more be regarded as "just pictures". They and other forms of media culture contain strong symbolism and they shape our understanding of what is worthwhile and worth identifying with. Thus, they strongly influence our idea of gender as well. (Politics of Gender, 2006.) It would also be essential to include equality education in the training of journalists.

Finnish organizations also think it necessary to have more discussion of pornography and its influence in sexual education. The influence of pornography on young people's idea of sexuality should be examined. According to a Nordic study, pornography is a well-known and actively debated phenomenon among Nordic and Finnish young people. (Youth, Gender and Pornography in the Nordic Countries 2006)⁶. More than 80% of Finnish people think that commercial means of communication are affecting children's and young people's ideas of sexuality to a degree considered too high. (Tasa-arvobarometri 2004). Finnish organizations are worried about the increasing pornographization of our society and the public sphere. The notion of public sphere refers to the media outlet in various genres and formats such as tabloids, television, commercials, the internet and the magazines and on the other hand our actual surroundings - streets, walls, public transport (buses, metro stations, etc.). More and more naked and sexualized female figures are being displayed in the public sphere to an extent that it has become impossible, even for small children, to avoid these images. This creates an atmosphere where women are seen as objects and encourages heavily stereotypical attitudes about gender roles and values.

Article 12 – Health, Drugs, Alcohol

As mentioned above, girls are using more alcohol and drugs than before. The same applies to women in general. However, their needs have not received any special attention in Finland's official, national alcohol policy and social work for intoxicant abusers. Finnish social work for intoxicant abuse is clearly dominated by men and manly needs. 75% of the people in institutional treatment are men. Services directed specifically to women are almost absent in both institutional and out-patient treatment. Based on this information, it can be said that women are facing discrimination in Finland also in issues of alcohol and drug use.

What should be done? Finnish NGOs' recommendations:

- Finnish government should take action to design methods and services directed clearly for the different needs of girls and women. Their special needs must be taken into consideration in the official alcohol policy of the state. A female perspective should also be more firmly included in the prevention of intoxicant abuse.

⁶ Unge, køn og pornografi i Norden – Slutrapport 2006
<http://www.norden.org/pub/velfaerd/barn/sk/ANP2006749.pdf>

- There should be more preventive, treatment and rehabilitating services designed exclusively for girls and women.
- All this requires more resources for research that studies the use of alcohol and drugs by girls and women.

General Equality Climate in Finland

A few words must be said about the general equality climate in Finland. Just as the question of sufficient resources, the general attitudinal climate, too, is affecting all areas of equality work. The elimination of gender-based discrimination requires considerable structural change in the society. These structures are difficult to reform but only by persistence can real equality be developed. The problem constantly facing equality work in Finland is the general climate of believing that equality has already been achieved in the Finnish society. There is also a strong belief that legislation and actions by authorities are already highly gender neutral. These are general misconceptions that need to be corrected. The Government should take the responsibility for this attitudinal work as well and thus facilitate the equality work that takes place in Finland.

Final Words

In conclusion, this parallel report has attempted to highlight the central problem areas in Finnish equality work. Although Finland is doing comparatively well in many areas of equality work, many problematic issues still remain. According to the view of Finnish women's associations and organizations, the Finnish Government should pay special attention to the legislative plan to reform or consolidate the Act on Equality between Women and Men with the Non-Discrimination Act. The organizations' view is that any changes like this in legislation would seriously impair the level of equality protection. The rights of women belonging to minority groups are of vital importance. It is important to acknowledge the double discrimination these women face based on their membership in a certain group and based on their gender. Better opportunities to improve one's life should be made possible for indigenous women like the Roma and the Sámi. Disabled women must be seen as women who are entitled to all the same rights as non-disabled women. The rights of women belonging to sexual minorities should also be more efficiently included in equality work. This work should not be hetero-normative as it is at the moment but flexible enough to acknowledge other forms of sexuality as well. All the Finnish NGOs highlight the importance of the Government in combating violence against women. As VAW is the most serious violation of human rights in Finland, much stronger measures must be taken by the Government to stop it. So far the Government has not shown enough political will to tackle this problem. Other issues needing urgent attention are human trafficking and prostitution. At the moment, there is no real plan for their prevention, and the Government is passing inadequate laws to combat them. This must change. One of the factors refurbishing the unequal structures in Finnish society is inequality in educational establishments. Teaching materials do not take gender perspectives into account and teachers are poorly trained to deal with gender issues. This inequality prevails in all educational establishments from day care centres to universities. Finland still has problems with inequality in the labour market, too. During the last 12 years, the problems of the labour market seem to have remained the same. Women still receive less money than men for work of the same

value. The Finnish labour market is highly segregated based on gender. And finally, women suffer from fixed-term employment clearly more than men. In general, more resources should be directed to all kinds of equality work thus securing gender budgeting.

In addition to these issues, measures should also be taken to combat inequality that girls are facing in many areas of life. Also, inequality in health services should be targeted, especially in services provided for support of alcohol and drug abusers. The media and the advertising business must be included in the Act on Equality between Women and Men so that discriminating forms of visual culture can be controlled and reduced. All these measures should also affect the general equality climate in Finland. It would be of vital importance to fight the idea that equality is already attained in Finland. Only that way can structural change in Finnish society take place and equality work really achieve its main goal.

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