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# Statement by the Finnish Human Rights Centre (NHRI)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

1. This oral statement is prepared by the Finnish Human Rights Centre/NHRI. Reference is made to our written submissions on 4 June 2021 and 3 September 2022.
2. In this statement I will touch upon violence against women, discrimination, hate speech and harassment, rights of elderly women and women with disabilities, employment, mental health, Sami, Roma and migrant women, intersex and transgender persons, and human rights structures.

## Violence against women

1. Violence against women and girls in general remains at a high level in Finland. Improvements are needed for **prevention** measures, in **recognising** the various forms of violence and in the amount and **geographic** **distribution** of victim services.
2. Where sexuality and sex are tabus or the woman’s life is more restricted, violence remains invisible from the view of authorities but also from **statistics**. Acts of violence in various forms relating to the alleged family **honour**, **female genital mutilation** or violence encountered by **women with disabilities or elderly women** are not discussed sufficiently, acts are often not recognised, complaints are not taken seriously and support services are not available.
3. An aspect that does not even get public discourse is **gender-based and intersecting discrimination and violence within cultural and religious minorities.** This includes women in closed communities and **Roma women**, whose position in the family and lack of discussion of tabu issues makes prevention measures and supporting victims difficult. No comprehensive studies exist, victims are mainly not talking and public services are not able to respond to the victims’ needs. More attention from authorities but also from those communities is needed as well as **facts-based information on rights, violations and remedies.**

## Discrimination, hate speech and harassment

1. **Discrimination, hate speech and harassment** based on ethnic background, skin colour, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability is common. **Roma women** in traditional clothing are subject to harassment and discrimination and the clothing often has a negative effect on their employment or training opportunities. Only about one third of Roma women have finished a degree above the basic education level and close to one fourth of Roma women are unemployed. **Sami women and girls** in traditional clothing are often subjected to unpleasant attention and violations of personal space. **Muslim** **women** wearing headscarf, equally, are discriminated against.
2. In general, women candidates, elected politicians, women in other public positions and in media encounter harassment and hate speech especially in social media and public discourse. Due to this **silencing effect**, women avoid talking about certain topics, specific discussions or fora. Many women refuse candidature in elections, participation in public debate or even discussions on social media to avoid being attacked with **anti-gender rhetoric** or hurtful remarks about personal issues or appearances. This applies also to girls in schools and online.

## Women with disabilities and elderly women

1. Women with disabilities are in general less able than other persons to **participate in the society**, including employment, elections, politics or activities. Many disabled women **face prejudice and inappropriate treatment** as parents and in family planning but also face **violence** and **poverty**, lack of availability of services and difficulties in obtaining related information.
2. In addition to age **discrimination in working life** older women run a higher than average risk of falling into **poverty**. Women's pensions are on average 20 % lower than men's pensions. The gap is still above the EU average. Although there is not much difference in the average employment rate, length of working careers or retirement of women and men, the difference in earnings is significant even by international standards (16%). The unequal sharing of family leave between women and men and particularly the long periods of supported home care as well as informal care work increase the **gap between earnings and pensions.**

## Mental Health

1. Pandemic brought attention to longstanding problems in equality and non-discrimination. At the same time, pandemic increased **mental health problems**. Anxiety, depression and loneliness increased, especially with girls. Access to mental health care, however, became even more backlogged, receptions were held remotely, and support group activities halted.
2. A part of the problem is also the lack of **psychotherapists** as demand is much higher than the supply. This is influenced heavily by the cost of the specialised education, which can be up to 60.000 euros. Clients also have to search an available psychotherapist on their own, which is challenging in many ways.

## Sami – indigenous population

1. The **reform on the Act on Sami Parliament** is still pending, the deadline on providing new draft legislation to the Parliament is Mid-November. The proposal is ready, but there is a lack of political unity to bring the proposal to the parliament. It might very well be that the reform is doomed to fail again, for the third time in a row. This will further highlight the human rights violations already acknowledged by the Human Rights Committee and many other monitoring bodies in general and in individual complaints. Finland thus is in continuous violation of its legal commitments and obligations towards the Sami people. A lot of before-mentioned **silencing** efforts and **harassment** is aimed at those advancing Sami rights in the North but also in daily politics and discourse.

The following is likely to go beyond the 5 minute limit.

## *Trans Act and Intersex children*

1. *The Act on Legal Recognition of the Gender of Transsexuals or the* ***Trans Act*** *is currently under reform. The draft was discussed by the parliament plenary last week, with unpleasant and disrespective tones. The draft does include the removal of the* ***infertility*** *requirement and bases the legal recognition on an explanation on gender rather than a medical statement, but it still contains a requirement for the person requesting gender recognition to be at least 18 years old. This excludes* ***trans children****, even though the draft states that this is not in line with the rights of the child.*
2. *With regard* ***intersex******children****, no national treatment practice exists. Treatments that aim at sex “normalising” are still practiced. Children are at risk of being subjected to* ***medically unnecessary surgeries*** *without their consent. Although the ministry has recently proposed research, education and guidance for health care professionals on intersex children, no legislative measures are initiated.*

## *Migrant women*

1. *One alarming development relates to* ***foreign nursing staff****, mainly women. According to Ministry experts, by 2030 at least 10 % of persons employed in social and health care sector have to be recruited from abroad. This has already started more than 10 years ago.*
2. *However,* ***regulations*** *are almost non-existing, recruitment takes place in many ways and even from countries where shortage of nursing staff exists. Currently, many women with specialised knowledge in a specific field of nursing end up in lower paid assisting jobs for long periods of times, despite additional education and training. This results in them losing their expertise but also leaves them with income levels that do not enable them, due general net income limits set by migration legislation, to bring their spouses or children with them, thus preventing them from enjoying family life. Better* ***regulation*** *and* ***coordination*** *over sectoral limits of administration is needed and more attention needs to be paid to the* ***income limits*** *in migration legislation.*

## *Human rights structures and resource*

1. *Due to the continuous evolvement and complexity of Finnish human rights structures, the Finnish Human Rights Centre conducted a study on the current state of these structures, focusing especially on how they function, the clarity and sufficiency of their competencies in law and their capacity and resilience. The study has been published in Finnish and Swedish in 2022 and an English translation is underway.*
2. *The study shows that there is a clear need for a more holistic approach to human rights structures. Balance should be sought especially between* ***general*** *and* ***specific human rights mandates****. When structures become too fragmented, resources and expertise are scattered for several different actors which risks weakening the clarity, coherence, and efficiency of the structures. Before considering new actors, the existing human rights structures should be strengthened.*

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