FINNISH DISABILITY FORUM/Mahlamäki, Vartio

17. Q: Please provide statistical information, disaggregated by age, sex, disability, ethnic or

national origin, on the employment situation in the State party. Please provide information

on the implementation of the Young Guarantee scheme and its impact in combating youth

unemployment, as well as on the progress made and remaining challenges faced in addressing

high long-term unemployment rate.

17. A: Further studies are required for closer analysis on how the employment situation of persons with disability developed during the reporting period. The available information is alarming: respondents to FDF questionnaire[[1]](#endnote-1), less than 20% of persons aged between 16 and 64 were employed in the ordinary open labor markets. The results are showing a significant disparity between employment rates of disabled persons of active age and the general population: less than 20 % vs. above 70 % respectively.

Considerable structural problems emerge, as well. For instance, many persons with intellectual disabilities are employed in de facto real jobs, they only receive a compensation of 0 – 12 euros per day, avg. 5 euros. Real access to open labor markets is possible; yet measures for effectively changing this remain insufficient. This leads to persons contributing their efforts to society, yet are facing poverty and inequality, in adulthood but also in retirement as no wage-based retirement funds have accumulated from their effort which resembles employment but is defined as a social welfare measure.

18. Q:Please explain the extent to which measures adopted have promoted opportunities for

productive and remunerated employment for persons with disabilities. Please also provide

information on measures adopted to provide reasonable accommodation.

The FDF questionnaire results give reason for concern. 16.5% of those who answered (N 237) noted that they had been discriminated in access to the labor market and recruitment situations. 14.6 % (N 210) had experienced

discrimination due to lack of reasonable accommodations and 15.4 % (N 221) had faced

discrimination in other ways. Furthermore around 70 % had noted that these questions were not

relevant for them, suggesting that many may have given up any hope of even being a part of

the open labor market. For instance, the regional authorities mandated to monitor employment discrimination matters (Aluehallintovirastot/Työsuojeluviranomaiset), received in 2016 only 7 complaints on the grounds of

discrimination on the ground of disability.

Disabled persons in Finland have quite poor access to the labor markets, suggesting that many

flaws in the societal structures and attitudes still exist. Eg Out of the 25 000 working aged persons with

intellectual disabilities, currently only around 500 – 600 are employed in the open labor markets.

Meanwhile more than 8000 persons with disabilities are daily taking part in working activities either in

institutions or in ordinary workplaces, but only receiving a compensation between 0 – 12 euros each day.

Inclusion Finland KVTL and the Finnish League for Human Rights estimates that around 3500

educated persons with intellectual disabilities could be employed to the open labor markets with the right

kind of assisting measures.

Also other structural and legislative problems exist on a societal level. While nearly everyone would like to

contribute more to the society by working as much as they, there are in-built pitfalls in the system. A person

may for instance earn up to 784,52 euros a month without the additional income affecting the right to

pension. The sum may also be higher as the limit is at most 40 % of the incomes prior to the disability

pension(työkyvyttömyyseläke). However, even a little increase in the working hours and salary may

cause whole pension put on hold. Hence, despite the individual’s preferences and prospects of professional

growth there are strong built-in-incentives in the system that keep persons outside the workforce and

marginalized in the society. Essentially these pitfalls have meant, that a person working too many hours

part-time may receive less income than a person working only little or not at all.

The current system has at least two major negative consequences. First of all, persons that have been

disabled at a young age will likely limit their contribution to 784,52 due to the economic needs an incentives.

Secondly this means that they are curtailed from professional growth and advancements in the career in an

unjustifiable way compared to others.

The Finnish disability organizations have been advocating a linear system where the pension would

gradually diminish, thus eliminating the current pitfall. Unfortunately, both political parties and the

social partners have not shown any interest to adapt these changes and embrace a prospective soft re-entry to the labor markets. In Finnish disability organizations views this structural problem should be regarded as an infringement on the individual’s right to both work and sufficient incomes.

25. Q: Please provide updated information on the reform of health and social services carried

out by the State party, and how such reform envisages to improve accessibility, affordability

and quality of health-care goods and services for disadvantaged and marginalized individuals

and groups, particularly Roma and Sámi indigenous peoples. Please explain which steps is

taking the State party to ensure that asylum-seekers and migrants, including irregular

migrants have access to all necessary health-care services.

A: Persons with disabilities can and should be regarded as a disadvantaged group. Service fees in many municipalities are too expensive for many, as shown in FDF questionnaire responses. Access to necessary healthcare and medicines was jeopardized for 29% among respondents. People were forced to make choices prioritizing basic needs, such as food, medicines or clothes for their children. Many prescribed medicines are subsidized by the state. However, the medicines subsidy has been reduced by introducing a yearly excess fee. While the excess fee is only 50 euros, this can cause economic distress for disadvantaged groups early in the year when the co-payment ceilings have not yet been reached: patients need to pay for medicines, care and travel. The co-payments can rise to one month worth of minimum pension until after the payment ceiling is reached.

 Also, the freezing of the index adjustments of pensions have further aggravated this economic distress and access to healthcare.

We would highlight some positive exceptions. For instance, the city of Helsinki provides healthcare-center services and even access to regular doctors’ appointments without any additional fees for the clients. This has lowered the threshold to care for many groups. Meanwhile, it has not led to any remarkable increased costs, as many critics had originally feared.

26. Q: Please report on the steps taken to overcome remaining challenges that prevent women

and girls from disadvantaged and marginalized groups to access sexual and reproductive

health facilities, services, goods and information. Please provide information on the measures

adopted to provide women and girls with disabilities support in the decision-making process

with regard to their right to sexual and reproductive health.

26. A: women with disabilities do not receive enough support or information re sexual health, starting a family. On this theme, awareness-raising is important to change attitudes and combat negative stereotypes, to ensure that women with disabilities receive information and support like other women.

Organizations working with disabled women have highlighted critical needs for improvement in women’s shelters. While these shelters claim to be accessible, there is no information available on to what degree the shelters are accessible. This can ultimately leave women with disabilities without the protection afforded by the shelters. Finnish Disability Forum would like to highlight that available information and knowledge of accessibility is a critical factor in making premises truly accessible. Currently, no record is kept on persons who are being turned away from the shelters due to the lack of access. This should be given closer attention.

27. Q: Please provide information on the measures adopted to ensure that children from

disadvantaged groups, particularly those belonging to minorities, child migrants, child

asylum seekers and refugee children have adequate access to preschool education. Please

provide information on the specific steps taken to reduce school dropout rates and attainment

gaps; to avoid de facto discrimination and segregation; and to combat bullying in schools of

children of immigrant background and Roma children. Please describe the measures adopted

to guarantee access to inclusive education for children with disabilities.

27. A: While Finland has internationally long promoted the principle of inclusive education, much remains to be done domestically. Disability rights organizations are continuously contacted by parents whose disabled children are facing challenges, obstacles or outright discrimination in accessing the ordinary pre- and primary schools close to their homes. Persons with physical impairments may be directed to groups with intellectually challenged peers, solely on the ground that they have a disability and a record of needing extra assistance. Furthermore, inclusion has all too often been used as an austerity policy; groups have been enlarged and special education diminished, with little or no additional resources given to the new larger class. There still exists a strong discrepancy with rights and services as written in law and their implementation in practice. E.g. a young student with impaired sight was formally granted assistance. Despite her need for assistance on all lessons, the assistance was only given to a fraction of her lessons. Remarkable structural flaws exist on practical and ethical level. For instance, the schools where future classroom teachers are trained receive their funding from the state directly. Due to the difference in funding, their policies have appeared to be much more discriminating even in instances where their premises would be the only accessible ones in the vicinity. Principally and ethically, this is problematic, as these are the very schools where all future teachers receive their training. This appears to be an insensible and discriminatory policy on the societal level. At the time of the writing several cases are pending by the Non-discrimination ombudsman.

Many families appear to be relatively happy with the inclusive education solutions up until the age of 16. However, after the basic education is completed, next level of education is often inaccessible and persons with disabilities – especially intellectual disabilities- are often guided towards old-fashioned solutions and professions, ultimately leading to an early marginalization both in education and later access to open labor markets.

1. In preparation for CRPD alternative report, Finnish Disability Forum together with NHRI organized a questionnaire in 2018 on the situation of the rights enshrined in CRPD for disabled people. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)