



March 29, 2021

Written submission by the Finnish National Human Rights Institution (Human Rights Centre) for the 11th Session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing

Social protection and social security

The Finnish NHRI/Human Rights Centre (HRC) wishes to thank the UN open-ended working group for the opportunity to take part and contribute to the discussion on the normative elements of social protection and social security. The protection and promotion of the rights of ageing (persons) is an important priority for the Finnish NHRI.

Affordability and accessibility of care

Let me first share some information on the legal framework in place in Finland. The section 19 of our Constitution guarantees the right to social security. It states that “everyone shall be guaranteed the right to basic subsistence in the event of unemployment, illness, and disability and during old age as well as at the birth of a child or the loss of a provider. The public authorities shall guarantee for everyone (...) adequate social, health and medical services and promote the health of the population.” These rights are further specified in social and health legislation.

Despite the comprehensive legislation, there are gaps in social protection and the right to social security is not always fully realized. Specific areas of concern in Finland are the affordability and availability of care, especially long-term care, for older persons.

The Government has taken steps to address the shortcomings by amendments made in the Act on Client Charges and the Act on Social and Health Services for

Older Persons.

However, the changes made do not apply to community-based services for older persons. According to a survey conducted by the Finnish HRC in 2021, approximately 10 % of persons over 70 years of age, who live at home and receive municipal services, do not get sufficient assistance. They report, though, having been offered more services during the covid-19 pandemic than before it. This seems to indicate that municipalities have made efforts to take care of older persons during the pandemic.

Participation of older persons

The Finnish legislation requires the municipalities to draw up a plan on measures to support the wellbeing, health, functional capacity and independent living of the older population as well as to organize and develop the services and informal care needed by older persons.

Municipalities must also establish a council for older people to ensure the participation of older population. The councils are included in the preparation of the abovementioned plan and its evaluation and to be provided the opportunity to influence the decision-making in the municipality.

According to a survey conducted by the Finnish HRC in 2020, nearly half of the municipal councils for older persons surveyed stated that they do not have sufficient possibilities to influence municipal planning and decision-making processes and thus promote the well-being of older persons in their municipalities. These findings confirm that there is still a long way to go to ensure effective participation of older persons in matters concerning their life. Too often older people are considered as objects rather than active rights-holders capable of participation and self-determination.