

STATEMENT

Helsinki 30th October 2020

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs / Officer of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Subject: (A/HRC/RES/44/7) – Human Rights and Climate Change

SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health is a Finnish umbrella organization of 200 social affairs and health NGO members and dozens of partner members. SOSTE works for the health and wellbeing of all people. With our members and partners, SOSTE is building the foundation for social wealth, health, opportunities of participation and a fair, responsible society. A socially bound, healthy and genuinely participatory society creates success. This idea forms the basis of our ideology: the wellbeing economy.

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SOSTE Suomen sosiaali ja terveys ry
SOSTE Finlands social och hälsa rf
SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health

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SUMMARY

- The risk of the adverse health effects of climate change is often higher among the older age groups.
- The social justice of the climate change mitigation is important for older people's participation and preventing energy poverty.
- Older women, older people with circulatory and respiratory diseases, mental disorders or nervous system disorders and older people living alone have an increased risk of suffering from prolonged heat waves.
- There are limitations in policies, practices and monitoring tools that address the nexus between climate change and the rights of the older persons.
- The development and execution of the Climate Change Adaptation Plans of the different sectors is crucial for improving the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of the older persons.

1. Please describe the impacts of the adverse health effects on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of older persons. Where possible, please share specific examples and stories.

The risk of the adverse health effects of climate change is often higher among the older age groups. Older age increases the risk, for instance, waterborne diseases which have been estimated to increase due to climate change in Finland. Prolonged heat waves increase mortality especially among the people over 75 years of age. Older people with limited physical or mental functioning are less likely to be able to escape the heat compared with people without functional limitations. The heating of the buildings is well taken care of in Finland, but the cooling systems are not. The rescue services have practices of evacuating people from frost during power outages, but there are no similar practices for heat waves.

In addition to heat waves, other increased extreme weather conditions can also have adverse effects especially for the older people living in the countryside. Storms that cause power outages can cause difficulties, for instance, for people who have medicines that should be kept in a refrigerator. Extreme weather conditions can also prevent older people from leaving their homes and exercising and thus decrease their functional ability and independence.

The social justice of the climate change mitigation is important for older people's participation and preventing energy poverty among them. Many of the older people living in the countryside are often dependent on vehicles that run by fossil fuels and fossil-based heating. This may lead to the situation where they could feel excluded from the climate discussion and efforts, because they cannot live in a climate-friendly way in terms of housing and transport. In addition, retired people living in old houses with oil heating have been recognised to be at risk of suffering from energy poverty in Finland.

2. Please describe any specific policy, legislation, practice or strategy that addresses the nexus between climate change and the rights of older persons. In particular, please share any information related to policies that ensure the participation of older persons;

as well as supporting the independence and autonomy of older persons. Please note and identify any relevant mechanism for ensuring their means of implementation.

The National Climate Change Adaptation Plan <https://mmm.fi/en/nature-and-climate/climate-change-adaptation> recognises that the magnitude of the adverse impacts of climate change should also be considered from the perspective of regions and population groups including older people.

3. **Please share a summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected older persons, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of multiple grounds, including disability, gender, race, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status) -including in older age cohorts.**

A study conducted in Finland in 2014 has found that in the 2000 s, hot weather has increased mortality by up to 21% on average. The heat cycle has been estimated to be a greater risk to women than to men. The risk of mortality is high especially in people with circulatory and respiratory diseases, mental disorders or nervous system disorders. Living alone can also increase the health risk.

<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/116296>

<https://thl.fi/fi/web/ymparistoterveys/ilmasto-ja-saa/helle>

4. **Please describe any mechanism and tools that are in place to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of older persons**

We are not aware of comprehensive tools that monitor the impact of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of the older persons. This theme is, however, relevant for the group that follows the progress the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan <https://mmm.fi/en/monitoring-group-on-climate-change-adaptation> The researchers of Environmental Health Unit at National Institution of Health and Welfare monitor the adverse health effects of climate change among older people and other age groups. <https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/about-us/organisation/departments-and-units/health-security/environmental-health>

5. **Please identify and share examples of good practices and challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of older persons in the context of the adverse effects of climate change, including any age-appropriate or sensitive support services that are provided**

National Institute of Health and Welfare provides guidelines for preventing the adverse health effects of prolonged heat waves in homes and institutions. <https://thl.fi/fi/-/viime-kesan-helleaalto-lisasi-ikaantyneiden-kuolleisuutta-helteisiin-on-hyva-varautua-ajoissa>

One concrete and somewhat promising social justice measure that could decrease retired people's risk for energy poverty, is a public support for switching oil heating to ground heat, air-to-water-heat-pump or district heating.

6. **Please include examples and good practices that highlight international and multilateral cooperation and approaches that are implemented in close consultations with and with the active involvement of older persons, including through their representative organisations**

We have no knowledge of these kind of examples.

7. **Please provide any additional information you believe would be useful to support climate action that promotes the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of older persons.**

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and National Institute of Health are preparing the Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the social affairs and health sector in Finland. The adaptation plan will likely improve the systematic prevention of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights of the older persons.