

## Response by the Government of Finland to the questionnaire by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing

12 July 2022

The Government of Finland thanks Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing for his work and presents the following replies to the questionnaire sent by the Special Rapporteur on 5 May 2022 for the preparation for thematic report to the 52th session of the Human Rights Council.

### *Impact of climate change on the right to adequate housing*

#### *In real life*

1. In your country, what have been the main effects of the climate crisis, on the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing? Please specify whether there have been any climate-induced impacts on the security of tenure, availability, affordability, accessibility, habitability, location and cultural adequacy of housing, including climate crisis related displacement.<sup>1</sup>

#### **RESPONSE:**

- According to the Constitution of Finland, the public authorities shall promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing.
- The legal system, planning and decision-making systems related to land use and construction guarantee ownership of land and real estate and an adequate standard of living in residential buildings.
- Measures to mitigate climate change may have led to rising construction costs, leading to higher house prices and rents. Switching to renewable energy can raise the price of energy, increasing the cost of housing.
- In the land use and building sectors, the impacts of climate change are fairly well known and the need for adaptation measures are commonly acknowledged. The main climate related risks to land-use planning and buildings relate to shifting temperature, rainfall, floods, rising sea level, and droughts. Climate change presents complex challenges to the built environment in Finland due to variability across regions and seasons. For example, there is a need for preparing for both increased snow loads in some regions and humidity risks to buildings as precipitation in the form of rain will increase in other regions. Climate change gives rise to moisture risks, which affect all buildings in all parts of Finland.
- To our knowledge, there are no direct climate change-related impacts on adequate housing standards in Finland.

2. Are there differences how the climate crisis affects the right to adequate housing in urban and rural areas? If yes, is there an interrelationship between the two?

**RESPONSE:**

- None that have been reported.

3. Are the groups distinctly affected in the enjoyment of their right to adequate housing as result of the climate crisis? Please describe in what way.

**RESPONSE:**

- To our knowledge, there are not. However, the increase of energy costs raise housing costs and affects mostly low-income groups.
- Finland has one of the most extensive welfare systems, designed to guarantee adequate living conditions. The social security system is complex and comprehensive. It includes i.e. social security benefits, such as the national pension, child benefit, basic unemployment security, sickness and disability benefits, child allowance, income support and guaranteed minimum pension. The scope of these measures is wide, yearly around 15% of people in Finland receive housing allowance alone and around 7% receive basic welfare.
- On 16 December 2021, the Government submitted a report to Parliament on the development of housing policy. The report summarises the principles and objectives for housing policy and presents solutions to housing challenges for the years to come. The housing policy development programme aims to provide good and affordable housing for everybody. The key objective of the development programme, implemented in 2021–2028, is to promote a long-term perspective in housing policy.

4. How is the right to adequate housing ensured for persons that have been internally or internationally displaced by the climate crisis? How and under what conditions is their right to voluntarily return ensured?

**RESPONSE:**

- According to the Constitution of Finland, the public authorities shall promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing. There are no separate statistics on whether those granted asylum or residence permit have been affected by the climate change in their countries of departure.

5. When housing has been damaged or lost due to climate-induced events, what has been the related impact on the lives, health and livelihoods of the affected populations?

**RESPONSE:** N/A

6. How have people been able to access redress and compensation for damages to or loss of their housing as a result of the climate crisis and extreme weather events? What are the main obstacles to accessing timely redress and compensation, and what could be effective solutions?

**RESPONSE:**

- Natural disasters include lightning, storm winds, heavy rains, hail and floods. The insurance only indemnifies for such loss events that are defined in the insurance terms as indemnifiable. Damage caused by storms or natural phenomena is often compensable. The insurance terms often also cover flood damage separately.

7. Please indicate any key rulings of national courts and tribunals protecting tenants and home owners from the impact of the climate crisis or on their right to adequate housing or related to climate induced displacement? Please also describe their outcome and impact?

**RESPONSE:** N/A

*In measures*

8. Please explain how energy efficiency, green urban planning, climate mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes take into account the right to adequate housing. What measures have been taken to ensure that they do not have any (unintended) discriminatory impact on particular population groups?

**RESPONSE:**

- Legislation and social security, as well as the national reconciliation strategy and climate law take these issues into account.

9. Please explain how natural disaster preparedness, response and recovery/reconstruction strategies and plans ensure non-discrimination?

**RESPONSE:**

- The Ministry of the Interior guides and directs emergency response centre operations, and prepares related legislation. The aim is a safe and crisis-resilient Finland.
- Global warming increases the frequency and intensity of known weather and climate related hazards and changes their typical time of occurrence. Climate

change and biodiversity loss raise the risk of extensive forest fires and other forest damage, in addition to having unpredictable impacts on ecosystems and, consequently, on food production. Ecosystem changes create suitable conditions for the development and spread of dangerous diseases. A warmer climate will lead to strong winds, high temperatures and low humidity becoming more common, increasing the risk of fires spreading. Changes will also be seen in the risk of sea, inland water and storm water floods. In northern Finland, the risk of spring floods will increase due to there being more snow.

- The Ministry of the Interior conducted a survey of the security experiences of groups in vulnerable situations as part of the preparation of the Internal Security Report. Our experience is that investing in preventive safety works.

10. What are the main barriers to addressing and mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change on the realization of the right to adequate housing?

**RESPONSE:**

- N/A

*Impact of housing on climate change*

11. How does the housing sector in rural and urban areas contribute to climate change? It may be helpful to think in terms of:

- energy consumption for heating, cooling, cooking, lighting of housing;
- urban sprawl and related climate impacts (soil sealing, commuter traffic etc.);
- increase of average per capita living space;
- water use;
- emission of pollutants;
- climate impact of construction and used construction materials;
- deforestation, desertification and loss of biodiversity caused by housing development projects.

Please provide as well any statistical information on the climate impact of the housing sector compared to other sectors in your country.

**RESPONSE:**

- About 40 percent of Finland's carbon footprint is made up of emissions from housing. Main cause of climate emissions is the heating of buildings. Heating of premises causes 30-50% of housing emissions.

12. What measures are being implemented in rural and urban areas to reduce and eliminate the adverse impacts of the housing sector on the climate? How successful have been these programmes?

**RESPONSE:**

- For example, building legislation steers the entire sector towards lower carbon emissions. Finland has succeeded in reducing its emissions in energy consumption and construction.

13. What are the main barriers to reducing and eliminating the adverse impacts of the housing sector on the climate?

**RESPONSE:**

- Rising energy prices and rising construction costs.

*Towards a just transition to a rights-compliant, climate-resilient and carbon-neutral housing*

14. What specific legislation, policies, or programmes have been adopted to put in place and finance a just transition to a rights-compliant, climate-resilient and carbon-neutral housing for all, without discrimination?

**RESPONSE:**

- Building legislation, e-regulations, subsidies and repair grants, oil and gas phase-out programs.

15. What measures have been taken to ensure that the costs of green transition in the housing sector are fairly shared between public authorities, taxpayers, homeowners, and tenants/renters or other affected interest groups, and to ensure the continued affordability of housing?

**RESPONSE:**

- Evaluations are ongoing in terms of legislation, taxation and various grants.

16. What adaptation strategies are needed to ensure the continued habitability of housing in the face of the climate crisis? (protection from e.g. heat, flooding, extreme weather, etc.)

**RESPONSE:**

- Key actions on the national level include the National Adaptation Plan, the Accident Prevention Action Plan and the Climate Act.

17. How are different interest groups, including marginalized communities, homeowners and tenants, being consulted, and able to participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of:

- legislation, policies, or programmes been adopted that provide for specific measures to ensure the realization of the right to adequate housing in the face of the climate crisis;
- natural disaster preparedness, response and reconstruction, as well as in mitigation and adaptation efforts;
- measures to reduce and eliminate the adverse impacts of the housing sector on climate.

**RESPONSE:**

- According to the Finnish Constitution, the task of public authorities is to promote everyone's right to housing and support the independent organization of housing.
- Participation and impact assessment are among the objectives of building legislation.
- Municipal democracy and self-government play a key role in meeting the needs of housing.

18. What is the role of international cooperation, technology transfer and development assistance of States and multilateral agencies to ensure a just transition?

**RESPONSE:**

- In all actions – international, regional or national, Finland emphasizes a human rights based approach, including gender equality and taking into account the rights of those in vulnerable situations.
- In addition to international cooperation, Finland has extensive cooperation with EU member states and on various EU funding for projects such as the green transition.

19. What are the main barriers to achieving such a just transition?

**RESPONSE:**

- Rising housing costs and challenges in the polarization of the housing market.

*Other issues*

20. Please use this space to indicate any issue that should be considered for this report.