

Commission for Population and Development
50th session

Agenda item 3
General Debate

Statement of Finland by

H.E. Mr. Jouni Laaksonen
Deputy Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Finland

New York, 3 April 2017

(check against delivery)

Madame Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Population age structures are changing, and this change is a necessary step on our way to a more sustainable future for our planet. To reach the sustainable development goals for people, planet and prosperity, we need concerted efforts for more sustainable patterns of production, consumption and sustained population development.

We are a country with an aging age structure. Every 5th Finn today is at least 65 years old. The total fertility rate is low. The fall in the number of births has accelerated, and numbers of children and youth are declining. Life expectancy is high both for boys and girls and continues to rise, although the difference between the genders persists. At the same time, maternal and newborn mortality rates have been low in Finland for decades.

During the past decades Finland has seen a general upturn in the health and functioning of the population. Both self-rated health and quality of life have improved, especially in the older age groups. The national health policy aim, to add years in life and life in years, has been successful.

Finland has a historically firm basis of a Nordic welfare state which dates back some 80 years. The Nordic welfare states are based on a shared political goal of encouraging strong social cohesion. The Nordic social model is renowned for the universal nature of its welfare provision, which is based on the core values of equal opportunities, social solidarity and security for all. The model promotes social rights and the principle that everyone is entitled to equal access to social and health services, education and culture.

Changes in population structure and health inequalities have implications for the health and social service structure and financing. Also in these changing circumstances, the welfare state is responsible for ensuring the sustainability of its financial basis and securing wellbeing. With the rapid increase of the oldest old age groups, the need for policies to support active ageing complemented by care and support will inevitably increase. Finland is preparing herself for the ageing of population by a broad active aging program.

Care for socially marginalized and vulnerable people is one of the cornerstones of the Finnish welfare state. A central goal is to create opportunities for all to take part in the social life and in decision-making processes in society by providing enabling education, public services and social protection. This has been particularly important for gender equality, as it has enabled women to work and participate in decision-making alongside men.

Finland has a long tradition of promoting gender equality both nationally and internationally. Men and women are fairly equally represented in the labor market and the employment rate of women is high. However, there is still room for improvement. Support is provided to families for the coordination of work and family life. A system of family leaves, maternity and paternity leaves, is a way to emphasize that parenthood is for both mothers and fathers.

It is important to ensure that gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment stay at the core of the implementation efforts of the 2030 Agenda. Consistent and comprehensive international efforts are needed to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through advocacy on issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights, increasing comprehensive sexuality education, and preventing mother and child mortality.

Equality policy calls for active promotion of equality within all policy sectors and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. Finland took an important step on the way of removing all barriers to equality in society when the Equal Marriage Act entered into force on March 1st this year.

Madame Chair,

Attention to young people and their needs is key for sustainable solutions. Finland has very good experience of providing comprehensive sexuality education at schools and promoting access to youth friendly sexual and reproductive health services. The good effects of these policies are reflected for instance in the very low and even decreasing numbers of teenage pregnancies.

Socially sustainable development remains a key principle guiding Finland's policies towards fostering wellbeing and ensuring that no-one is left behind. Equally and socially sustainable society requires improving the status of the most vulnerable persons while narrowing the wellbeing, health and gender gap.

Thank you.