



FINLAND

Contribution to the 2015 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Integration Segment



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ECOSOC: 2015 Integration Segment Achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work for all; Guidance Questions for Member States' inputs to the Integration Segment

Reference is made to the invitation letter dated 19 December 2014 concerning the upcoming Integration Segment of the ECOSOC. The annex to the letter included a questionnaire to the Member States. The response to the questionnaire by the Government of Finland includes contributions from the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Question on trade-offs between full employment and decent work

Finland has ratified and is implementing the majority of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions related to decent work and occupational safety and health (OSH).

Finland has adopted a tri-partite policy on the work environment and well-being at work until 2020. The underlying values are the basic human right to safety and health at work, improved productivity and competitiveness as well as inclusive growth.

One of the declared goals of the strategy is to extend work careers (the retirement age) with three years, which will have a positive impact on the national economy and the ability to sustain the welfare society. The positive impact on productivity of good working conditions is well-documented.

Question on youth employment

Youth unemployment is rather high in Finland. According to the labour force survey, Youth unemployment rate was 20.5 % in 2014. The average number of unemployed job seekers in the employment offices were 42 000 which represents 6.4 % of the population aged 15-42. The youth unemployment rate in Finland includes full-time students who are looking for part-time work. Excluding full-time students from the calculation, the youth unemployment ratio is usually half of the youth unemployment rate.

Youth employment has a high priority in the government policy. The implementation of the Youth guarantee started in 2013. The youth guarantee supports young people in gaining access to education and employment, in preventing prolonged youth unemployment, and in offering support at an early stage, in order to prevent social exclusion of young people. According to the youth guarantee, each young person under the age of 25, and each recently graduated person under the age of 30 is offered a place for work, a work try-out, a place to study, a place at a workshop, or rehabilitation no later than three months after registering as unemployed.

The youth guarantee is a comprehensive model which is implemented in cooperation among national and municipal authorities, the educational institutions, the business sector and social partners and third sector organisations. It includes measures related to the educational and training, public employment services and rehabilitation services, including municipal social and health care services and other individual services for young people, such as youth outreach work and youth workshop activities.

Youth guarantee includes an Education guarantee, which means that everyone leaving comprehensive school is guaranteed a place to study in an upper secondary or vocational school, in an apprenticeship, workshop, rehabilitation, or elsewhere. Young adults' skills programme offers additional possibilities to complete initial vocational education for those young people aged 20-29 who have not completed any degrees after comprehensive school. Workplace learning and apprenticeship is a solution for those under 25 whose education is limited to basic education. The goal is to increase apprenticeship training and to develop educational models that combine institutional and apprenticeship training.

The workshop activities are targeted at young people who are inactive and who need other support (NEETs = not in employment, education or training). The target group also includes unemployed young people without vocational or professional qualifications or work experience, career-changers, job-seekers with disabilities or a diminished ability to work, people recovering from substance abuse or mental health problems, long-term unemployed, people unable to work full time, and immigrants who need assistance in entering the Finnish labour market. The number of young people participating in workshop activities has increased significantly in the 2000s. In 2014, more than 14,720 young people under 29 participated in workshop activities.

One-Stop-Guidance Center is an easy access service point for young people below the age of 30. Its operating model is to provide information, advice, guidance and support across a range of sectors from the basic services from various administrative branches and across a broad network of collaborators. The open operating model encourages young people to get in touch to sort out their own situation which they can also do without involving the referring organisation. The Center will give special support to young people going through transitions and will encourage them to remain in education and work. The situations of young individuals will be taken into account through guidance the initiative offers, and support can encompass several stages such as social rehabilitation and health care services, getting onto the path towards education or employment, and coping with the preparations involved.

As a special measure, the Government / Ministry of Education and Culture supports local sport clubs with one objective to enhance employment in the sector (2013 – 2014 approx. 180 persons employed). In general, all stakeholders receiving state subsidy for sport (local and regional authorities and sport organisations) have to comply with the Sports Act and its purpose “to promote equality and tolerance, cultural diversity and the sustainable development of the environment through sports.”

Question on matching education/skills and jobs

The current Requirements for Vocational Qualifications underline job orientation and flexibility. The criteria enable individual and flexible learning paths, as well as the flexible use of various forms of vocational education and training (VET), enhancement of work place learning and strengthening of work based learning methods. The VET qualifications include at least 20 credits of work-based learning at workplaces in practical tasks. There is often more work based learning in the VET qualifications than the required minimum amount. The amount of work based learning may vary due to the nature of qualification and the student.

The use of work based learning has been increasing for many years already. The combination of extended work based learning, school-based learning and apprenticeships has made it possible to develop the supply of educational institutions to better meet needs of labor market and to increase opportunities for individual study paths.

The development of the VET qualification structure and curricula is going on. The 1st July 2015 new acts and new Requirements for VET qualifications will enter into force. The reform will create a clearer, learning outcome based and modular qualification structure to meet the needs of the working life. The new structure support flexible and individualized pathways and contribute to the validation of prior learning. Sustainable development is part of the Requirements for VET qualifications and skills requirements. The reform programme especially of young people's work-based learning and apprenticeships was launched in 2014. The aim of the programme is to develop and expand the work-based learning opportunities and offer more flexible ways of completing a degree.

The focus is to combine the work-based learning, apprenticeships and school-based education in a flexible way (2 + 1) and to expand the use of apprenticeship training more for young people also. In addition, the programme includes development of the skills of the workplace instructors and trainers, as well as the development of the work communities.

Question on trade-offs between environmental economic and social dimensions

Finland considers that the environmental, economic and social dimensions are complementary. Eliminating or containing hazards at work equally protects the environment; protecting workers lessens the burden of disease for the population in general; providing safe and healthy working conditions generates a motivated work force and increased productivity.

Question on transition from informal to formal employment; formalization of micro enterprises

The Finnish Government has started a broad campaign to facilitate the transition from informal to formal sector. The campaign is spanning several ministries, the social partners, police and customs and includes various promotion campaigns. Some examples are the introduction of mandatory ID-cards at construction sites, which improves the possibility to ensure employment contracts, adherence to working hours and working conditions, collection of taxes and elimination of forced work.

The legislation for all enterprises in Finland is the same. Micro and small enterprises are assisted with a variety of electronic tools and information leaflets to fulfil their obligations. State officials and inspectors are obliged to provide advice and assistance to any citizen on how to implement the legal requirements. In relation to OSH the inspectors are trained to inform enterprises on the economic benefits of good working conditions.

Question on integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development to facilitate decent work

The Government of Finland has adopted a National Working Life Development Strategy to 2020 (https://www.tem.fi/files/35434/Tyoelaman_kehittamisstrategia2020_A4_eng.pdf).

The Strategy has four focus areas: innovation and productivity, trust and cooperation, health and well-being at work and a competent work force. Thus, the strategy combines all the dimensions of sustainable development for decent work. The implementation of the Strategy is organised by a multi-ministerial working group incorporating the social partners and expert institutions.

Question on civil society and private sector engagement

As described above, the Government is working with the social partners in issues related to work life. The cooperation with civil society takes place in a number of other connections as well. Regarding OSH, cooperation with the social partners is formalised in the Centre of Occupational Safety.

Question on the role of ECOSOC in promoting sustainable development and decent work

ECOSOC can continue to promote good working conditions as a part of sustainable growth, productivity, decent work and as a human right.

In today's world it is worthwhile to note the cost of poor working conditions. Finland calculates that employers and the society are losing 2 billion euros monthly (24 billion annually) in lost work days and related costs.