

# **The Government of Finland**

**Replies to the Questionnaire to Member States prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 7/23 on human rights and climate change**

**a) Assessments at national level of the impact of climate change (experienced or anticipated) on human lives and on populations most affected and vulnerable**

Finland's National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change<sup>1</sup> gives a detailed account of the estimated impacts of climate change in different sectors and presents measures to be taken until 2080. It includes many angles to human lives, incl. health and livelihoods.

The Finnish Government is currently preparing a Government foresight report on climate and energy policy<sup>2</sup>. The timescale of the report will extend until the mid-century and cover both mitigation of climate change and adaptation to its impacts. It will also consider the impacts of climate change to the human lives, incl. the poor and the most vulnerable. The report is to be submitted to Parliament during spring 2009.

FINADAPT (Assessing the adaptive capacity of the Finnish environment and society under a changing climate, 2004–2005) was a consortium of 14 sub-projects participating in the Finnish Environmental Cluster Research Programme. It produced a report on implication of climate change for human health adaptation. Short-term extreme weather events will probably cause most of the additional burden of climate-induced adverse health direct outcomes in Finland. In increased risks are the elderly, children and those with poor health.<sup>3</sup>

**b) Studies carried out at national level, including by independent research institutions, on the relationship between climate change and human rights**

In recent years, only one study with some research on the relation between climate change and human rights has been published in Finland. This study was conducted as a sub-project of the Academy of Finland research programme FIGARE<sup>4</sup>, which ended in 2002. FIGARE dealt with Finland and Global Change, and the sub-project in question, led by Prof. Juhani Pietarinen from the University of Turku, focused on "Human rights, Justice and Global Change"<sup>5</sup>.

A compilation report on the FIGARE programme, titled "Gloabalimuutos" (Kuusisto, Esko; Käyhkö, Jukka (eds)), was published in 2004. A part of this report deals with the results of the above mentioned sub-project.

The Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland<sup>6</sup> conducts multidisciplinary research on several topics, including climate impacts studies. The Northern Institute for Environmental and Minority Law (NIEM) is part of the Arctic Centre and has a special focus on studying the law relating to (Arctic) indigenous peoples and environmental law as it applies in the Arctic and northern region (Finland as one part of it). The NIEM has a project related to climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mmm.fi/fi/index/etusivu/ymparisto/ilmastopolitiikka/ilmastomuutos.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.vnk.fi/hankkeet/tulevaisuusselonteko/en.jsp>

<sup>3</sup> Hassi, J. and Rytönen, M. 2005. Climate warming and health adaptation in Finland. FINADAPT Working Paper 7, Finnish Environment Institute Mimeo-graphs 337, Helsinki, 22 pp. <http://www.environment.fi/download.asp?contentid=45326&lan=en>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aka.fi/figare/>

<sup>5</sup> An abstract of the sub-project can be found at <http://www.aka.fi/figare/projects/abstracts/10.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.arcticcentre.org/>

**c) Projects and measures at national level to mitigate or adapt to climate change, including information on and assessments of the impact of such projects and measures on affected populations and their human rights**

Finnish national responses to climate change are outlined in the Finnish National Climate and Energy Strategy<sup>7</sup> and the National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change<sup>8</sup>. Even though human rights issues are not addressed directly in these documents, the National Strategy for Adaptation contains an indirect link to human rights by examining how to secure the future of reindeer husbandry, which forms a major part of the local economy and an important source of livelihood in northern Finland.

Reindeer husbandry is traditionally an essential element of the Sámi minority culture<sup>9</sup>, which enjoys a special status in Finland. However, because all EU citizens, not just the Sámi people, have the right to practice reindeer husbandry in Finland, the studies carried out in Finland have been focusing on the impact of climate change on reindeer husbandry in general and not on the means of existence of the Sámi people in particular. There are about 4.900 reindeer owners in Finland of which less than 1.000 belong to the Sámi minority.

For instance the following studies on the topic have been conducted in Finland recently:

Kumpula, J. & Colpaert, A. 2003. Effects of weather and snow conditions on reproduction and survival of semi-domesticated reindeer (*R.t.tarandus*). – *Polar Research* 22(2): 225-233.

Helle, T. & Kojola, I. 2008. Demographics in an alpine reindeer herd: effects of density and winter weather. *Ecography* 31: 221-230

Holand, Ø., Nieminen, M., Røed, K.H. & Myrsterud, A. 2008. Kalving og klima - kalvingstidspunktet i et skiftende miljø. - *Villreinen* 2008: 10-14

**d) Views on the relationship between obligations arising out of international climate conventions and international human rights treaties, including on international assistance and cooperation**

Defining the concrete implications of the responsibility of states based on international human rights treaties in matters of climate change is such a complex issue that it makes further examination on the national level necessary.

**e) Examples of support to mitigate and adapt to climate change through international assistance and cooperation, bilaterally and through multilateral institutions, including assessments of their human rights impact**

Climate change and environment are highlighted in Finnish development policy much more than earlier and climate change has become a focal topic in the national discussion on international aid in Finland. Finland seeks to focus its international aid on the people and countries deemed most vulnerable. In general, climate change is at the moment one of the biggest threats for development and as such is hampering the realisation of several basic human rights, up to and including the right to life.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tem.fi/?l=en&s=164>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mmm.fi/fi/index/etusivu/ymparisto/ilmastopolitiikka/ilmastomuutos.html>

<sup>9</sup> The Sámi people are an indigenous people of northern Europe.

Finland has identified women as being particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change but also at the same time a critical but grossly underutilised resource in the fight against climate change. Women and children, namely girls, stand to suffer the most even though they have not caused the problems they suffer from. Women could also be powerful agents of change and they contribute to curbing the impacts of climate change. Given these observations, Finland is actively promoting the application of the gender perspective in its development policy.

Addressing climate change with a clear gender perspective brings to the fore questions of gender equality and economical rights of women and includes thus a significant human rights component. Finland seeks to facilitate addressing the challenges of climate change by actively engaging and empowering women at all levels. This goal is aimed to be attained by:

- Consistently giving the gender perspective significant political visibility in our climate and development related positions and statements,
- Supporting women's participation in international and national climate talks,
- Emphasizing women in support for capacity building in developing countries,
- Supporting networking between women engaged with climate change and helping them to get their voice heard, and
- Streamlining the gender perspective into all of our climate co-operation, both bilateral and multilateral.

As this emphasis on women is a relatively new focus in Finnish development policy, no assessments of its effect have been made so far.