**17 May 2021**

**Replies by the Government of Finland to the questionnaire by**

**the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing**

The Government of Finland thanks Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagobal, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing for his work and presents the following replies to the questionnaire sent by the Special Rapporteur on 9 March 2021 for the preparation for thematic reports to the 76th session of the General Assembly and 49th session of the Human Rights Council.

The replies to the questionnaire were prepared by the Ministry of the Environment.

**HOUSING DISCRIMINATION**

*7. What specific forms of de facto or legal discrimination or barriers towards equal enjoyment of the right to adequate housing do the following groups face in your country (please provide evidence with examples, studies, reports and relevant statistical information):*

* *People of African Descent, or Roma*
* *Racial, caste, ethnic, religious groups/minorities or other groups*
* *Migrants, foreigners, refugees, internally displaced persons*
* *Women, children or older persons*
* *Indigenous peoples*
* *Persons with disabilities*
* *LGBTQ persons*
* *Low income persons, including people living in poverty*
* *Residents of informal settlements; persons experiencing homelessness*
* *Other social groups, please specify*

The Roma and many immigrant groups (especially third world origin) have problems in getting dwellings in the private housing market because of the attitudes of the main population and the low-income level of the Roma. Therefore, most of the Roma and immigrants working in low-wage jobs live in the state-subsidised social rental housing.

*8. Discrimination in housing can affect various dimensions of the right to adequate housing and other human rights. Could you provide more details regarding the specific areas in which housing discrimination is experienced? Below are examples of various forms of discrimination that can be experienced in relation to different dimensions of the right to adequate housing:*

*Accessibility*

* *Discrimination in relation to access to land, including water and natural resources essential for habitation;*
* *Discrimination in relation to housing for rental or for acquisition or in accessing public or social housing;*
* *Access to emergency and/or transitional housing after disaster, conflict related displacement or in case of homelessness, family or domestic violence;*
* *Accessibility of housing for persons with disabilities or older persons, including access to housing for independent living or to care homes;*
* *data collection or requirements to furnish certain certifications resulting in the exclusion of particular persons from accessing housing;*

*Habitability*

* *discrimination in relation to housing conditions, overcrowding or housing maintenance;*
* *Exposure to health risks within the home, including lack of ventilation, heating or insulation, exposure to fire or housing collapse risk, unhealthy building materials, or other unhealthy housing covered by the WHO Guidelines on housing and health;*
* *Exposure to other risks which render housing uninhabitable, including sexual or gender-based violence, interference with privacy and physical security in the home and neighbourhood;*
* *Discrimination in relation to housing renovation or permission of housing extension;*

*Affordability*

* *Discrimination in relation to access to public benefits related to housing;*
* *Lack of equal access to affordable housing;*
* *Discrimination in public and private housing financing;*
* *Discrimination related to housing and service costs, housing related fees, litigation or taxation;*

*Security of tenure*

* *Discrimination in relation to ownership or inheritance of housing and land and related natural resources including water including on the basis of a distinction between formal and informal tenure arrangements;*
* *Discrimination in relation to evictions, resettlement and compensation for loss or damage of housing, land or livelihoods;*
* *Differential treatment in land or title registration, permission of housing construction;*

*Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure*

* *Discrimination in relation to access to work, schooling, health care or public benefits based on the residential address or related to a lack of an official address;*
* *Public transportation services and transportation costs;*
* *Provision of water, sanitation, energy, waste collection and other utility services; their quality or cost, including interruptions/blackouts including policies relating to disconnection from utility services;*
* *spatial disparities in access to health care, education, child care, cultural and recreational facilities;*

*Location*

* *Discrimination in relation to freedom of choice of the place of residency within the country, within a particular region or location;*
* *Discrimination based on place of residence or address, such as exclusion from invitation to job interviews or access to credit;*
* *Exposure to environmental health risks, such as external air quality, flooding, toxic ground exposure; noise; risk of landslides etc.;*
* *Living quality and physical security in the neighbourhood, including geographical disparities in policing and law enforcement;*

*Cultural adequacy*

* *Discrimination in relation to the recognition of culturally adequate dwellings as housing as well as equal access to public space;*
* *Prohibition of accessing, maintaining or constructing culturally adequate housing;*
* *Lack of recognition of mobile forms of residency*.

In Finland, the Roma are living in the same residential areas and have the same level of quality in housing as the main population. Most of the Roma live in the state-subsidised social rental housing.

Local authorities are responsible for the selection of residents in social housing. Tenants are eligible for social rental dwellings according to their need, their income and their financial circumstances.

Homeless applicants have the highest priority in tenant selection for state-subsidised housing. In the end of 2020 there were approximately 4 300 homeless persons in Finland. Contrary to all the other EU member states, homelessness has decreased in Finland in last eight consecutive years.

**SPATIAL AND RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION**

*12. What forms of spatial segregation along racial, caste, ethnicity, religion, nationality, migration status, heritage, economic status/income or other social grounds can be observed in urban and urban-rural contexts in your country?*

In the Finnish context spatial segregation means socioeconomic segregation of neighbourhoods (residential segregation). Based on existing international comparisons of the city of Helsinki or the metropolitan area around the city, residential segregation by income or ethnicity has so far been at a rather modest level. In general, the levels of socioeconomic and especially ethnic segregation are very modest in Finland compared to any other EU country.

However, if the levels of urban segregation are rather modest in Finland and in its biggest cities, the Helsinki region differs from the other regions by stronger segregation between the high-income population and the rest, especially when looking only at the city of Helsinki, and by weaker segregation between the low- and middle-income populations. Due to rising housing prices and lack of affordable rental or owner-occupied flats low-income or even middle-income groups have limited possibilities to choose their residential location. In Finland low-income Finnish-born and foreign-born people live in same residential neighbourhoods. Immigrants have lower homeownership rates in all income categories, but higher income predicts higher homeownership rates also among them. The standard of equipment in dwellings is generally good and differences are small in this respect. Immigrants do not live more commonly in sub-standard dwellings, as they are concentrated in newer dwellings built since the 1960s*.*

*13. What impacts do these forms of spatial and residential segregation have on affected communities? Please point to indicators such as rates of poverty, un-employment and under-employment; prevalence rates of malnutrition; disparities in access to services and facilities (such as access to schooling, health care or other public benefits); disparities in access to infrastructure (lack of and/or poor quality provision of water, sanitation, transportation, energy, waste collection and other utility services); rates of exposure to environmental health risks (poor air quality, flooding, toxic ground exposure, etc).*

The socioeconomic differences/disparities are the main factor of neighbourhood segregation, but also disparities in education, employment, health and wellbeing can be observed. However, all people are entitled equally to all services.

There is a growing concern about school segregation. A recent examination in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and in comprehensive school education (primary and lower secondary education) indicates challenges posed by social and regional divisions. The study identifies the growing social and regional segregation in society challenging the systems of early childhood education and care and comprehensive school education at both local and national levels. In comprehensive schools, the growing differences in competence between both students and schools are a particularly worrying signal.

As a result of regional socio-economic and ethnic segregation, educational disadvantages are becoming localised in certain areas in a way that undermines the capacity of comprehensive schools that are geographically and socially marginalised to achieve good learning outcomes. Most of the schools at greatest risk are located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in big cities. The same dynamics of segregation can be seen in early childhood education and care, which impacts the disparate premises for equity from which the children then transition into comprehensive school education.

*15. In your view, what factors (current or historical) are the principal drivers of spatial and residential segregation in urban and urban-rural contexts in your country?*

Housing markets are clearly differentiated in different parts of the country. Helsinki and the capital region as well as certain other growth centres are suffering from housing shortages, high housing prices and high rents.

**MEASURES AND GOOD PRACTICES TO CURB DISCRIMINATION AND REDUCE SEGREGATION**

*21. What laws, policies or measures exist at national or local level to prevent or prohibit discrimination in relation to the right to adequate housing?*

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. Therefore, the right to housing is not included in fundamental rights in Finland, only that the public authorities shall promote it. In other legislation however, certain groups, such as the disabled persons who cannot arrange their own housing, are given a subjective right to housing.

The Government supports social housing (state subsidized) that is aimed for persons with low income and limited means as well as special groups such as the older people, disabled persons, the homeless, mental health patients and students. The Government awards interest subsidy loans and investment grants to finance the construction, renovation and acquisition of reasonably priced rental dwellings for these groups. Tenants are eligible for social rental accommodation according to their need for housing, their income and their financial circumstances. Priority is given to homeless and low income applicants and to those in urgent need of housing. Citizens of other countries can apply for state-subsidised rental housing once they have received a residence permit which is valid for at least 12 months. An applicant who is dissatisfied with a decision concerning the selection or approval of a tenant may request rectification within 30 days of having been informed of the decision. The request for rectification shall be made to the authority that took the decision. Instructions on requesting rectification shall be appended to a decision, which can be appealed, and the request shall be processed without delay.

The Government also grants subsidies for the renovation of homes for disabled persons and persons over 65 years old with low income and wealth. Subsidies are also granted for removing impediments to accessibility, making residential buildings, flats and other spaces accessible to people with impaired mobility. Lift subsidies are granted for installing new lifts in blocks of flats whose stairwells lack them.

*22. Have your State, regional or local Government adopted any positive measures, such as measures of affirmative action, to reduce discrimination, segregation or structural inequality in relation to housing? To what extent have such initiatives been successful to address housing discrimination and segregation?*

The Government has been implementing nationwide programmes aiming to reduce residential/spatial segregation. The most recent neighbourhood renewal programmes have been implemented 2008-2011, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022. The latest is currently in implementation.

*23. Have any particular laws, policies or measures been implemented to limit or reduce residential segregation? To what extent have such policies raised human rights concerns?*

In the Finnish context residential segregation means segregation of neighbourhoods. The socioeconomic differences/disparities are the main factor of neighbourhood segregation. The Government has been implementing several nationwide programmes aiming to reduce neighbourhood segregation. The most recent neighbourhood renewal programme 2020-2022 is currently in implementation. All programmes since year 2008 have been targeted to existing neighbourhoods and their residents aiming to improve the wellbeing of the neighbourhoods and their residents.

One of the key principles of the development work is to create inclusion by giving all population groups equal possibility to participate and to have an effect to renewal plans. Therefore, there have not been any human rights concerns. The levels of socioeconomic and especially ethnic segregation are very modest in Finland compared to any other EU country. According to the laws and official guidelines governing urban planning and housing, all people must be treated equally and all have a right to participate in urban planning.

*24. What is the role of the media, as well as other non- governmental organizations, of religious and governmental institutions, in fostering a climate that reduces or exacerbates discrimination in relation to housing and segregation?*

The mainstream media and the majority of non-governmental organisations are supporting a non-discrimination social climate.

***DATA ON DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING AND SPATIAL/RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION***

*28. Is any data on housing disparities, housing discrimination and spatial segregation collected and publicly available? If so where can it be accessed? Are there any practical or legal barriers to collect and share such information in your country?*

All statistics produced by the Statistics Finland are publicly available. Statistics Finland’s task is to process data accumulated from various data sources into statistics and bring them to the benefit of all Finns: citizens, decision-makers, researchers and other information users. Some specific or detailed statistic information might be rather expensive to use. All research publications are available in scientific journal or other publications.

*29. Can you kindly share any studies or surveys by local, regional or national Governments or by other institutions to understand better housing disparities, housing discrimination and spatial segregation and how it can be addressed (e.g. title and link, or kindly submit document).*

In Finland spatial segregation means neighbourhoods socioeconomic segregation or housing market disparity between different regions of Finland. Recently there is and have been several research projects carrying research into neighbourhood segregation. Therefore a comprehensive list of publication cannot be given.

Some research publications:

* Kauppinen TM, van Ham M, Bernelius V. (2021). Native-origin families with children as drivers of ethnic residential segregation. Housing Studies 1/2021, online. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2020.1857707>
* Rahnu L, Puur A, Kleinepier T, Tammaru T (2020). The role of neighbourhood and workplace ethnic contexts in the formation of inter-ethnic partnerships: A native majority perspective. European Journal of Population 36, pages 247–276. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10680-019-09528-x>
* Kauppinen TM, van Ham M (2019). Unravelling the demographic dynamics of ethnic residential segregation. Population, Space and Place 25:2, e2193. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2193>.
* Vaalavuo M, van Ham M, Kauppinen TM (2019). Income mobility and moving to a better neighbourhood – an enquiry into ethnic differences in Finland. European Sociological Review 35:4, 538-551. <https://academic.oup.com/esr/article/35/4/538/5480387>
* Tammaru T, Marcinczak S, van Ham M, Aunap R, Janssen H (2018). Relationship between income inequality and residential segregation between socioeconomic groups. Regional Studies Volume 54, 2020 - Issue 4, p. 450-461. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00343404.2018.1540035>

In Finnish (incl. summary or abstract in English):

* Bernelius, V. ja Huilla, H. (2021). Koulutuksellinen tasa-arvo, alueellinen ja sosiaalinen eriytyminen ja myönteisen erityiskohtelun mahdollisuudet [Educational equity, social and spatial segregation and opportunities for targeted support].VALTIONEUVOSTON JULKAISUJA 2021:7. <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162857/VN_2021_7.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>
* Saikkonen P., Hannikainen K., Kauppinen T., Rasinkangas J., Vaalavuo M. (2018). Sosiaalinen kestävyys: asuminen, segregaatio ja tuloerot kolmella kaupunkiseudulla [Social sustainability: housing, segregation and income inequality in three urban regions]. Raportti 2/2018. Helsinki: Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos. <http://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/136125>
* Vaalavuo M., Kauppinen T.M. (2018). Muutot pois pienituloisilta alueilta: onko etnisten ryhmien välillä eroja? [Moves out from low-income neighbourhoods: are the differences between ethnic groups?] URMI Urban analysis IV, 25.1.2018. <http://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/136665>
* Kauppinen T.M., Vaalavuo M. (2017). Työikäisen väestön alueellinen eriytyminen synnyinmaan ja tulotason mukaan suurilla kaupunkiseuduilla [Residential segregation of working-age population by country of birth and income in large urban regions]. URMI Urban analysis I. <https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/135602>
* van Ham M., Tammaru T. (2016). Pieni- ja suurituloiset asuvat aiempaa eriytyneemmin eurooppalaisissa pääkaupungeissa [Increasing Socio-Economic Segregation in European Cities]. URMI Politiikkapaperi 2016:1. <http://urmi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/URMI_policy_brief.pdf> (English version: <http://urmi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Increasing-socio-economic-segregation-in-European-cities-V2.pdf>)