

Report from Finland (by Terttu Pohjolainen, Deaconess, Finland)

Finland

In Finland live 5,5 million people. The official languages are Finnish, Swedish and Lappish. Other languages speak 6 % of the population.

72,9 % (4 million persons) of the population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The Orthodox Church in Finland has 61 000 members. The Catholic Church in Finland has 14 000 members. The Bishop of the Catholic Church is Teemu Sippo. About 80 % of the population belong to the Christian Churches and communities. The Christian Churches in Finland work actively together for example in Finnish Ecumenical Council (FEC established in 1917). FEC promotes Christian unity on the national as well as on the local level. The Churches come together for consultations, common prayers, discussions about ecumenical theology, dialogues and social-ethical issues. FEC organizes meetings and assemblies.

Some points about the Social situation in Finland

In Finland there is the on-going social and health care reform. The whole Social Welfare Law is changing. Finland's main challenges are related to poverty and social exclusion. In the country there is increasing inequalities and gaps between rich and poor people. This would have a negative impact on those families with children who are already economically vulnerable and are at high risk of falling into the poverty. Long-term unemployment is on the rise. The number of unemployed persons is about 220 000 (8,3 % of population).

The social welfare system in Finland is residency-based. It means that the people without a residency permit or a permanent address within a municipality are not able to get most of services. For example migrants, refugees and the homeless have very limited access to services and rights as well as regular labour market. The number of homeless persons is about 8 000 in Finland. The most homeless families are migrant families. Persons without residence or permanent address have limited access to education, health care, work, housing, pension and justice. With a permanent address anyone has access to the welfare system and its services in Finland.

Diaconal work

In Finnish Lutheran Church are working about 1500 deacons and deaconesses in the local parishes. They meet people in their offices, in telephone and offer home visits within spiritual and emotional support and discussions within people in need, financial advice and material assistance, help in dealing with authorities, family counselling, addiction counselling etc. Within the deacons and deaconesses there are about 30 000 volunteers offering companionship and practical assistance to the people at home, in hospitals and in other care facilities. The diaconal work is organized to act in local parishes, in 10 dioceses as well as in the central government of the Church.

Caritas Finland

Caritas Finland's main beneficiary group is migrants and ethnic minorities. Caritas Finland mainly provides advice, guidance and support to the different ethnic groups. It also organises events that promote the integration of immigrants within Finland. It also involves volunteer workers in its activities. The Caritas Finland will inform migrants about the welfare system in Finland and share information about the services on where to ask for different types of assistance.