

Statements of the labour market organisations

Joint statement of Central Worker Organisations - Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) and the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (Akava)

Report to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on non-ratified Conventions and Recommendations (Art. 19): Update of the report on the Nursing Personnel Recommendation (no. 157) and the Domestic Workers Recommendation (no. 201)

During the coronavirus pandemic, personnel in the social and healthcare services sector and related support services have been exposed to an increased risk of a generally hazardous communicable disease. Particularly at the start of the pandemic, work was carried out without adequate protective equipment in some situations. There was a lack of protective equipment and their quality did not meet the requirements of the Directive on medical devices. The employer's instructions on the use of protective equipment were not always in line with the latest information or with the latest recommendations of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. There were deficiencies in the effective protection of personnel belonging to the risk groups from COVID-19 infection at work.

Although the employer has a statutory obligation to update the risk assessment in accordance with changing working conditions, there were occasionally some significant delays in this regard. The expertise, help and advice of the occupational healthcare services was also not sufficiently utilised in all healthcare units. This applies to risk assessment, use of protective equipment and management of increased mental and physical workloads. Challenges related to the sufficiency of protective equipment have continued in some units.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the work of many professionals in social and healthcare services and related support services has become more strenuous, demanding and risky. As much as the majority of the personnel in the sector say that their wellbeing at work has deteriorated during the epidemic. The employer has not taken sufficient responsibility to promote occupational safety and wellbeing at work in exceptional circumstances.

In the early stages of the pandemic, Finland introduced the Emergency Powers Act, which allows temporary restrictions on fundamental rights in the exceptional circumstances referred to in the Act. As per the emergency powers of the Act, healthcare personnel could be assigned overtime without their consent, their annual leave could be cancelled and their notice period could be extended. In retrospect, the duration and scope of application of the Emergency Powers Act in some healthcare units may have been broader than what the pandemic situation would have necessarily required.