

Summary

At the beginning of May, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment set up a broad-based high-profile group to produce views and suggestions to strengthen wellbeing and equality. The aim was to prepare for the lifting of restrictions and the reconstruction of society in the aftermath of the coronavirus epidemic. The working group was set up for the period of 5 May to 31 May 2020.

The aim of the report produced by the working group is to highlight critical issues for the welfare society. Its key message is that human dignity and people's interdependence are set as bases for all action. Based on these two fundamental ethical pillars, a socially, humanely and economically intact and equal society is built. The Finnish welfare society provides a strong foundation for coping with the crisis, but we must make efforts to avoid long-term damaging consequences that were caused by the recession in the 1990s and the financial crisis of 2008.

Civil society has played an important role in creating and maintaining the Finnish welfare society in cooperation with the public sector. During a crisis, the role of civil society in maintaining social cohesion and wellbeing is emphasised. It is therefore essential to secure the resources of civil society in the future, too.

The corona pandemic and restrictive measures have affected all our social relations, the structures of daily life and everyday activities. Restrictions or how they were interpreted shifted a central part of public-sector welfare services to homes as unpaid work. The effects of the emergency situation are not evenly shared in the population, which is why it is important to focus attention on those whose wellbeing has been most affected. At the same time, it is necessary to assess which measures would provide the fastest way for removing restrictions to increase wellbeing without major health risks. In this assessment, the impacts on equality, equity and different age groups are central.

The crisis situation caused by the pandemic and its impact on business activities almost immediately caused income problems for those whose work was directly affected by the restrictive measures. The loss of job opportunities affected both entrepreneurs and workers who were laid off. We do not know yet the duration of the economic consequences, but a significant reduction in employment opportunities highlights the importance of economic support measures and employment policy.

In addition to financial losses, the crisis reveals the fractures of society, and addressing them is of primary importance in order to preserve the welfare society. The interruption or deterioration of available services has affected the wellbeing of many people, especially those already in a vulnerable position. We must assess this and possible economic adjustment measures and cuts equally, from the perspective of different groups of people, different age groups and different genders.

The economy needs people who experience wellbeing, and to experience wellbeing, people need a well-functioning economy; investing in people's wellbeing means investing in the economy. A wellbeing impact assessment requires a well-functioning set of criteria, regular production of information and a permanent assessment structure.