

Finland 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Finland during the year.

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

The government had mechanisms in place to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports that government officials employed them.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Abusive Physical Conditions: A Ministry of Interior official stated prison administrators requested additional staff and better facilities to improve management of inmate violence, largely attributed to gang activity.

In April, two men were charged with life imprisonment for the 2022 murder of a fellow inmate. In May, police began investigating the role of prison staff in the murder and whether negligence played a part in the assault going unnoticed by guards. The investigation continued at year's end.

Administration: Authorities conducted investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers.

Improvements: An official from the Ministry of Justice stated that the introduction of new prison sections for violent inmates had likely reduced

the number of violent incidents. The official also noted that minors convicted or charged with serious crimes were now also held in separate prison areas.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law required police to have a warrant issued by a prosecutor to make an arrest. Police had to obtain a warrant within three days if an individual was arrested while committing a crime. Arrested persons had to receive a court hearing within three days of arrest, and police were required to promptly inform detainees of the charges against them. Authorities respected most of these rights. Most defendants awaiting trial were eligible for conditional release on personal recognizance. Detainees generally had access to a lawyer promptly after arrest. Persons detained for “minor” criminal offenses, however, did not have a right to an attorney from the outset of detention or prior to interrogation. The government was required by law to provide counsel for the indigent. The 2021 Committee for the Prevention of Torture report noted delays in notification of custody were “frequent and

widespread” and could be delayed up to 96 hours, especially if the detainee was a foreigner. Civil society groups reported these delays continued during the year and noted there continued to be insufficient translation and interpretation services.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family,

Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibited such actions, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members.

Freedom of Expression: There were isolated examples of suppression of the media. In September, a Union of Journalists survey revealed increased difficulty of journalist access to politicians and officials. Forty percent of the respondents said working with politicians was more difficult and more than half (56 percent) believed obtaining information and interviews from office holders was more difficult than in previous years.

Public speech intended to incite discrimination against any national, racial, religious, or ethnic group was a crime. Hate speech was not a separate

criminal offense but could constitute grounds for an aggravated sentence for other offenses. In 2021 Prosecutor General Raija Toiviainen charged Christian Democrat Member of Parliament and former Minister of Interior Päivi Räsänen with hate speech for her written and verbal statements regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, intersex, or other sexual minority (LGBTQI+) persons, including a social media post that criticized the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland for partnering with a local LGBTQI+ Pride event in 2019, citing a Bible verse as justification. In March 2022, the Helsinki District Court dismissed the case, stating that Räsänen's remarks did not reach the level of incitement to hatred. In August, the Prosecutor General appealed the verdict to the Helsinki Court of Appeals, which acquitted Räsänen of all charges on November 14.

Libel/Slander Laws: Conviction of defamation and aggravated defamation carried a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment and a fine. The law had a section relating to breaches of the sanctity of religion (blasphemy) that included publicly blaspheming against God for the purpose of offending, publicly defaming, or desecrating what was held to be sacred by a church or religious community.

In January, the National Police Board stated that Quran burning would not be permitted, based on blasphemy laws. The UN Human Rights Committee urged the country to change the criminal provision, arguing that it restricted freedom of expression.

National Security: The law stipulated it was a crime to breach confidentiality or secrecy obligations as provided by any other law in the penal code. In January, the District Court of Helsinki found two journalists guilty of disclosing national secrets in an article regarding the Finnish Defense Intelligence Agency in news outlet Helsingin Sanomat in 2017. The court determined the article disclosed military intelligence that had been classified on grounds of national security. Tuomo Pietiläinen, the journalist who primarily authored the story, was issued a fine equivalent to 50 days' salary. Laura Halminen, the other journalist named in the byline, was not sentenced on grounds of her lesser role in the story. Kalle Silfverberg, then acting manager of Helsingin Sanomat, was acquitted when the court ruled that he had neither committed nor abetted the disclosure of national secrets. Reporters Without Borders and Helsingin Sanomat noted the case was a "dangerous precedent" for freedom of speech in the country.

Nongovernmental Impact: In July, hundreds of followers of Finns Party parliamentarian Sebastian Tynkkynen harassed *Iltalehti* journalist Ida Erämaa, both online and in person, after Erämaa published an article identifying the connections of Finns Party politicians to far-right groups and ideologies. In the article, Erämaa also criticized Tynkkynen and Finns Party Secretary Arto Luukkanen for attempting to hinder the work of journalists. The harassment began after Tynkkynen posted a response to the article on social media, calling the article biased and engaging in personal insults against Erämaa. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja

Mijatović urged a government investigation of the “public smear campaign” and threats of sexual violence against Erämaa.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In June, the Helsinki District Court dropped most charges against police in a trial against seven police officers who used pepper spray on peaceful protesters of the environmental group Extinction Rebellion Finland during a demonstration in 2020. The court only charged a police lieutenant for negligently carrying out his official duties by allowing his subordinates to use pepper spray against the protesters. The lieutenant was ordered to pay a fine equivalent to 30 days’ salary.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government continued to accept returned asylum seekers who had first entered the country but then moved on to other European countries according to the Dublin III Regulation.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had established a system for providing protection to refugees.

Local human rights organizations reported significant delays in the processing of asylum applications, noting that many asylum seekers existed in “limbo” without full access to social services, such as unemployment benefits. They noted that delays began following an influx of asylum seekers from primarily Syria and Iraq starting in 2015, and that some asylum seekers

from that period were still waiting for a decision in their cases. An official from the immigration service, Migri, noted that apparent delays in processing some asylum applications were due to repeat applications and appeals of negative decisions. The official added the average asylum application processing time was eight months.

Migration experts expressed concern regarding closures of the country's border with Russia in November and December in response to a Russian-orchestrated surge in irregular migration of third-country nationals, citing decreased access to those seeking asylum in the country. The government implemented a full closure of the country's eastern border on November 29 until December 13 and again from December 15 to year's end. In addition, the government restricted asylum claims to airports and water transport entry points. Migration experts said the country's border closures could violate international law, increase irregular migration, and pose a danger to migrants exposed to below-freezing winter temperatures. The government processed asylum claims of individuals who arrived before the November 29 closure in full accordance with the law, according to government statements and human rights advocates.

On May 23, the UN Committee against Torture issued a decision on a complaint against the government concerning the possible return of an asylum seeker to the Russian Federation. In its decision, the committee considered that the return of the complainant to the Russia would

constitute a violation of Article 3 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In its decision, the committee found the complainant, who was of Chechen ethnicity, would face a foreseeable, real, and personal risk of being subjected to torture if returned to the Russian Federation. The government approved the complainant's asylum application on July 6, in compliance with the committee's decision.

Durable Solutions: According to the Immigration Service, the government planned to accept a quota of 1,050 refugees during the year. As of November, the government surpassed the quota by accepting 1,052 refugees.

The government assisted in the safe, voluntary return of migrants to their home countries. Amnesty Finland noted an increase in deportations in recent years and expressed concerns that restrictions on work permits for asylum seekers would increase the number of undocumented immigrants. A significant portion of deportations during the year were due to changes in Iraqi procedures in June that allowed Finland to safely deport Iraqi-origin migrants who either entered the country illegally or were denied asylum, according to a Migri official. There were 992 deportations from January 1 to October 31, according to Migri statistics.

According to Amnesty, most undocumented immigrants in the country were of Iraqi origin.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to approximately 63,243 individuals who might not qualify as refugees. From January to November, Migri received 65,680 temporary protection applications, 64,422 of which were from Ukrainian nationals.

The government faced criticism regarding what was perceived by some as better treatment to Ukrainian refugees versus those from other countries. Local human rights organizations noted temporary protection status had not been used extensively in the past but was made readily available for Ukrainians. They also stated the government increased access to social services for those under temporary protection since the war in Ukraine began. A Migri official noted that the temporary protection offered to Ukrainian refugees was based on EU policy and that, without the expedient process offered by temporary protection status, the number of Ukrainian refugees would have overwhelmed the immigration system.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

According to the most recent UNHCR *Finland Fact Sheet*, 3,546 stateless persons resided in the country. The origin and causes of statelessness

mainly originated outside of the country. Involuntarily stateless persons and certain other special groups, such as refugees, had a shorter residency requirement (four years instead of six years) than other persons before they were eligible to apply for citizenship. A child could obtain citizenship from either the mother or father regardless of the child's place of birth and could also acquire citizenship if the child was born in the country and would otherwise be stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

For additional information about corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement*, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Several domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to their views, although Amnesty Finland noted reduced access to government officials compared with previous years.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Human Rights Center was an autonomous, independent institution administratively connected to the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The center's functions included promoting the implementation of human rights, reporting on the implementation of human rights obligations, and cooperating with European and international bodies on human rights matters. The parliamentary Constitutional Law Committee analyzed proposed legislation for consistency with international human rights conventions. The committee dealt with

legislation relating to criminal and procedural law, the courts, and the prison system.

The law required the ombudsman for children, the ombudsman for older persons, the nondiscrimination ombudsman, and the ombudsman for equality to impartially advance the status and legal protection of their respective reference groups. These ombudsmen operated independently but were organized under the Ministry of Justice. The nondiscrimination ombudsman and the ombudsman for equality oversaw government compliance with laws on equality and nondiscrimination. The chancellor of justice supervised the decisions of the government. The nondiscrimination ombudsman was the National Rapporteur for Violence Against Women per the Istanbul Convention. Responsibility for investigating employment discrimination rested with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in parallel with the nondiscrimination ombudsman.

Responsibility for developing antidiscrimination policies and legislation as well as for the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations resided with the Ministry of Justice's Unit for Democracy, Language Affairs, and Fundamental Rights. The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations advocated for policy changes to improve integration.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal rape, and the government enforced the law effectively. Rape was punishable by up to six years' imprisonment. If the offender used violence, the offense was considered aggravated, and the penalty could be up to 10 years. All sexual offenses against adults, except sexual harassment, were subject to public prosecution. Sexual offenses against a defenseless person (such as because of unconsciousness, intoxication, or a disability) were considered as severe as rape. Authorities could prosecute domestic abuse under various criminal laws, including as rape, assault and battery, harassment, and disturbing the peace. The penalty for physical domestic violence ranged from a minimum of six months to a maximum of 10 years in prison.

In January, the new Sexual Offenses Act came into force stipulating that the legal definition of rape included sex without consent. Under the prior law, the legal definition of rape included only intentional violence. The new law also expanded definitions of sexual harassment and criminalized nonconsensual dissemination of any sexual images.

Gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, continued to be a problem.

According to Statistics Finland, the number of sexual offenses increased by 23 percent between January and September. They added that every third woman was a victim of violence by a spouse or former spouse, based on a survey conducted from 2021-22. While police were obligated to investigate domestic violence cases, many of the cases were referred to a mediator and were not closely tracked by police. Victim Support Finland (RIKU), a nonprofit organization funded by both NGOs and the government, stated that some sexual assault cases could take several years to be prosecuted.

RIKU reported most of their clients sought support for intimate partner violence and sexual crimes. Three quarters of the clients requesting assistance for intimate partner violence and sexual crimes were women.

RIKU stated there was a steady growth in persons seeking guidance for domestic violence issues in the year. The government opened a shelter in Tampere that accepted survivors of domestic violence. Amnesty International reported that the network of shelters was sparsely distributed, and survivors faced the burden of traveling long distances to seek shelter and assistance, particularly in the less densely populated northern region of the country.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C was treated as aggravated assault under the law and could be punished with imprisonment or deportation. Taking a girl living in the country abroad for FGM/C was also considered a crime. The government generally enforced the law. According

to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, there were approximately 10,000 women and girls who had been subjected to FGM/C in the country, with approximately 650 to 3,080 girls at risk of being subjected to FGM/C.

Discrimination: The law provided for the same legal status and rights for women as for men and stipulated a 40 percent quota of women employed in public decision-making bodies. The government enforced the law effectively, but instances of discrimination occurred.

According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the gender pay gap was a pressing and persistent problem. Statistics Finland's Index of Wage and Salary Earnings 2023 stated the average earnings of women were 84 percent of the average earnings of men across all labor sectors.

Pregnant women experienced discrimination in finding a job, returning from leave, and renewing fixed-term contracts. The Office of the Ombudsman for Equality reported case numbers had increased but attributed the increase to more awareness of its services. The Ombudsman for Equality stated women were disproportionately placed on fixed-term contracts, which employers did not renew or renewed at lower levels of pay and responsibility after childbirth.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. Healthcare providers typically offer postpartum prophylaxis as part of routine postnatal

care.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, and emergency contraception was available as part of the clinical management of rape.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law prohibited discrimination based on origin and nationality. The nondiscrimination ombudsman was responsible for responding to complaints of discrimination and regularly mediated among business owners, government agencies, and public-service providers regarding treatment of customers and clients. The Ministry of Justice also responded to complaints of discrimination.

Interior Minister Mari Rantanen referred to population replacement (*väestönvaihto*) when distributing texts discussing demography on social media. While the interior ministry and the intelligence service considered population replacement to be a far-right conspiracy theory and justification for violence, Rantanen most recently used *väestönvaihto* as a hashtag in a March post on X. On June 30, in response to media reports on her use of the term, Rantanen posted on X: “I don't believe in conspiracies. The demographic pressure on Europe shown by statistics and the subsequent demographic change is a fact. It must be possible to talk about the consequences of immigration without stigmatization.”

In response to scandals involving past racist comments and actions by some politicians belonging to the governing coalition as well as members of far-right groups, the government established an antiracism working group in July to counter racism and discrimination. They presented their new antidiscrimination policy in August that included plans to criminalize Holocaust denial and institute a series of measures for the government to strengthen frameworks for combating discrimination; improving education on human rights, equality, and gender sensitivity; combating hate speech; promoting equality at work; and protecting women from violence in certain patriarchal cultures. Parliament adopted the antidiscrimination statement on September 8.

In September, more than 10,000 persons protested in Helsinki's Senate Square regarding what they perceived as a weak government response to the scandals. The following month, the government announced a program dedicating six million euros (\$6.5 million) as part of its plan to tackle racism in Finnish society. The pledged amount will fund truth and reconciliation processes that promote the rights of the indigenous Sámi people and the deaf.

The nondiscrimination ombudsman stated Roma continued to face discrimination in all areas of life in the country. In March, the Pirkanmaa District Court found that hair salon Hiustalo Oy discriminated against two Roma plaintiffs when their employment was terminated due to the wearing

of Roma skirts. A human rights activist noted that Roma faced discrimination in housing but that no governmental monitoring body existed for housing discrimination.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Justice *Fundamental Rights Barometer Survey 2021*, 36 percent of Arabic-speaking respondents and 31 percent of Russian-speaking respondents experienced discrimination during employment or while searching for a job. In general, men whose native language was Arabic experienced harassment, discrimination, and violence than respondents from other groups.

According to a university researcher and officials at the Ministry of Education, students were often placed in Finnish-as-a-second-language classes regardless of their Finnish proficiency if their native language on record was something other than Finnish or if they had a “non-Finnish” name. The nondiscrimination ombudsman reported instances of structural discrimination in basic and vocational education directing youth assumed to have an immigrant background towards certain fields involving manual labor.

School employees were mandatory reporters of discrimination and faced neglect charges if they did not report incidents of discrimination. The nondiscrimination ombudsman noted that most cases of discrimination in schools were based on disabilities, race, and sexual orientation.

In September, *Yle* reported that administrators at a Helsinki primary school hired additional staff in response to a nondiscrimination ombudsman investigation. The Ombudsman's Office found that a student with an ethnic minority background had been subject to physical and verbal attacks from other students, including the use of racial slurs, for years. In class, one of the student's teachers used racial slurs in a lesson wherein students voted on which slurs and swear words were the worst. Despite requests by the student's parents, neither teachers nor the principal intervened. The nondiscrimination ombudsman found that it was the school's responsibility to ensure the student was not subjected to racist bullying, harassment, or discriminatory treatment by teachers or other students.

The Finnish Intelligence Service reported the banned Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) continued to operate out of public sight through shifting organizational forms and associations. Academic researchers highlighted that while the ban had led to a significant decrease in organized, public events centered on racially or ethnically motivated violent rhetoric, it had driven some former NRM members to increased radicalization through unregulated online forums. The intelligence service highlighted in its annual terrorist threat assessment that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism in online platforms was a significant source of radicalization in the country and that ethnic minorities were at risk of being targeted by violence perpetrated by far-right individuals. The intelligence service noted the threat of far-right terrorism had grown stronger since 2022, due in part

to some individual right-wing extremists who left the country for the Ukrainian war zone, increasing the likelihood of their radicalization. The intelligence service's assessed threat level for radical Islamist terrorism, particularly threats against those representing a different faith or sexual minorities, was unchanged.

Indigenous Peoples

The constitution provided for the protection of the Sámi language and culture, and the government financially supported these efforts. The Sámi, who constituted less than 0.1 percent of the population, had full political and civil rights as citizens as well as a measure of autonomy in their civil and administrative affairs. A 21-member Sámi Parliament (Samediggi), popularly elected by the Sámi, was responsible for the group's language, culture, and matters concerning their status as an Indigenous people. Its authorities allowed it to adopt legally binding resolutions, propose initiatives, and provide policy guidance. In September, the government announced a grant of 1.3 million euros (\$1.4 million) to promote the rights of the indigenous Sámi people.

Members of the Sámi Council, a voluntary Sámi nongovernmental organization made up of Sámi member organizations from Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, highlighted Sámi self-determination as an ongoing human rights concern in the country.

In 2015, Finland's Supreme Administrative Court ordered names added to the electoral roll for that year's Sámi parliamentary elections. Sámi leaders noted that those who became eligible to vote in the indigenous community's parliamentary elections were not affiliated with Sámi identity and culture. Human rights organizations noted the continued inclusion of individuals in the Sámi parliamentary voter rolls who the Sámi people believed had no claim to the indigenous group's heritage infringed on the Sámi peoples' right to self-governance and access to Sámi indigenous land.

The nondiscrimination ombudsman, the Ministry of Education, and Sámi leaders all noted a lack of professionals and authorities with Sámi language skills working in Sámi regions, including health-care service providers, teachers, and interpreters. In addition, as services were moved online and to centralized service telephone lines, authorities did not take into consideration the possibility of accessing these services in the Sámi languages.

Children

Child Abuse: The law prohibited child abuse, defining children as individuals younger than 16. Child neglect and physical or psychological violence carried penalties of up to six months in prison and up to two years in prison, respectively. Sexual abuse of a child carried a minimum penalty of four months' imprisonment and a maximum of six years. The law defined rape of

a person younger than 18 as aggravated rape, which carried a minimum penalty of two years' imprisonment and a maximum of 10 years.

Aggravated rape of a child carried a minimum penalty of four years' imprisonment and a maximum of 12 years. The government enforced the law effectively.

In 2022, child welfare notifications increased 5 percent compared with the previous year, according to Statistics Finland. A child welfare notification was a request filed by a member of the public for social services to investigate the welfare of a child. A notification was filed for 98,634 children, which was 9.1 per cent of all children.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum age of marriage was 18. Under the law, marriage was fundamentally a voluntary choice, and marriage by coercion or compulsion was illegal. The government enforced the law effectively.

Parliament adopted legislation to permit the dissolution of forced unions, which came into effect in October. Under the previous legal framework, a forced marriage could only be terminated through a divorce, similar to voluntary marriages. Legal specialists expressed concerns regarding the problem associated with providing evidence of a forced marriage in a legal context.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited the commercial sexual

exploitation of children, including child pornography and the sale, offering, or procuring of children for commercial sex. The law prohibited purchase of sexual services from minors and covered “grooming” (enticement of a child), including in a virtual environment or through mobile telephone contacts. Authorities enforced the law effectively.

The minimum age for consensual sex was 16. The law regarded a person whose age could be determined, but who might reasonably be assumed to be younger than 18, as a child.

Changes to the Sexual Offenses Act included stronger legislation on protecting children. Sex with someone under the age of 16 was considered rape. Sentences for child rape were also increased, ranging from two to 12 years in prison.

In April, the Council of Europe reported children in Finland were increasingly suffering from sexual harassment and exploitation through commercial sex. Sexual abuse and exploitation facilitated by technology was also a problem: 62 percent of 1,762 respondents ages 11-17 indicated they had experienced various kinds of attempted grooming.

Antisemitism

The size of the Jewish population was estimated at 1,300, most living in the Helsinki area. Leaders in the Jewish community suggested the number was closer to 2,000.

In March, the Helsinki District Court convicted Sinimusta Party parliamentary candidate Ville Nurmela for an incident of vandalism at the Turku Synagogue on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2020. The court considered the attack to be a gross act of damage because it was aimed at a synagogue that survived the destruction of World War II.

Debates on religious practices of animal slaughter with respect to kosher products and on nonmedical male circumcision sometimes used direct or veiled antisemitic language.

The government provided funding for the security of the Helsinki synagogue. Representatives of the Jewish community reported they believed they were under threat and specifically targeted due to their beliefs.

In June, Economic Affairs Minister Vilhelm Junnila resigned after it emerged he had given a speech at a 2019 event attended by neo-Nazi groups at which he joked about Nazi symbology. Citing antisemitic and generally racist speech by members of the parliamentary coalition, opposition members called for a vote of no confidence in the government.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based

on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: There were no laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behavior. Seemingly neutral laws were not disproportionately applied to LGBTQI+ persons.

Violence and Harassment: In 2021, the latest year for which statistics were available, police recorded 126 of 1,026 suspected hate crimes based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. These statistics included threats and harassment in addition to assault and violent crimes. LGBTQI+ rights advocates said instances of hate crimes targeting LGBTQI+ persons were significantly underreported due to a lack of trust between victims and authorities and some reported hate crimes were not investigated because police lacked training and resources needed to recognize and investigate hate crimes.

Pride events in June around the country faced violent attacks and vandalism. Eight individuals with ski masks attacked customers of an LGBTQI+ nightclub in Tampere, and pride flags were torn down in Joensuu and Lappeenranta.

Discrimination: The law prohibited discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics and recognized LGBTQI+ individuals and couples. LGBTQI+

persons continued to report incidences of harassment and discrimination in public. The ombudsman for equality noted hostility against transgender issues in government and public discussions surrounding transgender rights. There were reports of social or employment discrimination. Some examples include a November assault of a lesbian couple in Turku and a June assault of a customer outside an LGBTQI+ nightclub in Tampere.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The country legally recognized two genders: male and female. The law required an individual who wished to have legal recognition of another gender be age 18 or older. Minors did not have access to legal gender recognition, even with the permission of parents or guardians.

In February, the government passed a law that allowed transgender persons age 18 and older to legally change their gender by a process of self-declaration, removing the previously required medical and psychiatric approval process that had required a medical certificate proving they were infertile or sterilized. The Amnesty International LGBTI rights advisor to the country said the law significantly improved the rights of transgender persons.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: While the law prohibited “conversion therapy” in clinical medical settings, “conversion therapy” and other “conversion” practices to attempt to change a person’s

sexual orientation or gender identity or expression were legal in all other settings and continued to be practiced. According to local activists, children in the Pentecostal Church community continued to be provided material that encouraged sexual orientation “conversion.” Academic experts said that although “conversion therapy” was not practiced in medical settings, because the practice was not banned in the country it was difficult to identify which “conversion” practices were most prevalent. Activists working with immigrant communities highlighted that honor-related violence, forced marriage, and forced exile, or the threat of such actions, were also used as part of broader “conversion therapy” practices in immigrant and refugee communities throughout the year.

Medical practitioners in some clinical settings subjected intersex children to nonurgent or medically unnecessary procedures without their or their parents’ informed consent, according to one medical expert. Advocates working with LGBTQI+ organizations said the country’s laws were insufficient for protecting the rights of intersex children and noted a lack of sufficient training and information for health-care professionals and parents.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:

There were no laws or other restrictions on individuals speaking or media reporting on LGBTQI+ matters, on the ability of LGBTQI+ individuals to assemble in public or private or to form associations, or on the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to legally register or convene events.

Persons with Disabilities

The nondiscrimination ombudsman, disability advocates, and persons with disabilities all reported there were barriers to persons with disabilities accessing education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The constitution and law prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities in all fields, including the provision of government services. The law included an obligation to make reasonable accommodations in situations in which the conditions did not otherwise allow persons with disabilities to engage with an authority or authorities or receive education, employment, and generally available goods and services on an equal basis with others. The law also referred to adapting services in individual cases based on the stated or demonstrated needs of the person with a disability. The law, however, did not impose an obligation to prepare proactively for the needs of persons with disabilities. Disability advocates said there were no efficient legal mechanisms to address accessibility matters, noting long trial delays and unclear regulations meant that it could take years to resolve even the simplest of accessibility disputes.

There were no comprehensive assessments of the state of accessibility of public buildings. Municipalities had to organize reasonable transport services for persons with disabilities if they were needed to manage daily life functions. Municipalities reported problems in the availability and quality of

transport services, particularly during major events, on-call times, and evenings and weekends.

Experts from civil society groups asserted legislation and practices surrounding labor and daily activities of persons with mental disabilities needed comprehensive reform. Gaps in the law created conditions where businesses could employ persons with disabilities for so-called rehabilitative work without pay. The system did not take into consideration that individuals with intellectual disabilities were often capable of full- or part-time work on the same basis as others.

Social welfare legislation defined labor activities as maintaining and improving capabilities, and a municipality could grant tax-free pay of between zero and €12 (\$12.97) an hour for such activities. If the work required guidance, it was seen as a daily activity rather than labor, meaning an employee might not have received even food in exchange for hours of work. Some disability rights organizations noted that, because work and wage requirements were set by collective bargaining agreements, there were limited incentives to create work opportunities for persons with physical or intellectual disabilities, exacerbating structural barriers to employment and leading to situations where persons with intellectual disabilities were not paid for their work.

In September, the government postponed implementation of the Act on Services for Persons with Disabilities until 2025, rather than the planned

entry into force in October. The government argued the postponement was necessary to ensure equal services for persons with disabilities across the country, while the opposition coalition criticized the postponement as an attempt to cut the social services budget. Disabilities rights advocates said the law provided insufficient access to independent living and conflated those with physical and intellectual disabilities. The Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities expressed concerns regarding group home living situations, citing the association's research that showed living in group homes with higher numbers of residents was correlated with the use of physical restraint methods, which violated self-determination.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The government effectively enforced all applicable laws.

Workers without permanent residence could be ineligible to join voluntary unemployment insurance funds. Employers who violated the rights of employees to organize and retain employee representatives faced the

possibility of administrative measures, legal proceedings, and fines. The penalties were generally commensurate with those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were regularly applied against violators. Authorities and employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and there were no reports of abuses. All workers, regardless of sector union membership or nationality, were entitled to the same wages negotiated between employers and trade unions provided for in applicable collective agreements.

An official dispute board could make nonbinding recommendations to the cabinet on ending or limiting the duration of strikes when they threatened national security. Employees prohibited from striking could use arbitration to provide for due process in the resolution of their concerns.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The law provided for employment contracts for children between ages 15 and 18 as long as the work did not interrupt compulsory education. Children between ages 15

and 18 were not permitted to work after 10 p.m. or under conditions that risked their health and safety, which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health defined as working with mechanical, chemical, physical, or biological hazards or bodily strain that could result from lifting heavy loads. A child whose 14th birthday occurred during the calendar year could be employed in light work, such as selling refreshments, running errands, or assisting in an office setting, for no more than half of the school holidays or during short-term duties during the school year.

Penalties for violations of child labor regulations were commensurate with those for other analogous crimes. There were no reported violations during the year. Child labor violations carried a maximum penalty of one year' imprisonment for occupational safety offenses and six months' imprisonment for working time protection offenses. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment effectively enforced child labor regulations.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: While there was no national minimum wage law, the law required all employers, including nonunionized employers, to pay the minimum wages stipulated in collective bargaining agreements.

The standard workweek established by law was no more than 40 hours of work per week with eight hours of work per day. Because the law did not include a provision regarding a five-day workweek, regular work hours could, at least in principle, span six days. The regular weekly work hours could also be arranged so that the average was 40 hours during a period of no more than 52 weeks. Persons in certain occupations, such as seamen, household workers, road transport workers, and workers in bakeries, were subject to separate workweek regulations. The law entitled employees working shifts or during the weekend to one 24-hour rest period per week. The law limited a worker to 250 hours of overtime per year and 138 overtime hours in any four-month period.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, and OSH experts actively identified unsafe conditions. Workers were able to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The law required employees to report hazards or risks they discovered in working conditions, including in machinery, equipment, or work methods. The law also required employees, where possible, to correct dangerous conditions that came to their attention. Such corrective measures had to be reported to the employer.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: Authorities effectively enforced wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties for work safety offenses, working hour

offenses, exploitive work discrimination, and other wage and hour violations were specified in the criminal code. Penalties for aggravated cases included a fine or imprisonment up to two years, commensurate with fraud and negligence penalties. Government resources, inspections, and penalties were adequate to deter most violations. Violations carried a maximum penalty of one year' imprisonment for OSH offenses and six months' imprisonment for working hour offenses. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was responsible for enforcement of labor laws and regulations. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) enforced appropriate safety and health standards and conducted inspections at workplaces. Individuals who committed work safety or working hours' offenses were subject to penalties commensurate with similar crimes. In cases of serious violations, inspectors issued improvement notices and monitored the employer's compliance. When necessary, OSHA could issue a binding decision and impose a fine. If a hazardous situation involved a risk to life, an inspector could halt work on the site or issue a prohibition notice concerning the source of risk. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections. If the employer failed to comply with an improvement notice, OSHA could impose a conditional fine, a notice of termination, or a notice of suspension to enforce the obligation. The number of labor inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance.

Because the law considered wild berry pickers as entrepreneurs not in a wage employment relationship, these workers were vulnerable to exploitation, including labor trafficking, and violations of wage or safety laws involving foreigners picking natural products were therefore undercounted in statistics of labor supervision violations. The law did not stipulate minimum wage or minimum earnings for berry pickers. While the law required a minimum purchase price be known to the picker before arriving in the country, some workers reported they were not informed in advance of a minimum purchase price or that purchase prices changed below previously stated minimums. A local human rights organization stated that some berry pickers incurred significant debts due to room and board fees charged to them by the sponsoring berry companies.

Estimates of the size of Finland's informal economy range from 10 to 13 percent. Government enforcement of labor laws in this sector faced challenges and government reports from April noted deficiencies in wages paid to workers, especially seasonal agricultural laborers, and a record number of employers neglecting to fully pay their workers' compensation insurance obligations in 2022.