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Finland – CEDAW – follow-up procedure

NHRI observations on the follow up report of 2024

This document contains observations by the Finnish Human Rights Centre (HRC¹, NHRI) to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the consideration of the follow up report by the State of Finland during Committee's 91st session in June 2025.

The information presented in this document is in addition to the written submission and oral statement presented by the Human Rights Centre to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2022 for the examination of the report of Finland.

Should you have any further questions or need for additional information, do not hesitate to contact us at leena.leikas@humanrightscentre.fi.

The document can be published on the committee's website.

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¹ The Human Rights Centre represents the Finnish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in international NHRI cooperation and other international and European cooperation in human rights.

The NHRI comprises the Human Rights Centre, its pluralistic 39-member Human Rights Delegation, and the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The institution complies with the UN Paris Principles and the Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI) has accredited it with A-status in 2014 and 2019.

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Follow-up information relating to paragraph 20 (a) of the concluding observations

1. The Government mentions in its follow-up report a legislative reassessment taking place. As part of this process, a report by an expert on the needs to amend the criminal provision on agitation against a population group, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, was published in September 2024.² No further action seems to have taken place since. The report does not handle issues relating to gender or women. It concentrates mainly on agitation based on nationality, race and religion.
2. The report assesses which amendments to the Criminal Code are required by the EU Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia. In 2021, the European Commission initiated an infringement procedure against Finland for failing to implement the Framework Decision.
3. The report proposes that the provision on agitation against a population group should mention incitement to violence or hatred as one of the essential elements of the offence. Such acts are already punishable, but the regulation would be clarified in this respect. The report also proposes that acts against an individual would in future be punishable as agitation against a population group, while they are currently punishable as defamation.
4. Additionally, it is proposed that the expression 'defame or insult' used in the provision be replaced by the expression 'disparage'. In practice, the proposed amendments would not broaden the scope of punishable conduct, but the provision would be clearer than before. The amended provision would also fulfil the underlying international obligations.

² [Report on the Needs to Amend the Criminal Provision on Agitation against a Population Group \(in Finnish\)](#)

5. Violence against women remains at a very high level in the Finnish society.^{3 4} There is a multitude of specific studies drawn from the FRA-EIGE-material on more specific topics. These publications exist, for time being, only in Finnish.⁵
6. In addition to the high occurrence of violence, the phenomenon of anti-gender raises concern. They are not unrelated. Hatred and hate speech are increasingly aimed at women, including LGBTIQ+ persons, women with disabilities and women of ethnic minority groups, including Sami, and the speech at times also turns into acts of physical violence, not to mention psychological.
7. The phenomenon of anti-gender also appears in other ways, challenging equality and contributing to discrimination and racism more generally and widely in the society. Anti-gender and related racism is not always clearly identifiable. This is further fuelled by politicians, influencers on social media and even the media in discourse and actions where human rights are increasingly being disregarded for the greater good of economics and security. This is the case also in practises, in societal discourse, as well as in law drafting. The current securitisation of the society increases this development, especially with regard foreigners and other persons in the risk of marginalisation.
8. While Finland is increasingly international and multicultural, the language and vocabulary is changing towards propaganda and being disrespectful towards the “others”. The media are not sufficiently interfering or aiming at eradicating racism and harmful language in the society. On the contrary, many in high public positions, even at the governmental level, are condoning and glorifying speech and actions which are racist and disrespectful. This is also a global phenomenon.
9. Anti-gender related hate speech is also a labour protection issue: academia, political parties and media do not necessarily have structures to support employees who are targeted while doing their work. In particular freelance journalists are in a weak position. Especially women journalists encounter many forms of targeting, which sometimes results in silencing. Many experience fear of tackling certain subjects, such as, for example, immigration or integration of migrants, which eventually may narrow the range of topics that are dealt with in the media and discussed in the society.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 20 (b) of the concluding observations

10. The Government's submission on the legislative amendment of the Criminal Code rightly mentions that the amendment in question does not address

³ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/eu-gender_based_violence_survey_key_results.pdf

⁴ <https://stat.fi/en/publication/cln32gnj49hev0cutpmcsm4ko> (2023 information)

⁵ <https://stat.fi/tup/sukupuoolistunut-vakivalta/artikkelit-blogit.html>

gender-based hate speech or related actions. There have been no changes in that regard.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 20 (c) of the concluding observations

11. The Government's reply does not indicate changes nor information in this regard.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 22 (c) of the concluding observations

12. The current legislation and practise with regard to sterilisation is not in accordance with the CRPD, which is directly applicable legislation in Finland. Specifically Articles 12 (equal recognition and support to exercise legal capacity), 16 (duty to protect from violence) 17 (duty to protect the integrity), 23 (respect for family) and 25 (right to free and informed consent).
13. The Act on Disability Services and Assistance entered into force in January 2025, with a three year implementation period. Changes have already been introduced to the Act to save costs. Further cuts in funding are likely to have effects also on supported decision making as many service providers will not be able to provide services.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 24 (b) of the concluding observations

14. The legislation discontinuing mediation in cases involving domestic or intimate partner violence has entered into force in January 2025. While discontinuing mediation is a positive change, potential challenges remain.
15. There are currently serious cuts in funding both for the public services as well as private service providers, the division of labour between authorities is unclear or not defined, service paths for the victims are non-existing or unclear. Instead of being directed towards mediation the victim is in risk of falling in between services. Also, there are no guarantees that the police and prosecution authorities, while not recognising the violence, will make decisions not to proceed. This is also cost effective when all authorities are facing cuts to their funding.
16. With regard to violence against women, in January 2025 the Government published a statistical study on the progression of cases in criminal proceedings⁶, from a report of an offence from the police to a court. It is based on statistical data compiled by Statistics Finland.

⁶ [Progression of Cases of Violent Crime against Women in Criminal Proceedings \(in Finnish\)](#)

17. During the period from 2009 to 2022, the most significant changes took place after 2011, when petty assault in a close relationship was made subject to public prosecution. As a consequence, the number of cases referred for prosecution remained stable, but the number of reports of an offence withdrawn by injured parties and the number of cases where the injured party did not request punishment for the perpetrator declined.
18. The processing times of cases in the police became longer. By the end of 2022, a final judgment had been issued in approximately 50% of all cases of intimate partner violence reported by female victims in 2019. The most common punishment imposed in cases of domestic violence was a fine, while offences involving intimate partner violence were more seldom punished by fine.
19. In January 2025 the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman published an examination on 200 decisions made by prosecutors in 2022 where a person was suspected of an assault offence committed in a partnership or close relationship.⁷
20. Of those 200 a total of 118 concerned limiting the pre-trial investigation and 82 non-prosecution. The offence category was usually assault or minor assault. Almost 60 per cent of suspected cases of violence occurred in a partnership. In violence against a partner, 71 per cent of the suspects were men and a woman was the complaint party in 72 per cent of the cases.
21. Pre-trial investigation was restricted, or prosecution was usually waived for reasons of reasonableness or appropriateness. The suspected crime of violence was not considered very serious, it was reported that the parties to the offence had settled the matter with each other or participated in mediation, and the complaint party had no demands for punishment or claims for damages.
22. The report shows that in the decision-making practices of the police and the prosecutors, not enough attempts have been made to bring the perpetrator to criminal responsibility in cases of violence in close relationships and intimate relationships, and there have not been enough prosecutions.
23. According to the recommendations set out in the report, limiting pre-trial investigations and waiving charges should be considered with caution in the future. The intensification of the criminal process should be continued, and prosecution should be increased in close relationship violence and intimate partner violence. The importance given to the victim's opinion, agreement between the parties involved in the offence and mediation should also be reduced in the decision-making practices of the police and the prosecutors.
24. In March 2025 the Deputy Chancellor of Justice came to similar conclusions in two decisions. He stated that violence against women and domestic violence

⁷ [Limiting pre-trial investigation and waiving prosecution in close relationship violence \(in Finnish\)](#)

are structural human rights issues in Finland, the threat is not recognised and the cases not taken seriously. In the first case published then the police did not recognise the presence of a threat to violence despite years of complaints, which eventually resulted in the death of the women. In another case the police did not submit a report on the case of violence witnessed by them but left it to the victim to process, thus not fulfilling their legal duty. The Deputy Chancellor has repeatedly reprimanded especially the police on related issues.

25. *Summa summarum*, the cases of violence are not recognised, not taken seriously, are not processed fast enough and the sanctions are not always sufficiently dire. This is a continuous problem and despite many efforts, training and guidelines it still persists in the society.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 28 (a) of the concluding observations

26. According to the Gender Equality Act, state committees, advisory boards and other similar institutions, institutions for cooperation between wellbeing services counties, welfare associations and welfare regions, as well as municipal and inter-municipal cooperation institutions, with the exception of regional councils and municipal councils, must have at least 40 percent of both women and men, unless there is a special reason to the contrary. This was introduced already in 1995.
27. The gender quota applies to all municipal institutions, with the exception of councils, which are elected by general elections. According to section 30 of the Local Government Act, municipal institutions include, in addition to the council the municipal government and its divisions, committees or boards and their divisions and similar entities.
28. Similarly, any governmental working group is to have at least 40% of both women and men, and if that were not the case, it needs to be justified.
29. In municipality elections in 2025, there was a total of 4 530 989 eligible voters, out of which 50,8 % were women. A total of 1 319 331 women (57,3 % of voters) voted.
30. Gender quotas do not apply to electoral rolls. There was a total of 29 950 candidates, out of which 12 678 were women (42,3 %). In comparison, in 2021 there were 35 627 candidates, out of which women 14 147 (39,7%). More women candidates appear in bigger cities in comparison to smaller municipalities.
31. In 2025 a total of 8 586 persons were elected, out of which 3 856 (44,9 %) were women. In comparison, in 2021 there was a total of 8 859 persons elected, out of which 3 564 women (40,2 %), 2021 being the first year that women surpassed 40% in the municipal councils.

32. In 2025 in 67 of the 292 municipality councils (22,9 %) in mainland Finland (excluding Åland Islands) women reached over 50% majority. In previous elections in 2021 the majority was reached in only 29 municipalities.
33. However, there are rather huge differences between municipalities. In 2025 the most women elected to a city council was 73,4 % and the least 6,7 %.
34. The number of women in municipal councils has steadily risen from 10,7% in 1968 to 44,9 % in 2025.
35. There has not been discussion on quotas in this context on national or municipal level.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 28 (d) of the concluding observations

36. In its follow-up report, the Government gives a good account on the practical and historical reasons on why representation remains skewed in favour of men in decision-making positions in the Defence Forces. The primary root cause for inequality in the military stems from Finland's conscription system that is mandatory only for men. The entire system therefore remains inherently discriminatory in terms of gender.
37. This backdrop of systemic discrimination naturally looms large in all questions of inequality in the military, including those relating to women's chances to advance in their military careers. Universal male conscription functions as the *de facto* stepping stone for nearly all military careers and, consequently, the current system by nature remains one that perpetuates gender imbalance within the organisation of the Defence Forces, in favour of men.
38. The need to change the *status quo* by eradicating gender discrimination from the conscription system remains subject to a slowly increasing societal discussion, and it's prominently advocated especially among the younger population. The security environment in Finland and Europe has changed and the age groups of men are shrinking. As equality develops, younger generations have already questioned the civic duty that only applies to men and find it discriminatory. Also, there are many tasks in the society that could be handled by non-military trained personnel in times of crisis, such as various maintenance duties, medical services, protection of cultural heritage, for example.
39. The opinion shift towards gender equality in the military is reflected also in the political parties, where a majority already favours a reform of some kind to the male-based system of conscription. In May 2025 the Council for Gender Equality published a report titled "Military conscription and gender equality – Towards gender-neutral selective conscription". According to the report majority of parties support a gender-neutral conscription system, but the discussion often remains at the level of general principles. The discussion is further complicated by the diverse terminology related to conscription, its

various forms and alternatives. Nonetheless, the report points out that current times and developments suggest that the conscription system should be reviewed in the near future.

40. The Finnish Defence Forces have also shown openness to the idea of reforming the system, provided it can retain its current ethos of mandatory service and troop production.
41. The report also highlights the effects of NATO membership: more investments are expected from the defence administration in the future to mainstream the gender perspective.
42. It seems obvious that eradicating the current discriminatory conscription system in favour of some other, for example a gender-neutral solution, would serve to ameliorate inequality within the military in an organic fashion. Such a shift would reflect in all sectors of the military and would be aided by the already existing practices developed since the 1990s to incorporate women into the military system.
43. Some 5 % of women in any given age group take part in the women's voluntary military service. However, at the same time, women's participation in voluntary defence training under the auspices of the National Defence Training Association of Finland⁸ amounts to approximately 20% of all its annual participants of c. 26,000 persons. Women's National Emergency Preparedness Association⁹ has over 100.000 women in its member organisations and women continue to open doors to all previously male dominated security related organisations and training providers with force.
44. As the Defence Forces stand now, Finland needs to keep developing and continue its ongoing efforts to streamline the participation and representation of women. While assigning gender-specific quotas in decision-making positions may have merit, a more holistic overhaul to the system itself would yield far more robust results in terms of gender equality in all echelons of the military structure.

⁸ <https://mpk.fi/en/>

⁹ <https://naistenvalmiusliitto.fi/>