

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

Action plan 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Operating environment

The security situation in Europe is worrying. Finland joined NATO in 2023. Russia's unlawful war of aggression against Ukraine continues, making the future increasingly uncertain. Hybrid threats against Finland are being discussed. Key issues in supporting Ukraine include taking care of the needs of refugees, documenting war crimes, strengthening human rights actors, the rule of law and democracy as part of reconstruction and the accession process to the EU. European security threats are increased by the effects of the armed conflict in the Middle East, which also erode trust in the universality of human rights. This will be reflected, among other things, in the considerable tightening of immigration policies across Europe.

Human rights, the rule of law and democracy are being challenged in many ways, in Finland as well. A number of European countries have made changes that diminish the key structures of the rule of law. Governments' savings budgets have increased both social inequality and confrontation, also between different language groups. The independence of the courts has been undermined, and the operating conditions of human rights actors and civil society have been narrowed. Movements against women's rights are hindering the progress of equality. On the other hand, new deliberative democracy practices have been developed and introduced. What is also delightful is that efforts have been made to restore the rule of law, especially in Poland.

Strengthening of the resilience of society and the rule of law has started in Finland. The constitutional guarantees of the independence of the rule of law are being examined by a working group appointed by the Ministry of Justice. In Finland,

a debate with even some quite critical views has also emerged on the state of the supervision of the Finnish Constitution and legislative drafting, as well as the coordination of security issues and human rights obligations. Fundamental and human rights actors, such as the Human Rights Centre and the Human Rights Delegation, participate in this debate in accordance with their tasks. The comprehensive reform of the Emergency Powers Act is moving forward. The crisis preparedness of different actors is being developed to respond to the security threats of our time. Human rights actors and civil society play an important role in crisis situations. Human rights, the rule of law and democracy constitute the set of societal values on which security, crisis resilience and trust are built. Security and human rights are therefore not mutually exclusive: a safe society provides the preconditions for the implementation of fundamental and human rights, but a society that violates them is not safe.

Significant changes have taken place in the international and European human rights regulatory system. In 2022, the UN General Assembly declared the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment a human right. The growing environmental case-law of international, European and national courts plays a key role in the formation and promotion of environmental human rights. In 2024, the HRC published a review on climate change as a human rights issue. It highlights the need to take into account climate vulnerable groups such as financially disadvantaged women, older persons and persons with disabilities, migrants and indigenous peoples.

Human rights standards of artificial intelligence have been strengthened. The ratification process of the Council of Europe's Framework

Convention on Artificial Intelligence began in 2024. The EU AI Act will gradually become effective within three years. The application of human rights principles and assessing the impact of AI systems on human rights, the rule of law and democracy are at the focal point of European regulatory system. Artificial intelligence also offers opportunities for developing human rights work.

Changes in the operating environment require the Human Rights Centre to assess and develop its operations and competence needs. The HRC will strengthen its cooperation with new stakeholders and deepen its expertise with them. The HRC also strives to further promote the participation of human rights actors in the building of comprehensive security and human security. Assessing the impacts of security measures on the implementation of fundamental and human rights and complex impact assessments of AI systems require new capabilities. The HRC strives to strengthen the resilience of human rights actors by cooperating extensively at both national and European levels, taking into account the human rights issues brought about by NATO membership. In 2025, the HRC's international activities will be affected by Finland's role as the holder of both the Chairpersonship of the OSCE and the Presidency of the Nordic Council in 2025 and Finland's efforts to seek a seat in the UN Security Council for the period 2029-2030.

As part of the process of building up its capabilities, the HRC published a report on Finnish fundamental and human rights actors in 2022. The report examined the legislation regulating these institutions, their independence and autonomy from executive powers, and their powers and tasks. In 2023, the HRC published a report on human rights foresight, resilience and preparedness during transformations in society. The report offers tools for developing human rights actors' foresight capabilities and resilience as well as food for thought for taking human rights into account in national foresight. Foresight enables understanding the status of human rights and changes in them in the long term and considering how they should be developed and reformed.

1.2 The HRC's finances and personnel

The Human Rights Centre's budget for 2025 is EUR 1,168,000, of which payroll expenses comprise EUR 950,000 and operating expenditure EUR 218,000. The estimate takes into account the savings targets set by Parliament, which will be allocated to the HRC's operational expenditure in 2025. With regard to operating expenditure, the largest expense items are expert and research services, external parties' fees as well as travel, translation and interpretation services.

In 2025, the Human Rights Centre employs 10 people in a public-service employment relationship. The HRC is administratively in connection with the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman but operatively independent and impartial. The HRC's premises are located in Parliament buildings C and D. The HRC receives the premises, equipment and some services from the Parliamentary Office and the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

2. Monitoring and promotion of fundamental and human rights and the rule of law

2.1 State of fundamental and human rights in Finland

The HRC maintains a monitoring database on the state of fundamental and human rights and the rule of law in Finland. Based on monitoring data, the implementation of these rights is assessed and promoted in different ways. The resulting data is used in statements, reports drafted for international treaty monitoring bodies and as background material for other promotion work, such as training, communications and influencing.

Special priorities in the HRC's monitoring and promotion work are the statutory task of monitoring and promoting the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities and promoting the implementation of the rights of older persons in different ways.

Other key themes include climate change as a human rights issue and as part of the Arctic dimension and the realisation of the rights of indigenous peoples, different forms of domestic violence and their impact on the realisation of women's rights, media freedom and strengthening the protection of human rights defenders, and particularly topical issues of corporate human rights responsibility and human rights dimensions of artificial intelligence. The HRC takes account of the perspective of young people on the implementation of human rights, and the rights, accessibility and changes in the security environment of potentially vulnerable people in all its work.

Many themes are monitored not only at the national level but also as part of European and international cooperation, especially within the

framework of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the Council of Europe, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This brings significant synergies to the HRC's monitoring and promotion work.

2.2 Monitoring and promotion of the implementation of human rights conventions and the rule of law

The HRC monitors and shares information on international human rights conventions and treaties and mechanisms concerning the rule of law, general comments by treaty monitoring bodies, recommendations concerning Finland and the decisions made on complaints and appeals. The HRC maintains thematic summaries of recommendations issued to Finland by international treaty monitoring bodies, and the analysis of their impacts is being developed. Their utilisation will be promoted in legislative drafting and political decision-making.

In 2025, as broad operational entities, the HRC will continue to monitor and promote the implementation of international human rights treaties, strengthen the rule of law and in relation to the latter, in particular, issues related to access to rights and support for rule of law actors.

The periodic reporting processes of international human rights treaties provide an opportunity to comprehensively review shortcomings observed in the implementation of fundamental and human rights. The aim is to have a more com-

prehensive knowledge base for the processing of Government reports and better targeted recommendations for Finland.

During 2025, the HRC will actively participate in the periodic reporting processes of the UN and Council of Europe human rights treaties in different ways. Ongoing reporting cycles include the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the UN Convention against Torture (CAT) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the new Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), which entered into force in April 2023. The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), the Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, as well as the European Social Charter are in the active phase of their reporting cycles in the relevant committees. In addition, the European Commission against Racism and Discrimination (ECRI) will give its report based on its visit to Finland in 2024. In 2025, the Finnish Government will also issue a voluntary mid-term report in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council.

The HRC shares information on recommendations issued to Finland, general comments made by treaty monitoring bodies, and decisions on complaints and appeals, and makes use of these recommendations, comments and decisions in its monitoring and promotion work. As part of its communications, the HRC maintains thematic summaries of the recommendations, comments and decisions issued to Finland by international treaty monitoring bodies and strives to promote awareness of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' recommendation database.

In 2025, the HRC will also strive to support the participation of different actors in periodic reporting. To this end, the HRC will share information on agreements, reporting schedules, opportunities for participation and procedures. In addition to

developing training material on reporting processes in general, the HRC will provide targeted training on specific processes, if necessary.

The HRC promotes the implementation and effectiveness of the decisions on complaints and appeals by the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights and the UN Committees by means of, for example, drawing the attention of national enforcement authorities and international monitoring bodies to issues and raising debate on them.

As part of the implementation of the statement on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination issued by Petteri Orpo's Government in August 2023, the Government annually addresses the decisions, conclusions and recommendations issued to Finland by international human rights monitoring bodies and decides on any necessary measures. The HRC promotes awareness of the results of the Government's annual review and utilises them in its work with both the Human Rights Delegation and human rights organisations.

Supporting the rule of law, strengthening the rule of law actors and maintaining a democratic society are a key part of the HRC's work. To this end, the HRC regularly reviews the access of different groups of people to their rights and the sustainability of structures, promotes awareness of the rule of law treaties and mechanisms, and reports annually, for example, to the European Commission on the scope of action of human rights and rule of law actors.

2.3 Human rights training and promotion of education and research

The Human Rights Centre will continue to promote human rights education and training in different ways in 2025. During the year, the HRC will update its training materials, in particular as regards monitoring and reporting, to support the monitoring work of independent and impartial authorities and NGOs and to promote report-

ing on the implementation of the human rights treaties of the Council of Europe and the UN. In reporting training, the HRC will cooperate with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The HRC will continue its established cooperation with research institutes and researchers conducting research on fundamental and human rights and the rule of law. The HRC will participate, among other things, in the steering and stakeholder groups of research projects, take part in seminars and hearings, and make use of research results in its activities.

2.4 Corporate human rights responsibility

The HRC's tasks include promoting fundamental and human rights also in the private sector. The HRC works actively to strengthen the corporate human rights responsibility by, for example, providing training on the theme, participating in research projects on the topic and influencing the regulation on corporate responsibility.

During 2025, the HRC will influence the national implementation of the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive by participating in the national monitoring group set up for the implementation of the Directive. The aim is to ensure that human rights and current national human rights structures are taken into account in the work to an appropriate extent.

The HRC will continue the work started in 2021 to enhance corporate responsibility in the social welfare and healthcare sector, especially in companies providing housing services. In 2025, the HRC will organise a workshop on developing human rights responsibility with companies, key authorities and other actors in the field.

The HRC participates in the Corporate Responsibility 2025 research project of the Corporate Responsibility Network Fibs in an expert role and cooperates actively with the Corporate Responsibility Working Group of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), which supports the exchange of information and the dissemination of good practices.

2.5 Media freedom

The HRC monitors issues related to media freedom as part of its rule of law work. Media freedom - the prerequisites for free and responsible media activities and the diversity and accessibility of the media - is a significant part of a functioning rule of law system. Therefore, the HRC reports on the theme, for example, to the European Commission for its annual rule of law report. In 2025, media freedom will be one of the priorities of the ENNHRI Rule of Law Report. Media freedom is also one of the main themes of Finland's OSCE Chairpersonship.

Harassment of journalists and other public actors and hate speech against them, questioning the media and dissemination of disinformation in general are phenomena that need to be addressed by means of closer monitoring and increased prevention and combating measures. The HRC assesses and develops measures to support media freedom and combat hate speech and keeps these topics on the agenda, for example, through its Human Rights Delegation.

2.6 Human rights defenders and civil society

In Finland, the activities and room for manoeuvre of human rights organisations and NGOs in general have narrowed alarmingly in recent years, especially due to financial cuts. In 2025, the HRC will highlight the issue in its own advocacy work, for example, through the rule of law reporting and in cooperation with international human rights actors.

The Government of Finland Report on Human Rights Policy defines the protection of human rights defenders as one of the priorities of Finland's human rights policy. The HRC has monitored and influenced Finland's activities to protect human rights defenders by bringing good practices and examples of other countries' actions to the attention of the authorities and by influencing, for example, the development of the Foreign Service's guidelines on supporting human rights defenders and relevant practices, especially with regard to visas and the temporary protection mechanism. In 2025, the HRC will monitor the implementation of the pilot project of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' Human Rights Defenders Programme.

Through its GANHRI and ENNHRI networks, the HRC strives to actively influence the harmonisation of protection practices for human rights defenders, especially at the EU level. This work will continue in 2025 in dialogue with key stakeholders.

3. Rights of older people, persons with disabilities and other potentially vulnerable groups

3.1 Strengthening the legal perspective and inclusion

Strengthening the legal perspective and inclusion is a key objective in the work carried out by the HRC. The HRC pays particular and cross-cutting attention to challenges in the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities of different ages, older persons and other potentially vulnerable groups. In 2025, the HRC will monitor the impact of the narrowing of the independent decision-making power of wellbeing services counties on the availability and general situation of services for disadvantaged groups.

During 2025, the HRC will promote compliance of legislation and other regulation with fundamental and human rights, including by taking initiatives and drawing up statements. For the same purpose, the HRC will investigate the realisation of rights in wellbeing services counties, municipalities and business activities. In addition to the realisation of the right to self-determination, it will pay particular attention to access to services.

The HRC will continue its efforts to raise awareness of the fundamental and human rights of persons with disabilities and older persons, especially their right to self-determination and ways to support it. The HRC monitors and promotes the full inclusion of persons with disabilities and older people in decision-making that concerns them. In cooperation with The Disability Rights Committee (VIOK) and the Section on the Rights of Older Persons (IJA), the HRC develops new means and methods to increase inclusion in general and in the activities of the Human Rights Centre, the Human Rights Delegation and the Parliamentary Ombudsman in particular.

3.2 Research data on the rights of persons with disabilities and older people

Establishing a stronger and a more robust knowledge base requires research and identifying existing information gaps. In 2025, the HRC will continue its cooperation with experts, researchers, research institutes and research communities to promote legal discourse, research and utilisation of research data related to the rights of persons with disabilities and older people.

The HRC will systematise its monitoring of the rights of persons with disabilities, older people and other potentially vulnerable groups and analyse the information collected through monitoring. In this context, it aims to identify possible information gaps to be able to launch further studies and influence measures to fill the gaps.

3.3 Monitoring and promoting the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the development of international regulation concerning older people

In addition to monitoring national efforts, the HRC will monitor the work carried out internationally and within the EU as regards the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the rights of older persons. The HRC will participate in the various stages of the periodic reporting of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and involve VIOK and other stakeholders in the preparation process. The country report on Finland will be examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2025.

The HRC will continue its cooperation with Heba Hagrass, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.

In 2025, the HRC will continue to produce translations of the general comments by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to share information about the comments. It will participate in international cooperation on the rights of older people, not only with the UN, but also with the Council of Europe, the EU and ENNHRI. It will also continue its cooperation with Claudia Mahler, UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons.

During 2025, the HRC will highlight the fundamental and human rights of persons with disabilities and older people during Finland's Presidency of the Nordic Council and the Chairpersonship of the OSCE.

4. Communication and advocacy as means of promoting human rights

4.1 Strengthening the fundamental and human rights perspective

In 2025, the most common focus areas of advocacy will include strengthening the fundamental and human rights perspective in the implementation of the Government Programme and legislative projects, influencing the implementation of the action plan concerning the Government's statement on equality, gender equality and non-discrimination, influencing the content of the forthcoming action plan on fundamental and human rights and promoting the implementation of recommendations received by Finland from international treaty monitoring bodies.

4.2 Targeting and systematising communication and influence

In 2025, the HRC will strengthen its communication and advocacy processes and strategic planning. It will continue to develop the monitoring of its communications and advocacy work to assess and promote the impact of the work.

The HRC will promote its stakeholder work by, for example, mapping new target groups and developing the work of the Human Rights Delegation. It will further develop its media relations, for example with journalists accredited to Parliament. Like in previous years, the HRC will utilise its location and provide Parliament with information on topical fundamental and human rights issues and continue its cooperation with, for example, Parliament's democracy education function and International Department. During 2025, the HRC will strengthen its EU expertise.

4.3 Developing communications

In 2025, the HRC will launch an extensive overall reform of its website and develop its digital communication channels in particular. It will also continue to develop the staff's competence in communications and advocacy work through various training programmes, for example.

4.4 Upcoming events and publications

The HRC will participate in organising the Council of Europe's Human Rights Day in May 2025. The Young Experts Programme will organise a human rights event for young adults and prepare a final report of its second programme period to be published at the end of 2025.

5. Resilience and human rights foresight

The HRC monitors changes in the operating environment and assesses the human rights impacts of megatrends. It thus aims to strengthen resilience and preparedness and define priorities and competence development needs. In this strategic foresight, the centre will utilise not only its report on human rights foresight, resilience and preparedness but also its report on fundamental and human rights actors as well as OSCE/ODIHR tools for building the organisational resilience of national human rights institutions and identifying threats.

In 2025, the HRC will continue to strengthen resilience as part of the cooperation programme of ENNHRI and ODIHR and by means of deepening crisis preparedness. The HRC will examine the possibilities of sharing information and tools for developing resilience also to other fundamental and human rights actors in connection with the activities of the Human Rights Delegation. It will promote foresight and its inclusion in human rights work and participate in the activities of the national foresight network, the Government's strategic foresight work and the participatory foresight activities of both Sitra and the Deaconess Institute.

The HRC will participate in the development of human rights foresight at the European and global levels. During 2025, the centre will particularly participate in the evaluation of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights' strategic foresight guidelines and the finalisation of its reference scenarios as well as in the monitoring of the Future of Rights and Governance programme of the University of New York.

6. Young Experts Programme

In 2022, the HRC launched the Young Experts Programme, which selects two younger experts at a time for a two-year public-service employment relationship to develop their own fundamental and human rights competence. The second programme period began in December 2023 and will end in November 2025. During this programme period, the aim is to integrate the perspective of young people's rights into the HRC's activities in a more cross-cutting manner. In addition to the youth programme's own activities, younger experts also participate in other expert work at the HRC.

In 2025, the programme will further strengthen the competence of younger experts selected for the Young Experts Programme on fundamental and human rights, the human rights field and the activities of the HRC. The programme highlights young people's perspectives on human rights issues, for example, in statements, events, public debate, as well as on Instagram. The programme pays particular attention to

the deepening segregation of young people. In 2025, the programme's younger experts will organise meetings for young people to discuss human rights from the perspective of young people. They will also collect information to promote young people's human rights in cooperation with other human rights actors. In addition, younger experts will be involved in organising training on human rights and the rule of law tailored for different groups.

The Young Experts Programme will organise a human rights event for young adults and prepare a final report of its second programme period to be published at the end of 2025. In 2025, the HRC will start recruiting experts for the third period of the programme.

7. The Human Rights Delegation's operation

The Human Rights Delegation is a national co-operation body of the Human Rights Centre. The four-year mandate of the current fourth delegation began in April 2024. The delegation includes 39 experts from different areas of human rights and society.

The delegation adopts its own action plan. During 2025, the delegation will prepare human rights-themed fact sheets for a new series of publications on the Human Rights Centre's website. It will deepen its competences and discuss, among other things, topical rule of law issues, human rights in the EU and Europe in a larger extent, the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities and older persons in Finland, as well as the human rights dimensions of artificial intelligence and climate change. If necessary, the delegation may give comments and take initiatives on themes of its choice to influence national human rights development.

The Delegation also approves the HRC's action plan and annual report each year.

8. Participation in international and European cooperation

8.1 International and European cooperation

As a rule, the Finnish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) is represented by the HRC in international and European cooperation. Finnish NHRI has the highest A status granted by GANHRI, giving the NHRI the right to participate and speak in ENNHRI, GANHRI and the UN Human Rights Council and its various human rights institutions and processes. The HRC represents the Finnish National Human Rights Institution at both the ENNHRI and GANHRI general assemblies, where decisions on the operation, administration and finances of the networks are made.

The right to speak and participate in the UN Human Rights Council will be used as far as possible on themes of key interest to the HRC. Whether the NHRI can retain its A status will be reviewed in the regular reassessment process in 2025.

The HRC will continue its active participation in ENNHRI activities. As in previous years, the HRC will submit a report on the rule of law situation in Finland to ENNHRI at the beginning of the year. ENNHRI compiles the reports of its members and forwards them to the European Commission. After having consulted its members, ENNHRI has selected the following themes for the 2025 report: human rights defenders and the state of civil society, media freedom and justice systems. In addition, throughout the year the HRC will participate in the preparation of ENNHRI's new strategy.

Extensive participation in ENNHRI working groups will also be continued. In addition, an expert from the HRC chairs the ENNHRI Legal Working Group. In the working group, member institutions exchange experiences and promote their competence in legal issues. Among other things, the working group carries out third-party interventions on various themes for the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights and participates in the work of different working groups of the Council of Europe.

The HRC is also a member of the ENNHRI working groups on rights of older persons and persons with disabilities, economic, social and cultural rights, corporate human rights responsibility, artificial intelligence, climate crisis and migration, and the ENNHRI Expert Group on NHRI Standards. In addition, the HRC monitors the work of the working group on fundamental and human rights communications. By participating in the working groups, the HRC receives information on the activities of other national human rights institutions in different themes and on opportunities to influence European human rights mechanisms. The global network GANHRI has also set up a working group on indigenous rights, in which the HRC is involved in together with other Nordic institutions.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the various institutions of the Council of Europe and the UN will also remain key partners. The HRC provides FRA with information on different human rights themes and participates in events organised by it. It will also continue to participate in the work of the ODIHR network for Resilience Focal Points and monitor Finland's OSCE Chairmanship in 2025. Cooperation with the Council of Europe and the UN institutions mainly takes place through periodic reporting and through ENNHRI and GANHRI.

8.2 Accreditation

Based on the Paris Principles, the accreditation status of NHRIs is assessed every five years by the GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA). The next assessment of the Finnish National Human Rights Institution will take place in March 2025. The aim is for the Finnish National Human Rights Institution to retain its A status.

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