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HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE



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Action Plan 2023

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE ACTION PLAN 2023

**Approved by the Human Rights Delegation meeting
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Introduction

Operating environment

The Human Rights Centre's action and financial plan for 2023–2026 describes changes in the operating environment and the development and priorities of the HRC's operations.

Some particular changes in the operating environment include the effects of rapid technological development, the challenges to fundamental and human rights and the rule of law in Europe and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. A new factor included in the plan is a description of the significant change in our security environment.

In February 2022, the security environment in Europe changed in a rapid and dramatic way following Russia's attack in Ukraine. In the spring, Finland applied for NATO membership alongside Sweden. In this current situation, security and crisis preparedness are strongly highlighted in all official activities and political discourse. Fundamental and human rights actors are also required to take increased account of security issues and their human rights impacts. Foresight and preparation must be factored in when discussing human rights and the rule of law.

The resilience of society must be strengthened by all means, which is a task where independent and impartial human rights authorities and civil society play an important role. Safeguarding human rights is part of comprehensive security. In exceptional situations, fundamental and human rights may be restricted or deviated from under certain conditions. However, there are also absolute human rights that must be honoured in all circumstances, even when carrying out national security.

An independent and effective judicial system and good governance are guarantees for the fulfilment of the rule of law and a secure society. In addition, there is a need for independent fundamental and human rights actors that are as accessible as possible and have clearly defined scopes of competence.

Human Rights Centre

The Human Rights Centre's budget for 2023 is EUR 1,072,000, of which payroll expenses comprise EUR 851,000 and operating expenditure EUR 221,000. The 2023 budget includes an appropriation for salary expenditure for the establishment of a new permanent communications post. recruitment will begin immediately at the beginning of the year. With regard to operating expenditure, the largest expense items are expert research services, external parties' fees as well as travel, translation and interpretation services.

In 2023, the HRC has 10 person-years of which eight posts are permanent (the director, six expert officials and an administrative assistant) and two fixed-term employment contracts for young experts. If necessary, experts may also be recruited for fixed-term employment relationships or by commission.

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 premises include desks for nine employees. The HRC receives the premises, equipment and some services from the Parliamentary Office and the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

The main lines of action of the Human Rights Centre

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

State of fundamental and human rights in Finland

The HRC develops and maintains its own up-to-date monitoring database on the state of fundamental and human rights and the rule of law in Finland in general and especially concerning the rights of persons with disabilities and other themes selected as priorities. A monitoring tool (LEMPI) is used to assist in this work. Monitoring is carried out by all human rights experts at the Centre in accordance with the agreed division of labour. The monitoring team coordinates monitoring and reporting.

Based on the gathered information, the implementation of human rights in Finland is assessed and efforts are made to promote the implementation of human rights in various ways. Monitoring data is utilised in the annual report, in reports drafted for international convention monitoring bodies, in statements and as background material for other work.

The HRC monitors new and emerging fundamental and human rights themes. Previous focus areas, such as the human rights impacts of climate change, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, are complemented with topical human rights issues related to security. These matters involve cooperation with other national actors, and also internationally with bodies such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The review will include the obligations and opportu-

nities brought about by the NATO membership process and its impacts on Finnish human rights policies.

The HRC conducts separate reviews on current and important topics:

- Early 2023 will see the publication of a report on case law concerning the circumvention of entry provisions. The report aims to contribute to the extensive consideration of fundamental and human rights and the rule of law in the comprehensive reform of the Aliens Act.
- A report on the anticipation and resilience of human rights will be published in April. The report will rely on the expertise of the HRC as well as the Human Rights Delegation of the Human Rights Centre and external experts.
- A report on the human rights impacts of climate change will be completed towards the end of the year.

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 convention monitoring bodies, and recommendations, complaints and decisions concerning Finland. The HRC prepares and keeps up-to-date recommendation summaries on various themes and analyses the impact of the recommendations in Finland. For example, a number of decisions by the European Committee of Social Rights have been examined multiple times already. In addition to various committees, the HRC particularly keeps track of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and their implementation.

The implementation and effectiveness of the recommendations and decisions will be strengthened by drawing the attention of national enforcement authorities and international supervisory authorities to related issues and by stimulating discussion among political decision-makers.

The HRC actively participates in the periodic reporting processes of the UN and the Council of Europe, provides information on the recommendations Finland receives and makes use of them in its monitoring work. During 2023:

- The Government will report on the adoption of recommendations received in 2022 in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council.
- The HRC will give an address in connection with the adoption of the final report of Finland's UPR at the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council.
- The monitoring of the implementation of the UPR recommendations received by Finland will be launched.

- Government reports on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) will be under committee consideration.
- The reporting cycles of several Council of Europe human rights conventions will also be at an active stage.

The HRC encourages independent and impartial national fundamental and human rights authorities and NGOs to participate in international periodic reporting in order to generate a more comprehensive knowledge base for the reporting process and thus more targeted recommendations for Finland. The Centre provides information on reporting schedules and procedures, prepares training materials on reporting and offers targeted training.

Human rights training and promotion of education and research

In 2023, training material on legal remedies will be produced, drawing on the HRC's report on national fundamental and human rights actors (2022). The HRC lecture series will be updated and training on indigenous people's rights will be published. In addition, a training package on monitoring will be prepared to support the monitoring work of independent and impartial authorities and NGOs.

The HRC will continue its cooperation with research institutes and researchers conducting research on fundamental and human rights and the rule of law. Among other things, the Centre will participate in steering and stakeholder groups of research projects, take part in seminars and hearings, make use of the research results in its activities and forward the results to parties who would benefit from them. In spring 2023, the HRC will participate in an expert role in a survey of the corporate responsibility of Finnish companies conducted by the corporate responsibility network FIBS and Fairtrade.

2. Communication and advocacy as a means of promoting human rights

The most important advocacy of the year will be focused on the new Government Programme to ensure that it takes account of fundamental and human rights comprehensively. One of the spearheads of this advocacy work is the inclusion of the recommendations in the HRC report on fundamental and human rights actors (2022) in the Government Programme, especially the recommendations concerning the reinforcement of the HRC and the Finnish National Human Rights Institution.

- Strengthening the Centre's communications and advocacy by recruiting a permanent communications expert to the communications and advocacy team.
- Developing the processes of communication and advocacy and planning communications and advocacy work from the start in all activities. Further developing the monitoring of communications and advocacy to assess and promote the impact of the HRC's work.
- Using the survey conducted in 2022 for developing staff communication skills and competence by organising presentation training, media training and Timeout training etc. Initiating dialogues on topical human rights issues with the Timeout method.
- Focusing on the approachability, accessibility and availability of communications to reach as many different target groups as possible.
- Developing targeted communications for young people based on experience gained from the Young Expert Programme. Also directing communications at actors responsible for security, among other things.
- Utilising the HRC's location by providing targeted information to the Parliament on current fundamental and human rights issues and raising awareness in the Parliament of the HRC's work and human rights.

Events organised in 2023:

- In the spring, a workshop will be organised for the Human Rights Delegation based on an upcoming report on the anticipation and resilience of human rights.
- The Council of Europe's Human Rights Day will be organised in Turku on 4 May 2023 in cooperation with the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the City of Turku, Åbo Akademi Institute for Human Rights and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.
- A day-long human rights event for young people will be organised in late spring to highlight different human rights issues that interest young people.
- In June, a seminar will be organised with the Center of Law and Welfare of the University of Eastern Finland on research on vulnerable people and related research methods that improve involvement.

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

The National Human Rights Institution of Finland (HRC, its Human Rights Delegation and the Parliamentary Ombudsman) has been assigned the task of promoting, safeguarding and monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in accordance with the statutory tasks of each body.

In spring 2019, work began at the HRC to promote the rights of older persons as its own priority area. In addition, the implementation of the rights of other vulnerable groups and people will be monitored. These include psychiatric patients and children in child welfare services.

Strengthening the legal perspective

- Raising awareness of the fundamental and human rights of persons with disabilities and older people, particularly the right to self-determination
 - by utilising feedback and other observations to develop the tool created by the HRC for strengthening the right to self-determination of persons with disabilities
 - by disseminating information on the right to self-determination of older people by sharing information about new online content related to this topic and cooperating with operators such as the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.
- Raising awareness of the rights of older people belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples by sharing information about new online content about their rights and by working with organisations and other operators.

- Strengthening compliance with the fundamental and human rights of legislation and other regulation, and making initiatives and statements to develop them. Participating as an expert in the monitoring group for strengthening the customer's and patient's right to self-determination.
- Investigating wellbeing services counties' plans on how to take the rights of older people into account by sending a survey based on guidelines such as the recommendations issued by the UN expert on older people's rights.
- Assessing alternatives for further measures based on the report on corporate responsibility in the care sector.

Strengthening involvement

- Monitoring and promoting the full involvement of persons with disabilities and older people in decision-making that concerns them.
- Developing new approaches to increase involvement in cooperation with the Disability Rights Committee (VIOK) and the Division for the Rights of Older Persons (IJA).
- Including VIOK and IJA in the activities of the HRC and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, and linking VIOK's work more closely to the activities of the Human Rights Delegation.

Monitoring and strengthening the knowledge base of disability research and older people's rights

- Clarifying the role of the HRC and the best opportunities for exerting influence in the research field.
- Promoting disability research and data collection matching the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in cooperation with research institutes and organisations.
- Developing and systematising the HRC's monitoring of the rights of persons with disabilities, older people and other potentially vulnerable groups and analysing the information collected through monitoring. Identifying the information gaps in monitoring, and planning means of influence and reports to cover them.
- Promoting the legal debate, research and the utilisation of research data related to the rights of older people by cooperating with different research institutes and researchers. Participating in a research project on the rights of older people with the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy (Krimo), the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Tampere. Participating in the SOLDEX project steering group of the University of Eastern Finland. The project studies the social exclusion of older people in home care.
- Including diversity in the monitoring and promotion of the realisation of rights with reference to groups such as the Sámi, the Roma, foreign-language speakers and immigrants, sexual and gender minorities and the different types of multivariate discrimination.

- Closely cooperating with the Parliamentary Ombudsman in particular and also with the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Older Persons to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of older persons.

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

- Attending the UN Conference of States Parties to the CRPD in New York in June 2023.
- Preparing a statement for the Pre-Sessional Working Group of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in autumn 2023. This process will include the Disability Rights Committee (VIOK) and other stakeholders.
- Having some of the general comments of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the CRPD translated and sharing information about them.
- Taking part in the annual meeting of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) in April. Continuing cooperation with the UN expert on older people's rights, Claudia Mahler. Sharing information about Ms. Mahler's report on Finland, for example by organising a round table for authorities and the organisations and researchers that provided information for the report.

4. Young Expert Programme

The Young Expert Programme was launched in 2022, with two young experts recruited and employed for 18 months to develop their competence in fundamental and human rights. The programme has been successful in significantly highlighting young people's perspective in the activities of the Centre. In addition to focusing on fundamental and human rights competence, different human rights themes and a younger perspective, the first round of the programme has emphasised the rights of persons with disabilities and communication in particular.

In 2023, the Young Expert Programme will:

- Boost the visibility of human rights issues that interest young people, especially on Instagram, but also on other social media platforms and in public discourse. Carry out small-scale communication campaigns on human rights themes that interest young people.
- Organise meetings with young people to discuss human rights from their perspective. The aim of the meetings is to gather information on what human rights issues young people can perceive and what they would like from human rights actors and political decision-makers.
- Compile a review of young people and human rights on the basis of the first Young Expert Programme period. The review will examine the information accumulated during the period on young people's human rights status and their views on human rights, and it will examine more closely the participation of young people in human rights discussions and how these themes could be strengthened in the future in the operations of the HRC and in general.
- Recruit three younger experts to the next Young Expert Programme starting in autumn 2023.

5. The Human Rights Delegation's activities and other cooperation

The Human Rights Delegation is a national cooperation body of the Human Rights Centre. The current delegation is appointed for 2020-2024. The delegation will meet about four times in 2023. In addition to cooperating with the Human Rights Delegation, the Centre works closely with several national and international actors.

- Developing the operation of the Human Rights Delegation to make it more inclusive, conversational and effective, and supporting the implementation of its statutory tasks. The HRC's action plan and annual report will be presented to the delegation for approval.
- Preparing and presenting carefully justified statements on topical fundamental and human rights issues for the Human Rights Delegation's approval.
- Promoting the implementation of the rule of law and fundamental and human rights during the spring 2023 parliamentary elections and subsequent government programme negotiations by providing up-to-date research-based information and recommendations.
- Cooperating systematically to monitor and promote fundamental and human rights in Finland, also taking into account the regional and local levels. Making a stakeholder analysis to further develop and plan effective stakeholder cooperation.
- Utilising the HRC's 2022 report on independent fundamental and human rights authorities to develop cooperation among them.
- Cooperating with bodies such as the Rule of Law Centre and the Crisis Management Centre on human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

6. Participation in international and European cooperation

As a rule, the Finnish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) is represented by the HRC in international and European cooperation as well as international forums. Finland's NHRI has the highest A-status granted by GANHRI (Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions) and the UN, giving the Finnish NHRI the right to participate and speak in the UN Human Rights Council and its various human rights institutions and processes. The HRC is also active in ENNHRI (European Network of National Human Rights Institutions) and GANHRI.

- Finland's membership of the UN Human Rights Council that started in 2022 is a central forum for Finland's policies on international human rights. The HRC monitors the agenda of the sessions of the Human Rights Council and the activities of Finland in the Council and actively participates in the operations of the Human Rights Council as a representative of the NHRI.
- As one focus area of monitoring and exerting influence on international human rights policy, continuing to monitor the implementation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' guidelines on human rights defenders and promoting their effective utilisation and the development of support for defenders based on the opinion of the Human Rights Delegation. Monitoring the progress of the preparation of the humanitarian visa.
- Monitoring Finland's action on human rights defenders in the UN Human Rights Council as well as in the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the EU.
- Since March 2022, the Director of the Human Rights Centre has served as the Chair of ENNHRI's Board of Directors and as a member of GANHRI's Board of Directors. The Chair is responsible for the strategic management of the network and acts as the network's main representative in international and European forums.
- An expert from the HRC leads the ENNHRI Legal Working Group, in which member institutions exchange experiences and promote their competence in legal matters. Among other things, the working group will provide the European Court of Human Rights with comparative information on third-party interventions.
- The HRC is active in the ENNHRI working groups on older people, people with disabilities, and corporate human rights responsibility. It monitors the work of working groups focused on immigration, climate and environmental issues, and communications on fundamental and human rights.

- The HRC will continue its regional and bilateral cooperation with other NHRIs, including Nordic and Baltic ones. In cooperation with ENNHRI, the HRC will also support national institutions in difficult situations, such as the institutions in Ukraine and Kosovo.
- The HRC will continue cooperation with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) to strengthen the fundamental rights dimension and the rule of law as well as to promote the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights at national level.
- The HRC will also continue close cooperation with the EU, the Council of Europe, the UN and the OSCE bodies working on human rights and the rule of law, both bilaterally and as a member of ENNHRI and GANHRI.

International events in 2023:

- Annual meeting of GANHRI in Geneva on 14-16 March and in connection with it the ENNHRI General Assembly.
- GANHRI International Conference (themed 'prevention of torture') at the turn of October and November.
- ENNHRI General Assembly in November.
- events related to ENNHRI's 10th anniversary and the 30th anniversary of the Paris Principles.

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FI-00102 Eduskunta, Helsinki, Finland
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