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HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE



# HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

## Action plan 2024

**HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE**  
**Action plan 2024**

**Approved by the Human Rights Delegation on 11 December 2023**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Monitoring and promotion of fundamental and human rights and the rule of law</b>	<b>6</b>
State of fundamental and human rights in Finland	6
Monitoring and promotion of the implementation of human rights conventions and the rule of law	6
Human rights training and promotion of education and research	7
<b>2. Rights of older people, persons with disabilities and other potentially vulnerable groups</b>	<b>8</b>
Strengthening the legal perspective and inclusion	8
Research data on the rights of persons with disabilities and older people	8
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	9
<b>3. Communication and advocacy as means of promoting human rights</b>	<b>10</b>
Strengthening the fundamental and human rights perspective	10
Targeting and systematising communication and influence	10
Developing the HRC's communications	10
Upcoming events and publications	11
<b>4. Human rights foresight and resilience</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Young Experts Programme</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Operation of the Human Rights Delegation</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>7. Participation in international and European cooperation</b>	<b>15</b>
International and European cooperation	15
Accreditation	16

## Introduction

### Operating environment

*The Human Rights Centre's action and financial plan for 2024–2027 comprehensively describes changes in the operating environment and the development and priorities of the HRC's operations.*

In April 2023, Finland joined NATO in a concerning security situation. Russia's unlawful war of aggression against Ukraine has become prolonged, making the future increasingly uncertain. Documenting war crimes, receiving refugees, supporting human rights actors, strengthening the rule of law and democracy as part of reconstruction, and the process of joining the EU will be key considerations in supporting Ukraine in the coming years. The wider impact of the military conflict in Israel and its neighbouring regions increases security threats in Europe. Finland is also facing hybrid threats.

Human rights, the rule of law and democracy are being challenged in many ways. A number of European countries have made changes that weaken the key structures of the rule of law. The independence of the courts has been weakened and the operating conditions of human rights actors and civil society have been narrowed. On the other hand, new methods for deliberative democracy have been developed and introduced.

The state of the rule of law in Finland is still good in international and European comparisons, but there is reason to continue discussing the state of the rule of law and the importance of maintaining it for the security and functioning of society and the implementation of fundamental and human rights.

The resilience of society must be strengthened by all means. In Finland, the overall reform of the Emergency Powers Act is progressing, and the crisis preparedness of different actors is being strengthened with the help of lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to

official preparedness measures, human rights actors and civil society play an important role in crisis situations. Human rights, the rule of law and democracy form the fundamental societal values on which security, crisis resilience and trust are built.

There is a risk that the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights in Finland will become further deteriorated. The global economic crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine has led to a sharp increase in living costs. Many of the cuts planned and partly already implemented by the Government are targeted at people who are already in a vulnerable position. Both the UN and the Council of Europe have already called Finland's attention to issues such as the inadequate level of social security. Racism, hate speech and discrimination undermine the implementation of human rights for ethnic minorities, the Sámi, the Roma and persons with disabilities and makes it difficult for members of these groups to participate in society and decision-making.

Significant changes are taking 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 Council of Europe and the European Union have accelerated their preparation of human rights standards concerning artificial intelligence and its use, and results are expected in 2024. The broad application of human rights principles and assessing the impact of AI systems on human rights, the rule of law, democracy and the environment are at the focal point of European regulatory proposals. Artificial intelligence also offers opportunities for developing human rights work.

Changes in the operating environment require the Human Rights Centre to continuously assess and develop its operations and competence needs. Cooperation and expertise will

be developed together with new stakeholders. The role of human rights actors in building comprehensive security and human security will be promoted. Multifaceted impact assessments of fundamental and human rights require new capabilities. The resilience of human rights actors must be strengthened through extensive cooperation at both national and European level.

As part of the process of building up capabilities, the HRC published a report on Finnish fundamental and human rights actors in 2022<sup>1</sup>. The report examined the legislation regulating these institutions, their independence and autonomy from executive powers, and their powers and tasks. Important perspective was provided on clarity and efficiency especially in terms of individuals' legal protection, as well as on the institutions' ability to take action in the event of crises.

In recent years, in the midst of the uncertainties caused by overlapping crises, central government has increasingly introduced proactive operating methods. In November 2023, the HRC published an extensive report on foresight with a particular focus on human rights foresight. The HRC strives for strategic foresight by monitoring changes in the operating environment, planning its activities over the long term and defining priorities and competence development needs. Foresight enables understanding the status and situation of human rights in the long term and considering how they should be developed and reformed.

## The HRC's finances and personnel

The Human Rights Centre's budget for 2024 is EUR 1,171,000, of which payroll expenses comprise EUR 950,000 and operating expenditure EUR 221,000. The 2024 budget includes an appropriation for the salary expenditure of a young expert. 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 2024, the Human Rights Centre employs 11 people in a public-service employment relationship. If necessary, experts may also be recruited for fixed-term employment relationships or by commission.

The HRC functions administratively in connection with the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman but is 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.

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1 Report on Finnish fundamental and human rights actors (2022, in Finnish). <https://bin.yhdistysvain.fi/1586428/ZmHhTqfJ5NNqXD4SoWlz0X-c87k/IOK%20SELVITYS%20KANSALLISISTA%20PIO-TOIMIJOISTA%202022%20FI.pdf>

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

## State of fundamental and human rights in Finland

The HRC maintains an 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 older persons, in addition to 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 HRC in accordance with the agreed division of labour.

- Based on monitoring data, the realisation of rights in Finland 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 advocacy.

The HRC strives to monitor and promote topical human rights themes, and international reporting processes offer an opportunity to highlight shortcomings in the implementation of fundamental and human rights comprehensively. Many themes, especially newer ones, will be monitored as part of European cooperation (with ENNHRI, the Council of Europe and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights), which will generate significant synergies for the HRC's monitoring and promotion work.

As for wider-ranging themes, the HRC will continue to promote the implementation of international human rights conventions, strengthen the rule of law - with a particular focus on issues related to access to rights - and strengthen human rights education and training. A particular emphasis will be on the statutory task of monitoring and promoting the rights of persons with

disabilities and promoting the realisation of rights of older persons.

The rights of indigenous peoples, the impacts of domestic violence on the realisation of the rights of different persons and groups, media freedom, strengthening the protection of human rights defenders, and corporate human rights responsibility are also constant themes in the work of the HRC, and related systematic monitoring and promotion work will be carried out as necessary. Cross-cutting themes in the work include rights and accessibility for potentially vulnerable people, considerations related to artificial intelligence and digitalisation, the perspective of young people's rights, changes in the security environment, and the human rights impacts of the climate crisis.

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

The HRC 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. 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 August 2023, the Government issued a statement on measures to promote equality, gender equality and non-discrimination, stating that the Government will annually address the decisions, conclusions and recommendations issued to Finland by international human rights monitoring bodies and decide on any necessary measures. The implementation of this annual review by the Government will be promoted and utilised in future cooperation with the Human Rights Delegation and human rights organisations.

- The HRC will participate actively in the periodic reporting processes of human rights conventions of the UN and the Council of Europe, provide information on the recommendations Finland receives and make use of them in its monitoring work.
- The national execution of decisions by the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights has been constantly delayed. The HRC will promote the execution and effectiveness of decisions, for example by drawing the attention of national enforcement authorities and international monitoring bodies to issues and by stimulating related discourse.
- In 2024, the HRC will actively participate in periodic reporting in different ways. There are several ongoing reporting cycles, for example on 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). The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) and the Istanbul Convention against Violence against Women, as well as the European Social Charter, are being assessed with the relevant committees. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) will carry out a country visit to Finland in 2024.
- The HRC will support the participation of different actors in international periodic reporting. The aim is to have a more comprehensive knowledge base for the processing of Government reports and better targeted recommendations for Finland. The HRC will provide information

on reporting schedules and procedures, prepare training materials on reporting and, if necessary, offer targeted training.

- The HRC will monitor the operating conditions of human rights actors in Finland and collect information on the state of human rights defenders, for example for the annual Rule of Law Report of the European Commission.

### Human rights training and promotion of education and research

The promotion of human rights education and training will continue in different ways in 2024.

- During this year, the HRC's lecture series will be updated, especially with regard to the UN, and a training package will be published on monitoring to support the monitoring work of independent and impartial authorities and NGOs and to promote reporting on the implementation of the human rights conventions of the Council of Europe and the UN.
- The HRC will also continue its well-established cooperation with research institutes and researchers conducting research on fundamental and human rights and the rule of law. The HRC's involvement will include participating in the steering and stakeholder groups of research projects, taking part in seminars and hearings, making use of research results in its activities and communicating said results to parties who would benefit from them.
- Follow-up measures will be evaluated and planned based on the results of the anti-Semitism study that will be published in March (see publications and events in section 3), for example in relation to teaching about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

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

### Strengthening the legal perspective and inclusion

Strengthening the legal perspective and inclusion plays a key role in the implementation of rights. Particular attention will be paid in a cross-cutting manner to issues related to the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities of different ages, older persons and other potentially vulnerable groups. Related measures include:

- Raising 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.
- Strengthening overall compliance with the fundamental and human rights of legislation and other regulation and making initiatives and statements to develop them.
- Examining the cooperation and coordination structures between wellbeing services counties and the municipal sector with regard to the rights of persons with disabilities and older persons.
- Monitoring and promoting the full inclusion of persons with disabilities and older people in decision-making that concerns them.
- In cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (VIOK) and the Division for the Rights

of Older Persons (IJA), developing new means and methods to increase inclusion in general as well as in the activities of the Human Rights Centre, the Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Human Rights Delegation.

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

Stronger monitoring data and a more robust knowledge base require research and identifying existing information gaps. The HRC cooperates closely with researchers and research institutes. Measures for this topic include:

- Investigating what kind of disability research and data collection matching the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is ongoing, in cooperation with research institutes and organisations.
- Promoting the legal discourse, research and the utilisation of research data related to the rights of older people by cooperating with different research institutes and researchers.
- Systematising HRC's own 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.



## **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, monitoring will encompass 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. This will entail:

- Participating in the various stages of the periodic reporting of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This process will include the Disability Rights Committee (VIOK) and other stakeholders. The country report on Finland will be discussed by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2025.
- Continuing to produce translations of the general comments by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and sharing information about the comments.
- Participating in the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) and continuing to work with Claudia Mahler, UN expert on human rights of older persons.

### 3. Communication and advocacy as means of promoting human rights

#### Strengthening the fundamental and human rights perspective

In 2024, the most important focus areas of advocacy 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 future action plan on fundamental and human rights, and promoting the implementation of recommendations received by Finland from international treaty monitoring bodies.

#### Targeting and systematising communication and influence

Planned measures include:

- Systematising stakeholder work, especially with regard to actors related to the rule of law, development cooperation and security. Directing communications and advocacy to actors responsible for security, regional and local actors, and actors at the Government level.
- Developing the processes of communication and advocacy as well as the strategic planning of communications. Further developing the monitoring of communications and advocacy to assess and promote the impact of the HRC's work.

- Continuing to focus on the approachability and accessibility of communications. Planning content and presentations with target groups and channels in mind.
- Developing EU advocacy at the national level.
- Utilising the HRC's location by providing targeted information in various ways to the Parliament on current fundamental and human rights issues and raising awareness in the Parliament of the HRC's work and human rights. Using the information provided by Parliament in the HRC's operations.
- Developing communications targeted at young people in the Young Experts Programme based on the work that was started during the first term and the experience that has accumulated.

#### Developing the HRC's communications

- Developing communication and advocacy skills among personnel and ensuring up-to-date competence through various training programmes and other measures.
- Initiating a website reform and an overall review of communication channels as part of the development of communications and advocacy.

### Upcoming events and publications

- In the spring, a report will be published on climate change as a human rights issue in the international and Arctic operating environment. The report will examine the human rights impacts of climate change through the rights of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups as well as the implementation of climate justice.
- In the spring, results will be published of the survey on anti-Semitism in Finland, and a publication event will be organised. The survey is a cooperative effort with the Ministry of Justice.
- At the end of February, a seminar on the rule of law in Europe will be held in cooperation with the Faculty of Law at the University of Helsinki. The seminar will also be a farewell seminar for Sirpa Rautio, Director of the Human Rights Centre, as she will be leaving for Vienna at the beginning of March to take up the role of Director at the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.
- In May, the Human Rights Day highlighting the work of the Council of Europe will be organised in Helsinki in cooperation with the Representation of Finland to the Council of Europe, the Association of Finnish Municipalities and other potential partners.
- In June, a panel discussion on art as a means to defend human rights will be held at SuomiAreena in Pori together with Arts Promotion Centre Finland
- The third Kalle Könkkölä symposium on the rights of persons with disabilities will be organised in the autumn.

## 4. Human rights foresight and resilience

In autumn 2023, the HRC published a report on foresight and human rights.<sup>2</sup> The report will provide a basis for the continued development of foresight from the human rights perspective and the utilisation of foresight in the HRC's activities as a special project during 2024. The HRC will strive to build strategic foresight by monitoring changes in the operating environment, planning activities over the long term and defining priorities and competence development needs.

- The HRC will support and promote foresight and its inclusion in human rights work and build contacts with national foresight networks.
- The HRC will also participate in the development of human rights foresight on the European level.

The HRC will continue to build resilience and preparedness. This work will utilise the report on fundamental and human rights actors, the report on foresight and the ODIHR tools to strengthen the organisational resilience of national human rights institutions and to assess threats.

- The foresight capabilities of HRC personnel will be reinforced with internal training.
- The HRC will also share information and tools for developing resilience with other fundamental and human rights actors.

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2 Report on human rights foresight, resilience and preparedness during transformations in society (2023, in Finnish): [https://bin.yhdistysavain.fi/1586428/DDerlDqf4q2ibosFmPVY0\\_Miln/lhmisoikeusennakointi%20selvitys%202023.pdf](https://bin.yhdistysavain.fi/1586428/DDerlDqf4q2ibosFmPVY0_Miln/lhmisoikeusennakointi%20selvitys%202023.pdf)

## 5. Young Experts Programme

The HRC launched the Young Experts Programme in 2022, with two young experts recruited and employed for 18 months to develop their competence in fundamental and human rights. The programme significantly highlighted young people's perspective in the activities of the HRC. The second term of the programme started in December 2023. In addition to continuing the established activities of the Young Experts Programme, an aim for the new programme term is to link the perspective of young people's rights to the HRC's other activities in an even more cross-cutting way. These efforts include:

- Continuing to reinforce young people's rights and strengthen their voice based on the work done during the first term of the Young Experts Programme. This work builds upon the final review of the programme's first term<sup>3</sup>, which includes information accumulated on young people's human rights status and their views on human rights, and examining 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.
- Supporting the competence of younger experts selected for the Young Experts Programme on fundamental and human rights, the human rights arena and the activities of the HRC.
- Reinforcing young people's perspectives on human rights issues, especially on Instagram, but also on other social media platforms and in public discourse. Doing small-scale communications campaigns targeting young people on topical human rights themes.
- Organising meetings with young people to discuss human rights from their perspective and gathering information to promote young people's human rights.

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3 Highlighting the rights of young people - more room needed for the voice of young people. Review of the first term of the Young Experts Programme (2023, in Finnish) <https://www.ihmisoikeuskeskus.fi/uutiset/katsaus-nuorten-ohjelma/>

## 6. Operation of the Human Rights Delegation

The Human Rights Delegation is a national co-operation body of the Human Rights Centre. The term of the current delegation will finish at the end of March 2024, and the application procedure for the new delegation will be launched in early 2024. The new, now fourth, delegation will be appointed and begin its term in spring 2024. Measures related to the Delegation include:

- Evaluating the concluding term of the Human Rights Delegation and its impact as well as the priorities for the new term, for example with a survey and discussions in the Delegation.
- Preparing an action plan for the new Human Rights Delegation.
- Preparing and presenting for the Human Rights Delegation's approval the action plan and the annual report as well as motivated statements on topical fundamental and human rights issues.

## 7. Participation in international and European cooperation

### International and European cooperation

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

The Director of the Human Rights Centre has been the Chair and a Board member of ENNHRI and a Board member of GANHRI since March 2022. The term of office for a Board member and the Chair is three years. However, according to the new ENNHRI rules, the term will end at the end of the appointment of the main representative of an institution - in this case the Director of the Human Rights Centre. The appointment of the Director of the HRC will end at the end of February, both at the Human Rights Centre and as the Chair of ENNHRI. The new ENNHRI Chair and Board member will be elected in early 2024.

In addition to themes pertaining to the rule of law, ENNHRI's activities in 2024 will focus on human rights in safety and security and the impacts of artificial intelligence on human rights. The work of GANHRI will support the exchange of information between different regions and the clarification of the roles of GANHRI and regional networks.

- An expert from the HRC leads the ENNHRI Legal Working Group, in which member institutions exchange experiences and advance their competence in legal matters. Among other things, the working group submits third-party interventions on various themes to the European Court of Human Rights.
- The HRC is a member of the ENNHRI Working Groups on the rights of older persons, the rights of persons with disabilities and on corporate human rights responsibility. Furthermore, the HRC is a member of the Expert Group on NHRI Standards. The HRC also monitors the efforts of working groups focusing on climate and environmental issues, artificial intelligence and fundamental and human rights communications.

By participating in ENNHRI Working Groups, the HRC gets access to information on the development of fundamental and human rights in Europe and the opportunities to influence it.

- The HRC will continue its regional and bilateral cooperation, especially with Nordic and Baltic NHRIs. In 2024, a regional meeting will be organised between the Nordic NHRIs.
- In cooperation with ENNHRI, the HRC will also support NHRIs in difficult situations, such as the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the Council of Europe will also remain key partners. Cooperation with various UN institutions will principally take place through fixed-term human rights reporting. The HRC will continue to follow the work of the Human Rights Council, taking into account that Finland's membership in the Council will expire in 2024. The OSCE/ODIHR cooperation will focus on the resilience of human rights actors and human rights defenders, as well as Finland's OSCE Chairpersonship in 2025.

Exchanging information on key themes for the HRC and strengthening fundamental and human rights, the rule of law and the actors promoting and protecting them are among the cornerstones of the HRC's European and international cooperation.

- The HRC will continue to report on the state of the rule of law and human rights in Finland both directly to the European Commission and through ENNHRI. In addition, the HRC will participate in the cooperation of human rights actors supporting preparedness for challenges and changes.

## 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 potentially take place in autumn 2024. Should the Committee discuss Finland's status at that time, the HRC will prepare an accreditation application in spring 2024 in cooperation with the Parliamentary Ombudsman.



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