

Report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to the Parliament 2026: Key recommendations

Every four years, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman submits a report to Parliament on the state of equality in Finland. In the report, the Ombudsman presents recommendations aimed at strengthening equality and the implementation of fundamental and human rights. The recommendations concern the various duties of the Ombudsman.

This publication provides a summary of the key recommendations in the 2026 report to Parliament.

Legal protection for victims of discrimination must be improved

Discrimination has long been prohibited by law in Finland but tackling it remains a challenge. Many people who have experienced discrimination are unable to secure their rights, as the legal protection provided by legislation and its practical effectiveness are not always sufficient to ensure that those rights are upheld. It is crucial that victims of discrimination have easy and accessible access to their rights.

Attitudes also have a significant impact. Attitudes and legislation influence one another: legislation reflects social attitudes but also shapes them.

- The National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal must have the authority to oversee compliance with the Non-Discrimination Act in the workplace. The tribunal must also be able to order compensation for victims of discrimination and impose a penalty payment on the discriminating party, rather than merely issuing a recommendation of compensation and imposing a conditional fine as is currently the case.
- In order to improve the prevention of discrimination, Parliament must extend the criminal liability of legal persons to cover discrimination offences as well. In principle, the prosecutor should, in cases of discrimination offences, pursue the injured party's claim for compensation against the party liable to pay the compensation.
- In order to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities, the wording of the Non-Discrimination Act must be clarified so that failure to ensure accessibility is also specified in the Act as a form of discrimination that is prohibited.

The realisation of non-discrimination in key areas of society

Discrimination remains deeply entrenched in the structures, practices and attitudes of society. Discrimination is common in Finland and occurs in all areas of life, such as the workplace, education, social and health services and housing. Equality must therefore be promoted consistently across all areas of society, and structures that perpetuate discrimination and prevent the implementation of equal rights must be dismantled.

- Individuals who suspect discrimination in the workplace must have stronger access to relevant information. Employers must be required to provide, upon request, a written statement to a person who suspects that they have been discriminated against during the recruitment process or whilst in the employer's service.
- The impact of the revised provisions on the support in the Basic Education Act on pupils with disabilities must be thoroughly investigated and assessed. Any shortcomings must be rectified.
- The police and other security authorities at all levels must strengthen their anti-racism work, whilst ensuring, through targeted measures, that the prohibition of ethnic profiling is upheld.
- The provisions of the Non-Discrimination Act prohibiting harassment must be amended to include an obligation on sports, cultural and other leisure organisations and clubs to take measures to eliminate harassment once they become aware of it occurring within the scope of their activities. It would constitute discrimination if organisations and clubs fail to take action to put an end to harassment.
- The right of people with disabilities to equal access to housing must be clarified by designating housing companies as entities subject to the duty to make reasonable adjustments under section 15 of the Non-Discrimination Act.

Promoting equality for groups vulnerable to discrimination

Promoting equality for groups vulnerable to discrimination requires consistent and long-term policy measures. For example, the equality of the LGBTIQ+ community and anti-racism work must be actively promoted through national action programmes. Strengthening the rights of the Sámi people and ensuring equal services for people with disabilities also require coordinated national measures and sufficient resources from the Government.

- The implementation of the recommendations of the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission must begin immediately. Larger-scale projects must be taken into account when the next government programme is negotiated.
- The financial situation of wellbeing services counties must not be allowed to affect the implementation of the rights of people with disabilities. The Government must monitor the implementation of the new Disability Services Act and in particular the application of the life stage classification contained therein.
- The Government must draw up a comprehensive national action plan on LGBTIQ+ policy.
- The Government must draw up a comprehensive national action plan to combat racism.

Promoting equality in institutional structures

The discrimination that exists in our society is, above all, structural. Equality must be ensured in legislation, in the activities of public authorities, in digitalisation solutions and in artificial intelligence projects and procurement.

Under the Constitution of Finland, the authorities must safeguard the implementation of fundamental and human rights. At every stage of the legislative process, it must be ensured that legislation safeguards the implementation of fundamental and human rights, and that it does not restrict the equal rights by people at risk of discrimination.

- Parliament must ensure that the proposals it considers have been adequately assessed in terms of the equal and non-discriminatory implementation of fundamental and human rights, so that the cumulative effects of reforms can be taken into account in decision-making.
- The Government must provide binding guidance and support for the conduct of equality impact assessments for public sector artificial intelligence projects and procurements.
- The Government must ensure that everyone has equal access to public services. Accessibility must be ensured when designing and developing digital services. The option of dealing with public authorities via multiple channels must be ensured.

The status and rights of foreign nationals

In recent years, the rights and status of foreign nationals have been significantly eroded by numerous legislative changes. These far-reaching changes have a direct impact on the daily lives of asylum seekers and those who have already settled in the country, on their sense of security and on their ability to build a new life.

Legislation must be amended in many respects to ensure that the fundamental and human rights of foreign nationals are fully safeguarded. It must also be ensured that the necessary resources are made available to fulfil the role of monitoring fundamental rights associated with the new screening and border procedure. Furthermore, those applying the law have a duty to apply it in such a way as to safeguard fundamental and human rights.

- The principle of prioritising the best interests of the child must be enshrined in the Aliens Act and the Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.
- Free legal aid must be guaranteed from the outset of the asylum procedure to ensure that grounds for asylum and people in vulnerable positions are identified at an early stage.
- Resources must be secured for the mechanism to monitor fundamental rights in relation to screening and border procedures.
- The law must make it easier for those who have been granted a residence permit to integrate into Finnish society and live with their families.
- Access to the asylum process and the absolute prohibition of refoulement must be safeguarded at Finland's eastern border.
- The allocation of refugee quotas must be based on the constitutional principle of equality and the need to resettle refugees in need of protection.

Monitoring removal from the country

The enforcement of removal from the country is a situation in which there is a heightened risk of violations of fundamental and human rights. External, independent and autonomous monitoring plays a vital role in safeguarding the rights of people being returned. At present, the intense pressure on the authorities responsible for enforcing deportations to speed up returns is increasing the risk of human rights violations. The best interests of the child must also be taken into account when planning return operations.

- The detention of children must be prohibited.
- Returns must not be accelerated in a way that jeopardises the fundamental and human rights of the persons being returned.
- Finland must not support the proposed weakening of the rights of persons being returned. The independent monitoring of returns must be ensured.

National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings

Trafficking in human beings is a serious violation of human rights and a form of crime. To combat human trafficking, preventive measures, victim protection and support, the enforcement of criminal liability and cooperation frameworks must be strengthened. Human trafficking is often a hidden crime, but its victims are visible in places such as workplaces, educational institutions or social and health care services. Therefore awareness of human trafficking must be raised across all sectors of society.

- The structures for combating human trafficking must be strengthened: the permanence of the police's specialist human trafficking investigation unit must be ensured, the Government's cross-

departmental working group must be made permanent by decree, and wellbeing services counties must be given more effective guidance.

- Policy programmes and measures relating to children, young people and youth crime must incorporate a strong focus on identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking.
- The right of foreign victims of human trafficking must be safeguarded by lowering the threshold for obtaining a residence permit.

National Rapporteur on violence against women

Finland has continuously underperformed in combating violence against women. Violence against women is not consistently addressed as a gender equality issue that reflects society's power structures and harmful gender roles. Given the prevalence and severity of violence against women in Finland, more determined structural measures are needed to reduce violence.

Legislation must be introduced without delay to establish a cross-sectoral system of violence risk assessment and risk management that is binding on the various authorities. Ensuring the prevention of violence and the functioning of the social and health care system in wellbeing services counties and municipalities requires binding legislation that safeguards the status of civil society organisations working to combat violence. The Criminal Code must be amended to better recognise the reprehensible nature of close relationship and intimate partner violence.

- Legislation must be enacted on the assessment of the risk of violence.
- Legislation must be enacted on anti-violence work.
- The Criminal Code must refer more explicitly to aggravating circumstances.