

FINLAND

ASYLUM

LGBT asylum seekers continued to face difficulties in getting status, due to the application procedure requiring a narrative centred around identity, stigma, and shame. Trans asylum seekers and refugees also continued to be denied access to gender-affirming healthcare, unless they become residents, which can take several years.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Several hate speech incidents took place again this year, including during the continued trans law debates in parliament. In April, the screening of *Drag Kids*, a Canadian documentary, was cancelled at the Kulttuurikaappi festival organised by the City of Helsinki due to hateful messages, public hostility, and threats. Several politicians made hateful remarks about the event.

The hate speech trial of former Minister of Interior and Chairperson of the Christian Democrat Parliamentary Group, Päivi Räsänen continued in August at the Helsinki Court of Appeal. In 2022, Räsänen was acquitted, but the Prosecutor filed an appeal. Conservative Christian groups have funded Räsänen's defense. In November 2023, the court of appeal upheld the verdict.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Vandalism continued to be a serious issue this year. Rainbow flags were destroyed, taken down, or burnt in a number of cities and towns, including Masku, Pori, Lappeenranta, Joensuu, and Tornio.

Three people, including a former pastor, were physically assaulted during a Gay Christians discussion group at Tallinn Pride in Estonia.

Several people were harassed or assaulted outside Tampere's oldest LGBTQ bar Mixei.

A man harassed and attacked a female couple at a supermarket's parking in the town of Kaarina in November.

BODILY INTEGRITY

A citizens' initiative to ban so-called 'conversion practices' gathered over 50,000 signatures in only a few weeks, but the parliament did not discuss it before the elections. A previous citizens' initiative had been pending in the parliament since 2021. In June, another initiative was launched to ensure that this time the government does have sufficient time to discuss it.

The parliamentary debate started in November 2023 and is set to continue in 2024.

The government made no concrete steps this year to ban non-consensual and medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children, as set out in the Gender Equality Programme (2020-2023). In 2022, over 60 organisations demanded action. The new government did not mention this in its government program. In June the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Finland ensure bodily integrity of intersex children, provide counselling to intersex children and their parents, and also provide reparations.

EDUCATION

In 2023 the city of Helsinki rolled out "rainbow workshops" to all sixth-to-ninth graders in the city's schools. The project was a result of the city's participatory budgeting process where citizens can make proposals into the city's budget. The city chose Seta as the service provider to design and implement the workshops. MP Päivi Räsänen criticised the initiative.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

432 MP candidates signed Seta's pledge of commitment in the lead-up to the national elections, 33 of whom were elected to parliament, but most are in opposition parties. Seta's target goals for the 2023 elections included a rainbow action plan, making legal gender recognition accessible for minors, a ban on intersex surgeries, the introducing of a third legal gender category, regulations on surrogacy and recognition of multiple-parent families, and a ban on so-called 'conversion practices'.

Seta published a report about the socio-economic marginalisation of LGBTQ+ people, also noting that services such as trans-specific healthcare or surrogacy require capital that many do not have. Seta called for data gathering on the issue.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

(See under Bias-motivated Speech)

Pride events were held in a record number of over 40 different cities and small towns this year, which is twice as many as just five years ago.

Helsinki Pride was held on 1 July, focusing on the themes of triumph and rebellion, and brought together around 100,000 people. No incidents were recorded. Former President Tarja Halonen acted as the matron of Helsinki Pride Week this year.



Several MPs, Ministers, and cabinet members joined the Pride march, but were criticised by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and other conservative politicians.

The indigenous Sápmi Pride was held for the ninth time this year and took place in Heahtá in August.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

(see under Bias-motivated Speech)

HEALTH

The latest School Health Survey from the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare found that LGBT+ children and youth, and particularly those who are trans report high rates of depression, anxiety, and are seriously impacted by minority stress.

In August 2023 the Finnish Medicines Agency updated its guidelines on blood donation by men who have sex with men. Previously, a four-month restriction was applied whenever a man has had sex with another man, even within a monogamous relationship. This was considered discriminative, as sex between a man and a woman or two women amounted to the same restriction only in cases where the person had new or several sexual partners. The new guideline lifted the restriction and was implemented in December 2023.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

A new government was formed in the summer 2023 between the moderate right wing National Coalition Party, the right wing populist True Finns, Christian conservative Christian Democrats and liberal Swedish People's Party. The government program has no explicit mention of LGBTIQ+ policies.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

On 2 February, Finland introduced a legal gender recognition (LGR) procedure based solely on self-determination, ending the requirement of sterility and mandatory psychiatric diagnosis. The vote was a firm 113:69. The new law includes a 30-day reflection period and sets the maximum number of changes in legal gender at one per year, unless "for a particularly compelling reason". The law sets a minimum age requirement at 18 and over, much to the disappointment of civil society and contrary to the Social and Health Committee's report.

It also does not provide for gender marker options beyond male and female. It does however provide for the recognition of trans parents in their legal gender on their child's birth

certificate - upon request. By November, over 1,700 people had applied for LGR based on self-determination.

Civil society organisations had lobbied for LGR reform for long time, and the reform process was delayed for several years. In January, MPs of the Centre Party and The Finns tried to halt the process by raising alleged concerns that men would use the law to harass women. The Centre Party instructed its MPs that they could vote in individual capacity in line with their beliefs.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

(See also under Equality and Non-Discrimination)



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