



# FINLAND

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

The anti-gender movement was vocal in Finland this year. The Aito Avioliitto (True Marriage) association appeared at different events and organised panel discussions with candidates of this year's parliamentary elections. In January, they were banned from participating in the annual Educa teachers' exposition in Helsinki, following widespread criticism from attendees and members of the Trade Union of Education (OAJ).

Prior to Helsinki Pride in June, Christian Democratic politician Päivi Räsänen published an open letter criticising the Church for participating in the Pride. Evangelical Lutheran archbishop Tapio Luoma responded by affirming that same-sex couples are warmly welcome at Church events. Following Räsänen's letter, a few hundred people formally left the Church. A police investigation on account of suspected incitement against sexual and gender minorities was initiated.

In September, the Media Regulator struck down a complaint against Finnish tabloid, Iltalehti, a concerning its reluctance to delete a reader's comment calling homosexuality a disease and wishing for "homosexuals" to be cured. The Regulator ruled that the comments posted in June, were an expression of opinion and not hateful or inciteful.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

As reported by the police in November, the number of hate crimes on sexual orientation grounds increased by 27% in 2018, compared to the previous year. Reported hate crimes on other grounds all decreased during the same period.

## BODILY INTEGRITY

The new government's programme (see under **Equality and non-discrimination**) commits to banning unnecessary and non-consensual cosmetic surgeries on intersex children.

As part of the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2017-2019, the government published a report on the experiences of intersex persons and the parents of intersex children, based on 18 interviews. The main findings include negative experiences of medical treatment, lack of clarity about their medical necessity, inability of parents to make an informed decision, lack of non-medical information about intersex, lack of

peer and psycho-social support. The report also includes good practices in healthcare, education, and in law on the basis of Malta, Portugal, Germany and Iceland.

## EDUCATION

In February, seven members of the Orivesi municipal council proposed a motion that children in daycares and schools should only be taught about two genders, male and female. The city concluded that this would be discriminatory and dismissed the motion.

The Institute for Health and Welfare published the findings of the national school health survey, finding that LGBTI children and youth experience significantly more of bullying, sexual violence, psychological and physical violence than their peers. They are also more likely to suffer from violence at home. The results informed the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children 2020–2025 which includes a specific chapter and action points to address violence against sexual and gender minority children and youth.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Finland held its parliamentary elections in April. The new government's programme, headed by Prime Minister Antti Rinne, includes several important measures for LGBTI equality, but fewer than hoped by civil society (see under **Bodily integrity, Family, Health, Legal gender recognition**). Rinne left his position and Sanna Marin was elected as PM in December. Marin grew up in a rainbow family, which was discussed widely in international media.

## FAMILY

On 6 March, the Helsinki Administrative Court ruled that the directive of Markku Mäkijärvi to provide fertility treatments only to heterosexual couples is discriminatory. Mäkijärvi, Medical Director of the Helsinki and Uusimaa hospital district, ordered in 2015 that fertility treatments should only be provided to people whose infertility is caused by a 'medical condition', excluding same-sex female couples.

The Maternity Act, establishing automatic co-parent recognition for female same-sex couples following fertility treatment, entered into force on 1 April.



A same-sex couple received compensation in August, after a public servant on the Åland islands refused to officiate their wedding due to his religious beliefs. The Ombudsperson for Equality facilitated the settlement between the two parties.

Discussions continued within the Evangelical Lutheran Church on officiating same-sex weddings. In March, a survey with 534 priests showed that 57 per cent would be happy to do it with the Church's approval. In June, the northern Finland administrative court ruled in favor of a priest who was reprimanded by the Oulu diocese for marrying a gay couple. The Church will appeal.

The government programme sets out a number of measures to improve the recognition of LGBTI parents, including the introduction of an Act on Parenthood to replace the Maternity and Paternity Acts and the regulation of non-commercial surrogacy.

## FOREIGN POLICY

On 28 August, the government published a report recommending Finland to continue its work on protecting LGBTI rights at international fora.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

An increasing number of Pride marches were organised in smaller towns. This year, Pride took place for the first time ever in Lappeenranta and Loviisa. In Pori and Riihimäki, Pride was organised again after a few years' break. Helsinki Pride was held on 29 June, and for the first time was attended by the Prime Minister.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Rainbow flags were stolen during Pride events in Kouvola and Lahti. It is suspected that a flag in Kouvola was burnt.

## HEALTH

A number of trans people reported barriers to accessing gender affirming care this year. Although care is provided for those with a mental health diagnosis, it can be postponed if they have "unresolved" mental health issues and do not currently have a mental health care provider. Because queues for mental health clinics are long, trans people affected may not receive care in a timely manner, which could result in postponing access to gender affirming treatment for years.

Following extensive campaigning, trans healthcare provision for non-binary trans people was resumed this year.

The new government programme (see under **Equality and non-discrimination**) outlines that members of "gender minorities" will be provided individualised services when they need them." Civil society hopes this will mean improving gender affirming health services for trans and non-binary children and their families.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

The New Name law entered into force making it easier for people to change their name on the basis of their gender identity. Names can be male, female, gender neutral, or a combination. Young people can access the law from the age of 15, but only with their parent or guardian's consent if they are younger.

The new government committed to introducing the long-awaited gender recognition law reform process, abolishing the sterilisation requirement, ensuring that social security numbers are no longer gendered, and making parental laws gender neutral. The government programme fails to abolish the "credible statement" requirement, which may translate into an external evaluation; lower the age limit from 18; or introduce a third gender marker category.