



A New Boost for Equality in Finland

Government action plan to combat racism and
promote equality



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Finnish Government

Prime Minister's Office

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ISBN pdf: 978-952-383-981-6

ISSN pdf: 2490-0966

Layout: Government Administration Department, Publications

Photos: Aya Brace

Helsinki 2024 Finland

A New Boost for Equality in Finland

Government action plan to combat racism and promote equality

Publications of the Finnish Government 2024:43

Publisher	Finnish Government		
Group author	Prime Minister's Office		
Language	English	Pages	51

Abstract

The government action plan for combating racism and promoting equality is based on the equality statement submitted by the Government to Parliament on 31 August 2023.

The action plan contains a variety of measures to improve the social climate and relations between population groups, raise awareness of challenges and solutions and combat racism and discrimination, especially in working life and education. Resources are also allocated to strengthening and expanding tried and tested practices. The plan focuses especially on the actions of the public administration and on ensuring that the requirement to promote equality under the Non-Discrimination Act is fulfilled. Along with central government, this work requires the involvement of local actors. Extensive cooperation with civil society will also play a key role throughout the plan's implementation.

The action plan will be implemented under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office together with other ministries and authorities. A cross-sectoral project group appointed by the Government will monitor the work. The progress of the work and the impact of the measures will be assessed in 2025 during the Government's mid-term policy review, when new measures can be introduced for the second half of the government term if necessary.

Keywords equality, prevention of racism, non-discrimination, hate speech

ISBN PDF	978-952-383-981-6	ISSN PDF	2490-0966
Reference number	VN/27386/2023	Project number	VNK031:00/2023

URN address <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-981-6>

Uutta vauhtia yhdenvertaisuuteen Suomessa

Valtioneuvoston toimenpideohjelma rasismin torjumiseksi ja yhdenvertaisuuden edistämiseksi

Valtioneuvoston julkaisu 2024:43

Julkaisija Valtioneuvosto

Yhteisötekijä Valtioneuvoston kanslia

Kieli englanti

Sivumäärä 51

Tiivistelmä

Valtioneuvoston toimenpideohjelma rasismin torjumiseksi ja yhdenvertaisuuden edistämiseksi perustuu tiedonannolle, jonka hallitus antoi eduskunnalle 31.8.2023.

Toimenpideohjelma sisältää toimenpiteitä yhteiskunnallisen ilmapiirin ja väestöryhmien välisten suhteiden parantamiseen, tietoisuuden lisäämisen haasteista ja ratkaisusta sekä erityisesti työelämässä ja koulutuksessa tapahtuvan rasismin ja syrjinnän torjumiseen. Resursseja kohdennetaan myös jo hyväksi havaittujen toimien vahvistamiseen ja laajentamiseen. Erityistä huomiota kiinnitetään julkishallinnon toimiin, ja tehostetaan yhdenvertaisuuslain mukaisen edistämisvelvollisuuden toteutumista. Valtionhallinnon lisäksi työhön tarvitaan mukaan paikallistason toimijat. Yhteistyötä tehdään toimenpideohjelman toimeenpanon aikana laajasti myös kansalaisyhteiskunnan kanssa.

Toimenpideohjelmaa toimeenpannaan valtioneuvoston kanslian johdolla yhdessä muiden ministeriöiden ja viranomaisten kanssa. Työtä seuraa valtioneuvoston poikkihallinnollinen hankeryhmä. Työn etenemistä ja toimenpiteiden vaikuttavuutta arvioidaan hallituksen puoliväliriihessä keväällä 2025, jolloin voidaan tarvittaessa ottaa käyttöön uusia toimia hallituskauden toiselle puoliskolle.

Asiasanat yhdenvertaisuus, rasismin ehkäisy, syrjimättömyys, vihapuhe

ISBN PDF 978-952-383-981-6

ISSN PDF 2490-0966

Asianumero VN/27386/2023

Hankenumero VNK031:00/2023

Julkaisun osoite <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-981-6>

Ny fart på arbetet för likabehandling i Finland

Statsrådets handlingsprogram för att bekämpa rasism och främja likabehandling

Statsrådets publikationer 2024:43

Utgivare Statsrådet

Utarbetad av Statsrådets kansli

Språk engelska

Sidantal

51

Referat

Statsrådets handlingsprogram för att bekämpa rasism och främja likabehandling grundar sig på det meddelande om främjande av likabehandling, jämställdhet och icke-diskriminering som regeringen lämnade till riksdagen den 31 augusti 2023.

Handlingsprogrammet innehåller åtgärder för att förbättra samhällsklimatet och relationerna mellan olika befolkningsgrupper, för att öka medvetenheten om utmaningar och olika lösningar och för att bekämpa rasism och diskriminering särskilt i arbetslivet och utbildningen. Det reserveras också mera resurser för att främja och sprida de åtgärder som redan fungerar bra. Särskild vikt fästs vid åtgärderna inom den offentliga förvaltningen. Skyldigheten enligt diskrimineringslagen att främja likabehandling effektiviseras. Även lokala aktörer behöver delta i arbetet utöver statsförvaltningen. Under genomförandet av programmet samarbetar man på bred front också med det civila samhället.

Handlingsprogrammet genomförs under ledning av statsrådets kansli, i samarbete med övriga ministerier och myndigheter. En förvaltningsövergripande projektgrupp som tillsätts av statsrådet ska följa arbetet. Arbetets framsteg och åtgärdernas genomslag utvärderas vid regeringens halvtidsöversyn våren 2025, då man vid behov kan införa nya åtgärder för regeringsperiodens andra hälft.

Nyckelord jämlikhet, förebyggande av rasism, icke-diskriminering, hatpropaganda

ISBN PDF 978-952-383-981-6

ISSN PDF 2490-0966

Ärendenummer VN/27386/2023

Projektnummer VNK031:00/2023

URN-adress <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-981-6>

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FOREWORD

At the end of August 2023, the Government issued a statement to Parliament on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society. This action plan forms part of the statement, and seeks to implement the policies set out in the statement. Active and concrete measures to improve equality and combat racism are a key component of the programme.

There is no place for racism in Finland. We need everyone to be involved in building the future. Conversations with young adults of foreign descent have been particularly important to me. These individuals are keen to feel that Finland is their home, and that they are part of society. They must also have equal opportunities in that ambition.

Immigration to Finland has increased in the 21st century. Most immigrants have moved on the basis of work and education together with family members. About 9 per cent of the national population was of foreign descent in 2022. The fact that society comprises people of varying age and descent affects its activities and services.

One of the key principles of Government policy is that work is part of effective immigrant integration. We are seeking to increase the employment rate of all population groups by reforming the labour market and eliminating incentive traps. We must also change the attitudes and structures that form a barrier to realising equality in the labour market and at work.

We also need to see a change in attitudes and structures elsewhere in society, so that everyone feels accepted and becomes a full participant in society and in building society – as a schoolmate, in leisure time interests, as a colleague, and as a neighbour. Trust in other people and in society as a whole, and the experience of equality are a crucial foundation for social stability. An equal and inclusive society also brings greater security and crisis resilience.

Progress has already been made in many of the policies set out in the Government statement. I arranged the first Prime Minister's round table to promote equality in March. Extensive materials collected from stakeholders by that stage formed the basis for the round table discussion, and for selecting the priorities and policies of this action plan.

The action plan will boost work for equality. The Government will assess the situation and the need for further measures at its mid-term policy review. Government measures alone will nevertheless not be enough to bring about change. Promoting equality and combating racism calls for broad commitment by society as a whole. We achieve the best outcome when we work together.

Petteri Orpo, Prime Minister



1 Summary

The action plan on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society was drawn up by the Prime Minister's Office based on the equality statement submitted by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government to Parliament on 31 August 2023.

The action plan takes into account the material obtained in the consultations carried out while preparing the equality statement, as well as the assessment of the 'An Equal Finland' Government Action Plan implemented by the previous government and feedback from stakeholders concerning that action plan.

Like the equality statement, the purpose of the action plan is to promote equality and non-discrimination in society. It focuses on active, concrete measures to combat racism. Other grounds for discrimination, such as age, disability and sexual orientation, as well as gender equality, are dealt with in a cross-cutting manner throughout the plan in accordance with the planning obligations under the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act.

The goal of the action plan is to continue the Government's anti-racism work so that equal opportunities can genuinely be realised in the lives of everyone living in this country. The action plan is a comprehensive tool that enables the measures to be implemented at all levels and in different areas of life in a coordinated manner.

1.1 Current state and operating environment

Finland's equality policy has in large part been shaped by Finland's membership in the European Union. As a result of EU legislation, Finland's legislation on equality at the national level has quickly become among the strongest in the EU. A 2015 legislative amendment extended the prohibition against discrimination to include discrimination based on age, origin, nationality, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, political activities, trade union activities, family relationships, health, disability and sexual orientation. The obligation to promote equality has also been extended so that authorities, education providers and employers are also required to combat structural discrimination in their work.

While authorities, education providers and employers have usually met their obligations to promote equality in a formal sense, not enough attention has been paid to ensuring that goals are met and monitoring the effectiveness of efforts to promote equality.

The share of people with foreign backgrounds in the total population of Finland has grown significantly over the course of the 2000s. Whereas people with foreign backgrounds were a small minority in 2000, they will make up a significant portion of the population in the future. According to a projection by Statistics Finland, there may be more than one million people with foreign backgrounds living in Finland by 2040. This will pose a more significant challenge for public administration than at present. An equality-focused approach in the work of the authorities supports social inclusion and ensures that different population groups feel they are a part of Finnish society.

Many young people with foreign backgrounds who were born in Finland experience racism and discriminatory treatment in their everyday lives, which leads to insecurity and feelings of exclusion. Anti-racism work and measures aiming to achieve genuine equality are a form of preventive work that also promotes broader social cohesion. Civil society organisations and religious communities also play a key role, as they are more closely connected to ethnic and religious minority communities than the authorities are. It is important to make ethnic and religious communities more aware of the Non-Discrimination Act and of the legal remedies that it provides, so that they can help to spread information more widely through various population groups.

1.2 Objectives and priorities of the action plan

The purpose of this action plan is to implement the policies outlined in the equality statement. The measures in the plan will also continue the work that has already been carried out in recent decades in Finland to combat racism and promote equality. The measures included in the plan are based on an assessment of the work carried out during the previous Government, as well as recommendations from bodies monitoring Finland's compliance with human rights treaties, existing research data and information gained through strategic foresight. Information on the current state of affairs has been supplemented by extensive material collected from stakeholders, based on which the priorities and cross-cutting policies of the action plan have been selected.

The four objectives set in the equality statement also form the basis for this action plan. They are the following:

1. Dismantling social structures in the labour market and elsewhere in society that lead to inequality,
2. Fostering good relations between population groups,
3. Promoting access to the labour market, and
4. Building up the knowledge base on racism. In drawing up the action plan, various stakeholders have also highlighted the need for new initiatives to combat racism and for increased attention to promoting equality among young people.

These have been selected as cross-cutting priorities in the action plan.

1.3 Sets of measures included in the action plan

The action plan contains new initiatives for improving the social climate and relations between population groups, raising awareness of challenges and solutions and combating racism and discrimination, especially in working life and education. Resources are also allocated to strengthening and expanding tried and tested practices. When it comes to future social cohesion and democracy, paying attention to equality and inclusion among children, young people and families is especially important. Initiatives under the action plan will develop the activities of public administration and enhance the implementation of the obligations to promote equality under the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act. In addition to the central government, this work also requires

the contribution of local actors, such as municipalities, wellbeing services counties and other authorities. The implementation of the action plan will involve extensive cooperation with various actors in society, including civil society organisations.

The sets of measures in the action plan reflect those laid out in the equality statement.

1.3.1 Social atmosphere and debate, increasing awareness, good relations between population groups

The Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister will lead public discussions on the direction of work to combat racism and promote equality more broadly in society. All actors in society are invited to take part in this work through an extensive anti-racism campaign spanning the whole government term. The discussions will be based on new information on the attitudes of the population and identified challenges. We will promote dialogue on difficult issues at all levels of society. We will support measures to promote good relations between population groups especially at the regional and local level.

1.3.2 Education system and culture, sports, physical activity and youth policy

Professionals working at different levels of the education system will be supported in planning measures to promote equality and non-discrimination and ensuring that they are targeted effectively. A cross-cutting priority of cultural, sports and youth policy will be to pay more attention to equality in ministry-funded activities and when providing information-based guidance to actors in the sector.

1.3.3 Equality and non-discrimination at work

The measures in the action plan aim to improve employers' awareness and competences related to diversity management and the promotion of equality by providing training and producing materials on the topic. The Prime Minister's roundtable also issued new recommendations for measures to promote equality in working life.

1.3.4 Combating racist harassment and violence

Actions to combat antisemitism have been compiled into a separate set of measures in the plan. The measures in the action plan will produce information on religious minorities' experiences of equality and provide training for different target groups so they can better identify racist harassment and violence in their work and support victims.

1.3.5 Internal measures to be taken in the Government and administration

The measures in the action plan will improve the efficiency of processes guiding equality work in central government, especially performance guidance. The goal is to launch measures that will bring about real change in agencies' operating cultures and personnel structure. Training, a knowledge base and practical tools will be produced to support this goal.

1.4 Implementation and monitoring of the action plan

The action plan will be implemented under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office together with other ministries and authorities. The work will be monitored by a cross-sectoral project group appointed by the Government. The progress of the work and the impact of the measures will be assessed in 2025 in connection with the Government's mid-term policy review, when new measures can be introduced for the second half of the government term if necessary. Leading up to the checkpoint, the project group will draw up an interim report detailing the implementation up to that point and identifying potential needs for development.

Careful monitoring and evaluation of the action plan will enable long-term and knowledge-based work to promote equality in Finnish society. A wide range of stakeholders will be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the action plan, including communities facing racism and discrimination, civil society organisations, representative organisations whose work is related to the topic, key authorities, and actors in working life.

2 Background and focus of the action plan

This action plan specifies the Government statement on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society.

The statement notes the following with respect to the action plan:

‘The Government is preparing to continue the Equal Finland action plan,¹ on the basis of the Government Programme. The Prime Minister and the Prime Minister’s Office will lead the preparation of the plan and the coordination and monitoring of measures under the plan. In the government budget session, the Government will allocate sufficient resources to the measures within the spending limits. The EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025 will be taken into account when drawing up the Government’s plan. The Government will assess the situation and the need for further measures in its mid-term policy review session in 2025. The continuing work under the plan will be carried out in a way that encourages broad participation and will make use of the consultations carried out in the preparation of this statement.’²

This action plan is based on the goals and measures of the equality statement, which were approved as part of a Government resolution. The action plan was prepared by a project group appointed to implement the statement, on which all ministries were represented. The preparation was coordinated by a secretariat at the Prime Minister’s Office.

Drafting the action plan included considering materials gathered through consultations arranged when drafting the statement, the evaluation report of the Equal Finland action plan, and subsequent stakeholder feedback on that plan.

-
- 1 An Equal Finland – Government Action Plan for Combating Racism and Promoting Good Relations between Population Groups, adopted in accordance with the Government Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin in autumn 2021 and implemented until spring 2023. Link to document: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163577>
 - 2 Government statement to Parliament on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/165110>

Views were also received from stakeholders in a wide variety of contexts during the drafting process, including the Prime Minister's round table and its preparatory workshops.

A total of 104 statements were received when the draft action plan was circulated for comments between 14 May and 10 June 2024. These statements came from representatives of a broad spectrum of society, including urban and other public authorities, immigrant organisations, advocacy organisations, organisations working against racism and promoting equality, parties working on religious issues, and those working extensively on children's rights, on the rights of sexual and gender minorities, elderly and disabled persons, and in the sphere of human rights.

The statements focused on requested aspects of implementation, with particular reference to the forms of stakeholder cooperation and to the consideration of multiple discrimination in the implementation process. Statement providers were also asked to highlight topics and measures that they felt should be promoted as part of the action plan. While the observations submitted in the statements covered a wide range of topics, many statements expressed a wish to see racism and discrimination targeting Muslims and Roma people highlighted, and more vigorous measures deployed to combat hate speech. Another request was for the action plan to confine its focus more clearly to combating racism, as opposed to broadly promoting equality. Some additions were made to the draft programme in the light of the statements received. A summary of the statements may be viewed through the equality statement project page of the Gateway to Information on Government Projects (mainly in Finnish and Swedish).

In line with the Government statement, the action plan focuses on active and concrete measures to combat racism.

The Government statement defined racism in the following terms:

Racism means defining individuals or groups of people as being inferior based on ethnic origin, skin colour, nationality, culture, native language or religion. Racism can manifest in society as discriminatory norms and practices, for example, at work. Racism can manifest between individuals and groups as discriminatory behaviour. Prejudice between individuals and groups and fear of the unfamiliar can serve as a breeding ground for racism. Racism creates inequality and not only damages its targets, but all of society.

Other grounds for discrimination, such as age, disability and sexual orientation, and the issue of gender equality, are considered in measures directly related to implementing the statutory duty to promote gender equality and non-discrimination, such as the education system development programme and performance management in central government administration.

The action plan recognises that many people of foreign descent are also vulnerable to multiple and intersectional discrimination. Besides the characteristics associated with racism, gender, age and functional capacity are also particularly important factors. The action plan responds to this by such means as assigning a cross-cutting focus on the equality of young adults and applying targeted measures that promote gender equality and non-discrimination among immigrant women. The aim is to accommodate multiple and intersectional discrimination when implementing measures.

Several Government strategic and action programme packages that are closely related to the content of this action plan are already ongoing and under preparation, including:

- The Civil Society Organisations Strategy
- The National Democracy Programme 2025
- The National Child Strategy
- The National Action Programme on Fundamental and Human Rights
- Finland's National Roma Policy (Rompo 3) 2023–2030
- The Government Action Plan for Gender Equality
- The National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme (VANUPO) 2024–2027
- The Government Integration Programme (Valko)
- The Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violent Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

The implementation process will seek synergies and cooperation with these programmes.



3 Systematically seeking a socially sustainable Finland of equal opportunities

3.1 Equality legislation provides a solid foundation for anti-racism work

Equality is one of the most important fundamental rights in Finnish society. The Constitution of Finland provides that everyone is equal before the law. No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person.

Finland's equality legislation has developed rapidly in the 21st century along with EU legislation to become one of the strongest in the European Union. The first Non-Discrimination Act was approved in 2004, seeking to promote and secure the implementation of equal services for members of the public, and to enhance the legal remedies of victims of discrimination. Following an amendment that took effect in 2015, the prohibition of discrimination now covers discrimination on the basis of age, origin, citizenship, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity,

trade union activity, family relationships, health, disability, sexual orientation or other reasons related to the person in all areas of life. A partial reform in 2023 further reinforced this statute.

The scope of the legislative toolkit is also broadened to include identifying and combating structural discrimination through the statutory equality-promoting duties of public authorities, providers of early childhood education, teaching and training, and employers.

Studies nevertheless still show room for improving awareness of the Non-Discrimination Act and related legal remedies. Similarly, while the statutory duties of public authorities, providers of early childhood education, teaching and training, and employers to promote equality have mostly been discharged in formal terms, insufficient effort has been invested in goal-setting and effectiveness.

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman is responsible for supervising the application of the Non-Discrimination Act and promoting the realisation of equality. Other public authorities with functions that are important for promoting and monitoring equality include the Ombudsman for Children and the Ombudsman for older people. The Ombudsman for Equality supervises the application of the Act on Equality between Women and Men and promotes gender equality.

Finland's equality policy has been very strongly shaped by membership of the European Union and of the broader international community. On the other hand, global development costs also affect Finland in this latter capacity.

Over the post-World War II period the UN and other international organisations adopted human rights treaties of significance for work against racism and discrimination, which together with national legislation form a strong legal foundation for building an equitable and socially sustainable society. Work in recent decades has largely focused on monitoring the implementation of these treaties. Issues of discrimination have been strongly highlighted in the recommendations that Finland has received from bodies that monitor international human rights treaty commitments. Significant legislative initiatives have also been issued within the European Union in recent years, even though the *anti-discrimination directive*³ was among those that have faced resistance from some Member States. The European Commission policy programmes for gender equality and non-discrimination and their associated measures, such as instructions, inter-Member State working groups and events, also form an important reference framework for national measures.

3 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52008PC0426>

3.2 Non-discrimination – from promise to realisation

The tendency to discuss discrimination and racism as minority issues is misleading with respect to the social significance of the problem. There were already 508,173 people of foreign descent living in Finland at the end of 2022. Many other population groups – including Roma, Sami, Tatars, Muslims and Jews – may also encounter racism and discrimination in everyday life.

Racism may take shape in diverse ways for various ethnic and religious minorities, and so the forms of racism have been specified more precisely in the context of anti-racism work in recent years. Even though the racism that targets various population groups reflects diverse prejudices and stereotypes, one commonality is that these views have formed throughout history and are widespread. The Afrophobia that targets people of African descent is linked to attitudes from colonial times, whereas anti-Semitism and antigypsyism have historical roots of their own. The international concept of antigypsyism targeting Roma people has also been used increasingly in Finland. Instead of Islamophobia, the notion of anti-Muslim hatred is increasingly used internationally to refer to harassment and discrimination of Muslims, as negative attitudes are mostly directed at Muslims, and not necessarily at Islam as a religion. Anti-Muslim hatred is a particular form of racism that denotes acts of violence, discrimination and racist hate speech targeting Muslims or individuals, groups or communities that are assumed to be Muslim. The Sami also face discrimination and harassment in Finnish society. Studies indicate that Sami individuals who prominently defend the rights of Sami people are particularly likely to experience discrimination and harassment.⁴

Discrimination may be experienced not only in various stages and areas of life, but also by disabled individuals and members of sexual minorities. Anyone may encounter discrimination due to age or gender. Individuals belonging to two or more minorities are highly likely to experience multiple discrimination, with more potential opportunities for discrimination and more frequent experiences of discrimination. It may also be difficult for individuals belonging to a minority within a minority to find a safe space or group where they are not subject to discrimination.⁵

4 “Hoping for a Concrete Intervention”: Follow-up Survey on Hate Speech and Harassment and Their Effects on Different Minority Groups, Ministry of Justice, <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/164248> (description sheet in English)

5 <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161239> (description sheet in English)

The population of Finland continues to become increasingly diverse with higher immigration. The number of people of foreign descent who were born in Finland and raised in bicultural families is continually growing, and their confidence that Finland is a land of equal opportunity is challenged by experiences involving discrimination. Regional differences in population base must also be considered when planning policy measures to promote equality. Most people of foreign descent tend to live in cities, and especially in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, where there are communities and services in their own languages.

Equality issues have become a burning topic of social debate in Finland nowadays. Recent population surveys indicate that people in Finland also appreciate the measures taken by public authorities to promote equality. A very large number of operators are engaged in equality work nowadays. Besides discharging their statutory obligations, public authorities are motivated to improve the genuine accessibility of their operations.

Many studies and surveys have shown in recent years that racism and discrimination have persisted in various services and levels of society in spite of policy measures. This shows that new initiatives and effort are required in equality work to bring about the desired change. Both the public debate preceding the Government statement and the public consultations arranged at the preparatory stage signalled that public authorities are expected to make concrete efforts to deliver on the promise of equality.

Realising a truly equitable society will require long-term work at various levels and in diverse areas of life. The recommendation that countries should draw up national anti-racism action plans comes from the UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban in 2001. Action plans against racism have proved an effective and comprehensive tool of policy work that enables concrete engagement with racism at various levels.

3.3 Action plan policies to combat racism and promote equality

The Government equality statement sought to continue and boost the work that has already been done in Finland in recent decades to combat racism and promote equality. This action plan refines the policies set out in the statement by identifying concrete measures. The selected measures are based on an assessment of the work done during the term of the previous Government, on recommendations from

bodies that monitor Finland's compliance with human rights treaties, on available research findings, and on information gained through strategic forecasts. The scenario is complemented by substantial material gathered from stakeholders, which has served as a basis for selecting the priorities and cross-cutting policies of the action plan.

More than one hundred stakeholders were consulted in the course of preparing the Government statement, and asked to express their views on the measures that would be required for continuing the Equal Finland action plan. After considering these views, the following four objectives emerged as the basis for the statement:

- dismantling structures in the labour market and elsewhere in society that lead to inequality,
- fostering good relations between population groups,
- promoting access to the labour market, and
- building up the knowledge base on racism.

The need for new initiatives in anti-racism work and additional attention to promoting equality among young adults also emerged through various stakeholders while preparing the action plan.

The following were also selected as cross-cutting policies of the action plan:

New initiatives to boost the realisation of equality

A huge number of public, private and third sector operators throughout Finland are already engaged in anti-racism work and measures to promote equality. The Government nevertheless retains an important role in encouraging, leading and directing equality work. An assessment of the Equal Finland action plan noted that funding of the programme should not rely solely on project financing, and that the political leadership should instead set aside sufficient resources for this work. The Government of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo has allocated EUR 6 million for implementing the Government statement. This will enable the action plan to launch new initiatives on issues that require attention, and to allocate additional resources to important measures that are still incomplete.

Additional investment in the equality and inclusion of young adults

Studies conducted in Finland and across the European Union have shown that Finnish-born young adults of foreign descent are highly aware of the discrimination and racism that targets them, and that these experiences damage their wellbeing, and their confidence in society and their own opportunities.⁶ The number of Finnish-born individuals of foreign descent in Finland is growing, and reinforcing the sense of social cohesion has accordingly become an issue that affects the direction of society as a whole. The social structures around young adults must support the realisation of equality. Besides concrete measures, inclusion of minority young adults in planning, implementing and monitoring equality work measures must also be taken into account. This will help to promote an experience of genuinely realising equality among young adults.

6 Eg. European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights FRA's report EU MIDIS II p.111, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-eu-midis-ii-main-results_en.pdf

4 Social atmosphere and debate, raising awareness, good community relations

An active social debate on issues of equality is currently ongoing in Finland, with most people considering it very important for public authorities to promote human rights. The Fundamental Rights Barometer project⁷ found that 95 per cent of the Finnish public consider human rights to be important for building a fairer society in Finland. On the other hand, 69 per cent of Finnish respondents to the Eurobarometer survey published in December 2023⁸ considered that anti-discrimination measures in their own country were effective, compared to an EU average of 84 per cent.

Various research institutes, such as the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA), have compiled information on the attitudes and values of people in Finland in recent years. These studies reveal major disparities in values and attitudes, for example, between people of varying age and educational background. The Well Said project of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE has reported on how the Finnish public views the general state of public debate. One concrete finding of these studies is that people in Finland yearn for greater opportunities for calm debate, even on difficult topics. Public authorities have also praised the highly popular dialogue method developed by the Erätauko Foundation as a very effective tool for promoting dialogue between the governing administration and the public. These dialogues also furnish public authorities with insight on everyday experiences as a basis for planning policy measures.

International human rights treaty monitoring bodies have repeatedly issued recommendations urging Finland to strengthen anti-racism work. The 2022 Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) included dozens of recommendations addressed to Finland by other States Parties on enhancing work to tackle racism and discrimination, including adequate resourcing and systematic implementation of measures. Treaty monitoring bodies have highlighted the role of government in building a general climate of attitudes, and have urged public authorities to implement information campaigns promoting equality, and to encourage public figures (especially politicians) not only to condemn all forms

7 <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163261> (description sheet in English)

8 [Discrimination in the European Union – December 2023 – Eurobarometer survey \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/index.cfm?id=688)

of racist speech, but also to work on reinforcing the values that such speech jeopardises⁹. Finland has also been urged to promote dialogue between public authorities and ethnic minorities, for example by strengthening its national and regional advisory boards for ethnic relations¹⁰. Finland has been encouraged to strengthen an inclusive approach to implementing work against racism and discrimination, and to make ethnic minority individuals more visible in society with a view to promoting respect for cultural diversity¹¹.

4.1 Thematic cross-cutting measures

New initiatives to boost the realisation of equality

Resources for implementing the equality statement will boost national equality work. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)

The Prime Minister will lead annual round table discussions on promoting equality and non-discrimination on a theme to be selected annually. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)

An anti-racism campaign will be carried out together with labour market organisations, sports, cultural and civil society organisations, and other operators. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)

A series of dialogues will be organised to boost the general public debate on racism and its effects. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)

Special measures to improve equality for young adults

The national and regional advisory boards for ethnic relations will broaden their dialogue work with respect to the racism encountered by children and young adults, and will arrange events for policymakers throughout Finland to highlight the experiences of young adults. (Ministry of Justice, 2024–2027)

9 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination CERD 2017, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance ECRI 2019, Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC 2023

10 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, FCNM 2020

11 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights CESCR 2021

4.2 Cooperation and agency involved in promoting equality

Among the key operators for promoting equality are those with a statutory duty to combat discrimination and promote equality in a systematic and informed way. Civil society, political policymakers, the media and businesses are also important stakeholders in realising equality. Important collaboration structures for anti-racism work include national and local level representative institutions, such as immigrant councils, Roma working groups, advisory boards for ethnic relations, advisory boards on Romani affairs, youth boards, councils for elderly people and councils for people with disability. Stakeholders supporting interfaith dialogue are also important partners for the action plan.

Research data would be needed on how these structures accommodate various population groups and how they work together. Studies could follow the lead of a 2022 youth council survey conducted by the Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland (NUVA), which examined the participation of young adults from various minorities in the work of youth councils and how this work accommodates equality issues. The findings of this survey revealed that young adults in sexual minorities were the best represented minority group. The survey responses suggest that both youth council leaders and youth councillors are highly aware of equality issues, and that equality-related topics also give rise to discussion on youth councils. Equality promotion nevertheless falls short, and there is a need for implementing more concrete measures.¹²

The Government statement encompasses the goal of boosting collaboration and information exchange between various stakeholders, and increasing the inclusion of civil society organisations and target groups of racism in monitoring and evaluating the action plan. This also responds to the assessment of the Equal Finland action plan, which recommended broadening the effectiveness analysis of activities from a mere internal analysis of implementing agencies to include evaluations received from target groups.

The action plan and its goals provide a thematic reference framework for collaboration between various stakeholders, identifying the key partners for implementing the goals. When implementing the Government statement, it is particularly natural to foster opportunities for various stakeholders to collaborate and exchange information through seminars, workshops and dialogues, thereby improving coordination and synergy between parties engaged in anti-racism work.

12 <https://nuva.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Nuvaselvitys-2022.pdf>

The process of implementing the Government statement will also systematically seek to reinforce the structures and resources of anti-racism work in civil society, ensuring that the victims of racism are more effectively entitled to participate in promoting equality and combating racism.

Civil society also fosters public debate and everyday interaction more generally. The Government statement seeks to enable ordinary members of the public to increase their awareness of equality and participate in promoting equality in their own surroundings.

Measures of the action plan:

- An annual forum for civil society organisations will be arranged on the themes of the Government statement and on assessment of the action plan. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)
- Thematic stakeholder events will be arranged with various operators throughout the Government term. These will involve such partners as municipalities, parishes, central government, civil society organisations, advisory boards for ethnic relations and advisory boards for Romani affairs. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)
- The operating conditions of organisations that promote equality will be supported through measures of the Civil Society Organisations Strategy. (Ministry of Justice, 2024–2027)
- Tendering will be arranged for a discretionary government grant with a view to promoting the participation of civil society organisations representing ethnic minorities in work to combat racism. (Ministry for Education and Culture, Prime Minister's Office, other ministries, 2025–2026)
- An equality event will be arranged in the framework of an EU funded project Well planned for participants including stakeholders and public authorities from the world of work, culture and civil society. This event will seek to increase awareness through networking and dialogue. (Ministry of Justice, Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024)

4.3 Knowledge base related to realising equality

Discrimination monitoring has been developed at central government level in Finland since the 1990s. The national discrimination monitoring system produces information and compiles information from other sources into an overall impression of how equality has been realised. The system entails a discrimination monitoring specialist group that provides a platform for research institutes, public authorities and civil society organisations to collaborate in identifying information gaps and enhancing national discrimination monitoring. Efforts have been made in recent years to develop joint EU-level data collection on the realisation of equality led by the European Commission and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

A great deal of information has also been gathered in Finland concerning various aspects of realising equality. Examples of research include individual surveys by ministries, population surveys by research institutes, various barometers, statistical reviews and research summaries. The Ministry of Justice has published the Discrimination in Finland 2020–2023 research review, providing a cross-section of research findings released over the review period.

This period has included a great deal of debate on enhancing data gathering and solving problems. The key challenge in measuring equality realisation is the background information in official registers that determines the variables available for analysing data. The importance of researched information was also highlighted during the summer consultation round. Besides gathering statistical data, there is a perceived need for more academic research with a view to more clearly identifying the mechanisms and practices that lead to racism.

Finland has also received recommendations on this subject from the monitoring bodies of human rights treaties. For example, a recommendation received in 2021 from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights describes the challenge and approaches to solving it: “The Committee recommends that the State party improve its data-collection system with a view to producing reliable data disaggregated based on prohibited grounds of discrimination and to identifying those groups that are disadvantaged in their exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. In this regard, the Committee also recommends that the State party (a) apply a participatory approach and appropriate methodologies in order to collect data on ‘hard-to-count’, marginalised populations and those who may be excluded from traditional household surveys; (b) use, on the basis of the principle of self-identification, proxy indicators to circumvent the legal prohibition of collection of data on the basis of ethnicity.”

The evaluation of the Equal Finland action plan also recommended reinforcing the identification of individual group-specific issues by increasing research on the racism experiences of various groups, and broadening the gathering of data on racism and its expression to include the greatest possible range of sectors.

Information will be produced to enable informed policy measures within the context of the action plan. A survey of the experiences of individuals in various religious groups, for example, would seek to build a knowledge base enabling more informed social debate on the importance of religion to equality and inclusion, and launching of concrete measures to promote equality. The survey would be defined and its findings would be analysed and disseminated in partnership with representatives of various religious communities.

Measures of the action plan:

- A Government discrimination monitoring specialist group will be appointed to analyse research data on discrimination in support of the goals of the Government statement. (Prime Minister's Office, other ministries, 2024–2027)
- Information will be formulated to support the Government equality statement in accordance with needs identified by the discrimination monitoring specialist group. (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)
 - Research on the experiences of security and inclusion of people of foreign descent will be conducted in 2024 for official use.
 - The experiences of people in various religious groups regarding equality in Finland will be studied in 2025.
 - A study on measures to promote equality and their societal impact will be conducted in 2026–2027.
- A website will be maintained at www.perusoikeusseuranta.fi to support government monitoring of the implementation of fundamental and human rights, and analysis reports based on the contents of the website will be produced to support the goals of the Government statement. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Justice, 2024–2027)

4.4 Community relations nationally, regionally and locally

Community relations may be studied between the majority population and minorities, and between various individual population groups. They are considered functional if various groups and their individual members treat one another with respect and are able to interact, and if society and individual participation in society are perceived as secure and equitable without regard to background.

The government has been developing a community relations policy since 2010 based on the British *good relations measurement framework*. Community relations policy refers to a policy that seeks to increase positive interaction and trust between groups, and to prevent and resolve conflict in community relations. This policy is also cognisant of the social status of groups and potentially inequitable situations.¹³

The goal of developing a community relations policy was included in the Equal Finland action plan. A pilot project was launched in this context providing financial support for regional and local activities to promote good community relations. In practice the measures of the pilot project implemented the goals of the action plan more broadly at the regional and local level, uniting various operators in considering regional challenges and taking action to resolve them.

The recommendations of the action plan evaluation noted that the activities of the *Good community relations* pilot project were very important from the perspective of implementing the action plan regionally and locally, and that such activities should also be included in future anti-racism action plans in order to ensure their regional and local effectiveness.

Measures of the action plan:

- Support for the work of the Sámi and sign language truth and reconciliation commissions, including support for implementing findings (dissemination and events). (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Justice, 2024–2027)
- An evaluation to develop the work and structure of the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (current condition, future): operating conditions, purpose, duties, organisation and resources. (Ministry of Justice, national and regional ETNO advisory boards 2024)

13 <https://rm.coe.int/raportti-kotoutumis-ja-vaestoshuhepolitikan-tilannekatsaus-suomessa-/1680ab3d68> (Abstract in English)

- Support for implementing regional action plans prepared as part of the good community relations project of Uusimaa Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry for Employment and Economy, Ministry of Justice/ETNO, 2024–2025)
- Developing community-oriented work in the museum sector to strengthen community relations. Preparing a development project with the Ministry of Justice and the National Museum of Finland. (Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Justice, 2025–2027)

4.5 Other measures

- Training professionals and boosting awareness in preventing of honour-based violence. Improving recognition of the phenomenon and intervention when it occurs. Increasing collaboration with communities and strengthening the role of the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations in boosting awareness. Also seeking to improve the knowledge base on this phenomenon. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of the Interior, ETNO, 2024–2027)
- Examining the need to criminalise coercive control in accordance with the Government Programme (Ministry of Justice, 2025).
- A victim policy action programme currently in preparation will promote support measures for victims of systematic harassment. (Ministry of Justice, state's employer offices, 2024–2026)
- Enhancing the competence of Anchor model team members by arranging national further training. (Ministry of the Interior/Police University College, 2025)
- The Ministry of Justice has prepared a Government proposal to revise the Act on the Sámi Parliament based on the work of the commission chaired by Permanent Secretary Timonen in partnership with the Sámi Parliament. The Government submitted this proposal to the Parliament of Finland on 14 December 2023. (Ministry of Justice, 2024)



5 Education system, and culture, sport and youth policy

Gender equality and non-discrimination are guiding principles of all education policy from early childhood education onwards. The value base of the national plans and curriculum criteria for early childhood education includes gender equality, non-discrimination, respect for human rights, and sustainable development. The role of schools and other educational institutions in work to promote gender equality and non-discrimination was also stressed during the consultation round on the Government statement. The submitted opinions raised the point that equality themes should be taught and discussed from the basic level onwards until school education ends. A report of the national Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations on young adult dialogues stresses the importance of community relations work in schools. This report includes a recommendation that schools should actively create opportunities for interaction between young adults of varying background.¹⁴

14 <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/165318> (description sheet in English)

Both the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-discrimination Act impose a duty to promote gender equality and non-discrimination, to prevent harassment, and to draw up gender equality and non-discrimination plans from early childhood education to the higher education level.

A national Teacher Education Forum established by the Ministry of Education and Culture has promoted implementation of a Teacher Education Development Programme that was most recently republished in 2022. This Programme seeks to meet the latest needs of teacher education in the operating conditions of the 2020s, accommodating such aspects as challenges related to gender equality and non-discrimination. The Teacher Education Forum will continue operating in 2024–2027.

The Ministry of Education and Culture directed higher education institutions to draw up accessibility plans of their own based on the common guidelines of the accessibility plan for higher education and higher education institutions (Towards more accessible higher education and higher education institutions) during 2022. Future realisation of the goals of accessibility plans for higher education institutions will be monitored as part of the guidance process between those institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Many studies conducted in recent years have suggested that, despite equality legislation and guidelines, discrimination and racism have continued in the structures of education and schooling, with whole lifetime repercussions arising through educational pathways and career choices. Examples of inequality include the finding of an international PISA comparison published in 2019 that Finland has the largest disparity between the PISA results of immigrants and the majority population in OECD countries.¹⁵ The findings are worrying from the perspective of realising equal opportunities. The tendency to direct immigrant students – even those who were born in Finland or already learned the Finnish language in early childhood – towards Finnish as a second language education has been much discussed in recent years. The Finnish National Agency for Education has launched several measures to address this problem, including investigating its scope and arranging pertinent supplementary training.

15 Feasibility Study on Structural Discrimination: Identifying and Monitoring Discrimination in Different Sectors of Society, Ministry of Justice, 2023, <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/165023>

Responding to a report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, Finns of African descent noted that discrimination occurs and that they have to face it at all levels of schooling, from early childhood education through the secondary and even higher education stages. Nearly one third of respondents experiencing discrimination in education had already done so in early childhood education before reaching school age.¹⁶

The 2021 recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights proposed that promoting non-discrimination should be included in school curricula. Teaching staff should also be trained in non-discrimination and gender equality, an action programme should be implemented to prevent bullying, violence and harassment in early childhood education, schools and educational institutions, and the rights of all children to inclusive education should be ensured. 94 per cent of Finnish respondents to a recent Eurobarometer survey¹⁷ considered it important for school lessons and learning materials to include information about racism.

The evaluation of the Equal Finland action plan notes that identifying concrete goals and measures may require delving into a more limited number of areas of life. Channels of influence and measures may thereby be planned as packages that involve all levels of public administration and civil society. A comprehensive development programme of this kind will be realised in the education and teaching sector to implement this recommendation in the context of the action plan.

5.1 Thematic cross-cutting measures

New initiatives to boost the realisation of equality

A gender equality and non-discrimination development programme covering the entire education system will be planned and implemented. This programme will seek to support and monitor the formulation of statutory gender equality and non-discrimination plans, and to make them a more effective tool for promoting gender equality and non-discrimination. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024–2027)

¹⁶ Report on discrimination experienced by people of African descent, Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020

¹⁷ Discrimination in the European Union – December 2023 – Eurobarometer survey (europa.eu)

Special measures to improve equality for young adults

Equality expertise will be reinforced in the youth sector as part of implementing the national youth work and policy programme and centres of expertise. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024–2027)

A study will be conducted to support gender equality and non-discrimination plans in early childhood education, and to enlarge the knowledge base. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health/Child strategy, 2024–2025)

The pedagogical competence of hobby instructors and coaches will be enhanced in such areas as gender equality and non-discrimination through development projects of the Finnish model for leisure activities. The projects to be financed will also help to promote equal hobby opportunities for children and young adults. (Ministry of Education and Culture/organisations/municipalities/University of the Arts, 2024–2027)

5.2 Realising equality, gender equality, non-discrimination and human rights in the field of physical exercise, sport and youth work

When applying for discretionary government grants, organisations that promote physical exercise are required to have up-to-date gender equality and non-discrimination plans, and to monitor their implementation. The aspect of responsibility has expanded since 2021, and its significance when determining the size of grant awards has grown. During 2024 the Ministry of Education and Culture will specify the responsibility criteria (including gender equality and non-discrimination) governing the award of discretionary government grants to organisations promoting sports and physical exercise, assess the responsibility measures of organisations, and continue to take this assessment into account when determining the size of grant awarded. The Ministry of Education and Culture is also supporting equality projects in the sports sector, including anti-racism activities and research in the field.

The Youth Act also requires organisations in receipt of discretionary government grants to promote gender equality and non-discrimination systematically. A report on the gender equality and non-discrimination planning of youth organisations was published in 2022. The report found that most organisations have formulated such a plan, and that this plan has affected their operations. The requirements and duty to promote equality are nevertheless perceived to be unclear. Operators are also unsure of where to seek support for this work.

Measures of the action plan:

- The responsibility criteria for awards of discretionary government grants to organisations promoting sport and physical exercise (including gender equality and non-discrimination) will be specified, the responsibility activities of organisations will be assessed, and consideration of this assessment will continue when determining the size of grant awarded (15 per cent). (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024 assessment, consideration of grant awards for 2024 – 2027)
- The *You are not alone* service will be placed on a permanent footing and expanded (in accordance with the Government Programme and Government statement 2/2023). (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024–2027)
- Promotion of equality in the youth sector will continue in accordance with the objectives of the Youth Act. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024–2027)

5.3 Equality and diversity in art and culture, and in leisure activities

In accordance with the Strategy for Cultural Policy 2025 of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Working Group on Cultural Policy, Immigrants and the Promotion of Cultural Diversity has prepared policies and action proposals for increasing diversity, systemic equality and inclusion in the field of art and culture. An action programme published by the Ministry in 2023 includes six packages of measures for promoting cultural diversity, non-discrimination and gender equality in cultural policy, government agencies, national art institutions, and collaboration with cultural sector communities. The Ministry requires art and culture communities to take duties under the Act on Equality Between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act into account when applying for discretionary government grants. From 2025 onwards, applicants will be required to have a responsibility plan that must also include measures to promote gender equality and non-discrimination in the community's sector.

Recent reports indicating that members of minorities engaged in art and culture have experienced inappropriate treatment, racism and discrimination in their work provide strong backing for measures to promote cultural diversity and work for equality. (Artists of foreign background in Finland, Diversity Report, Cupore, 2023 [in Finnish], Finnish Actors Union survey: There is discrimination and racism in the industry, 2022, Initiative: The status of foreign-born art and culture professionals in Finland, Cupore, 2020 [in Finnish])

Measures of the action plan:

- Implementation and development of ethical guidelines in the field of art and culture will continue. (Ministry of Education and Culture, organisations, 2024–2027)
- The priorities, practical measures and monitoring of cultural diversity and equality will be settled in the 2024–2027 performance agreement period. (Ministry of Education and Culture, government agencies)
- Criteria supporting responsible operations will be developed in the work of communities to promote and monitor the realisation of good governance, gender equality, non-discrimination, cultural diversity and sustainable development as part of awarding discretionary government grants. (Ministry of Education and Culture, organisations, 2024–2027)
- The effectiveness of awarding discretionary government grants for cultural diversity and anti-racism activities will be assessed. (Ministry of Education and Culture, Arts Promotion Centre Finland, 2024–2025)
- The opportunities provided by the dialogue card tool promoting cultural diversity and sustainable development to boost equality in training events and in developing work life in practice will be exploited. (Ministry of Education and Culture, Arts Promotion Centre Finland, organisations, 2024–2027)
- Measures will be implemented under the national strategy for the recreational use of nature to enable equitable and unimpeded roaming for everyone in the local natural environment. (Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, Metsähallitus, 2023–2030)

6 Equality and non-discrimination at work

Access to the world of work plays a crucial role in establishing the social status and inclusion of an individual. While the disparity in the employment rates of people of foreign descent compared to those of Finnish descent has narrowed, the difference in favour of those born in Finland was still 9.3 percentage points for men and 21.6 percentage points for women in 2022.¹⁸ Comments received in the Government statement consultation round also called in particular for efforts to improve the educational opportunities of women of foreign descent, and in developing their language competence and participation in society.

A segregation of the labour market whereby people of foreign descent are overrepresented in low-wage sectors was also visible. This is also reflected in the findings of the E2 survey, indicating that 53 per cent of Arabic speakers and 45 per cent of Russian speakers considered themselves overqualified for their work.¹⁹ The status of foreign employees is more vulnerable than that of employees of Finnish descent, as data held by Statistics Finland indicates that they are more likely to work in irregular employment.²⁰

The monitoring bodies of human rights treaties have also urged Finland to take steps to address discrimination at work. For example, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recommended in 2019 that public authorities should take strong action in close partnership with affected communities to address and combat the problem of discrimination against people of African descent in both the housing and labour markets. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also recommended in 2022 that Finland should improve the participation of immigrant women in political and public life, and their access to well-paid employment.

18 Comprehensive overview of integration, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2024 https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/165441/TEM_oppaat_1_2024_Kotoutumisen_kokonaiskatsaus_2023.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (summary in English)

19 How different are we? Survey on identities, values and attitudes among the Finnish majority population and the largest ethno-linguistic minorities. 2020 <https://www.e2.fi/media/julkaisut-ja-alustukset/identiteetti-tutkimus/how-different-are-we.pdf>

20 Discrimination in Finland 2020–2023, Ministry of Justice, 2024

A comprehensive reform of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration will take effect at the beginning of 2025. This reform seeks to strengthen the employment, language competence and inclusion of immigrants, clarify the responsibilities of various operators, accommodate transfers of official functions, reinforce multidisciplinary cooperation, and strengthen the integration of immigrants outside the workforce.

The Government statement set out a policy of beginning annual societal round table discussions on equality and non-discrimination led by the Prime Minister. The theme of the first round table of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (18 March 2024) was addressing racism and discrimination at work, and involved 40 key operators from the labour market, education and civil society. The round table was preceded by three workshops that formulated action proposals for the round table discussions. Based on a discussion led by the Prime Minister, the following measures to promote equality and wellbeing at work were taken up for further refinement and study:

1. Developing incentives for employers to recruit people of varying descent.
2. Strengthening counselling for immigrant entrepreneurs with respect to such aspects as navigating public administration systems.
3. Networking of students, especially in higher education, and assisting intern placement by such measures as incentives for student organisations.
4. Formulating a retention strategy that encourages trained specialists to remain in Finland.
5. Facilitating equality planning by providing assistance without increased obligations, for example in the form of free materials that are already available to various parties.

6.1 Thematic cross-cutting measures

New initiatives to boost the realisation of equality

Transitioning of immigrant women into the labour market will be promoted in accordance with the Government Programme through an increased allocation of EUR 5 million for integrating and employing immigrant mothers as of the beginning of 2025. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, as of 2025)

A regional pilot project will be implemented/financed to support the access of highly educated immigrants to intern placements, duties that match their skills, and general career development. This project may be implemented by such parties as employment authorities, universities or organisations. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025–2026)

Training of specialists moving from Employment and Economic Development Offices to municipalities will include a module on equality and diversity at work. This training module will include such topics as non-discrimination in employment services, promoting diversity in workplaces, and considering multiculturalism in recruitment. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Justice, 2024–2025)

6.2 Other measures promoting diversity and equality at work

- A working group appointed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment to boost the employment of individuals who are disadvantaged in the labour market and to increase participation in work life will promote non-discrimination, diversity and equal opportunities at work. The working group will be assigned to prepare an action programme to boost the work life participation of people who are disadvantaged in the labour market and to monitor implementation of the programme. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2024–2027)
- IMAGO coaching through Employment and Economic Development Offices will continue for small and medium-sized businesses operating in Finland. This service helps to boost business operations by developing diverse recruitment and job orientation training, fostering an employer image that interests jobseekers, and establishing a corporate culture in which all employees may thrive and succeed in their work. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2024–2025)

7 Combating racist harassment and violence

The Finnish government has sought to develop new and more effective ways to tackle harassment, discriminatory and violent speech, and racist violence in recent years. This work has been coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, which has requested additional resources for development work from European Commission funding programmes. The work has helped to improve coordination, collaboration and information flows between various operators, with special reports produced and training events arranged. The work was based on action recommendations drafted and published by the *Against Hate* project, which accommodate the roles of various operators and previously implemented measures.²¹ This work will continue in the context of implementing the Government statement.

Finland has received recommendations on tackling hate crimes and hate speech from several human rights treaty monitoring bodies. These recommendations focus in particular on gathering data and monitoring, training law enforcement officers, developing victim support services, and changing general attitudes to ensure that public debate avoids inciting hatred of minority groups. The Government Programme also includes the objective of strengthening the national culture of good discussion and exchange of opinions.

The 2019 ECRI country report for Finland recommended that public authorities should reinforce their responses against hate speech by setting up an inter-institutional working group to develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle effectively the problem of racist and homo-/transphobic hate speech. This group should include the relevant authorities, as well as equality bodies, civil society organisations and, as much as possible, media representatives.

21 [Recommendations of the Against hate project for work against hate crimes and hate speech](#), Ministry of Justice, 2019

7.1 Thematic cross-cutting measures

New initiatives to boost the realisation of equality

Making members of religious minorities more aware of legal remedies related to discrimination and harassment. (Ministry of Justice, 2024–2025)

Establishing a coordination network for a good culture of debate. Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom, National Police Board, Police University College, National Court Administration, 2024–2027

7.2 Measures to combat anti-Semitism in Finland

The spring 2024 Human Rights Centre and the Ministry of Justice publication *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism in Finland – A report on discrimination and hate crime targeting Jews* notes that most people who self-identify as Jews feel that anti-Semitism in Finland has increased in recent years. The report finds that the greatest problem is perceived to be anti-Semitism on the internet and social media, and in the media and political life.²² The conflict that has arisen between Israel and the Hamas terrorist organisation has exacerbated the atmosphere also outside the Middle East. As part of this escalation, an increase in anti-semitism has also been observed, including in Finland. The Government statement will serve as a framework for a community relations and integration policy that seeks to promote good relations between various groups, including minority and religious groups.

Finland has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, according to which:

*Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*²³

22 <https://bin.yhdistysavain.fi/1586428/RWmi5qFyISakQRjVPSEY0aINBa/Antisemitismiselvitys%202024.pdf> (description sheet in English)

23 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>

The European Commission recommends that Member States should draw up separate action plans against anti-Semitism. Government measures to combat anti-Semitism in Finland have been included in this action plan. The Ministry of Justice will coordinate Government work against anti-Semitism. One important tool for promoting this work is the Government anti-Semitism network, which seeks to promote collaboration and sharing of information on this subject. The evaluation report of the Equal Finland action plan also recommended that measures to eradicate anti-Semitism should be more prominently included in future anti-racism action plans.

Measures of the action plan:

- The name of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Persecution has been changed to the *Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust* in accordance with international practice. (Decision of the Prime Minister's Office, 25 January 2024)
- The prospects for criminalising Holocaust denial in the Criminal Code will be investigated. (Ministry of Justice, 2024–2026)
- A legal study will be conducted into criminalising the use of symbols of Nazism and Communism. (Ministry of Justice, 2024–2025)
- Discretionary government grants will be awarded to promote the security of Jewish congregations in Finland (EUR 400,000 annually). (Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2027)
- Combatting anti-Semitic attitudes by applying instruments from various policy areas, such as education, integration, and security (all ministries, 2025–2027).
- Ways of making key public authorities more aware of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism will be sought in partnership with the Finnish IHRA delegation. (Ministry of Justice, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2025)

7.3 Measures to combat racist harassment and violence targeting Muslims, Roma and other ethnic and religious minorities

Several studies suggest that minorities who stand out from the mainstream population of Finland due to such factors as skin colour or cultural or religious attire are particularly vulnerable to racist harassment and violence.²⁴ Comments on the draft plan also highlighted Muslims and Roma people in particular as groups that face a great deal of negative attitudes, racist harassment and violence, and it was hoped that this would be a focus of greater attention in the action plan.

The Eurobarometer survey published by the European Commission regularly provides information on various topics, focusing on discrimination roughly every four years. The latest barometer surveys show that negative attitudes towards Roma people and Muslims are uppermost in many responses. Some 72 per cent of Finnish respondents to the Eurobarometer published in 2023 felt that Roma people are the most common targets of discrimination in Finland, ahead of 57 per cent nominating ethnic background and 53 per cent selecting skin colour in this category. Roma and Muslim workers were most often viewed as the least desirable choice of colleague among representatives of ethnic and religious groups at work.

Experiences of equality realisation among people of African descent were also investigated by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman. Most respondents to this survey report experiences of discrimination on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis. The report finds that racial discrimination and harassment were encountered especially in urban public settings, at work, in jobseeking, and in education. Racial discrimination also occurred in public services, such as health and social services. About one fifth of respondents have experienced ethnic profiling by the police or security guards. The first experiences of discrimination occurred already in early childhood education and care, or in the early grades of comprehensive school education. The survey responses also show experiences of multiple discrimination. Besides Afrophobic treatment due to skin colour, up to 65 per cent of respondents have also experienced discrimination for some other individual reason. The respondents felt that being a foreigner, language, and religion or conviction were the most common other grounds for discrimination.²⁵

24 For example, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights FRA 2023 report *Being Black in the EU – Experiences of people of African descent, and the 2023 MoniSuomi survey* conducted by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

25 <https://yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu.fi/en/-/report-of-the-non-discrimination-ombudsman-racism-and-discrimination-everyday-experiences-for-people-of-african-descent-in-finland>

The Ministry of Justice published a report assisted by artificial intelligence on the occurrence of online hate speech in 2021²⁶. The single most common word in the material collected in the survey was *Muslim*. This word was used in 26 per cent of all texts identified by artificial intelligence as hate speech. Most police reports of hate crime cases related to religion also concern Islam. Police statistics for 2022, for example, indicate that 60 such crime reports concerned Islam, with 24 relating to Christianity and 10 to Judaism. Most (43 cases) of the incidents concerning Islam were verbal insults, threats and harassment.

Some recent information focuses on racism and discrimination targeting Roma people, especially with respect to children and young adults. A 2023 report published as part of the national children's strategy by the Ombudsman for Children in Finland²⁷ reviewed the experiences of children aged between 11 and 17 years who self-identify as Roma in various parts of Finland. The survey broadly considered the wellbeing of Roma children and young adults, with discrimination as one theme. While the report gave a favourable impression of the general situation and resources of Roma children and young adults, its materials indicated that racism and discrimination are features of daily life. Some 57 per cent of Roma children responding to the survey had faced incidences of discrimination at least occasionally. More than half of Roma participants in a study of hate speech and harassment published by the Ministry of Justice had experienced hate speech or harassment at least once a month. These incidents were evenly distributed between single occurrences and daily experiences.²⁸

Consultation round comments on the draft programme also highlighted the need for better communication of existing support services for victims of racist harassment and violence, and for new forms of low-threshold support. The You are not alone service developed in the field of sport and physical exercise is one example of this support, and its further development will be supported within the context of this programme (p. 36).

26 <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163382>

27 <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/164839>

28 https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/164248/OM_2022_10_SO.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (description sheet in English)

Measures of the action plan:

- Launching an inter-ministerial religious affairs network for the purpose of exchanging information and coordination related to religious equality and religious freedom. (Ministry of Justice, Prime Minister's Office, other ministries, 2024–2027)
- Active cooperation will be carried out with the ESF+ -funded project Active Agency, coordinated by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, which aims to promote the equality and inclusion of the Roma population. The cooperation aims especially at disseminating the results of the project.

A municipal development programme will be implemented to combat racism that targets ethnic and religious minorities, and to promote equality.

- Implementation of a pilot project to develop local anti-racism advisory services in partnership with municipalities and civil society organisations. (Prime Minister's Office, ministries, 2024–2027)
- Supporting Six Cities networking and expertise on equality issues, and disseminating the lessons learned through network cooperation to the broader municipal domain (a national seminar, communications). (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Ministry of Finance, 2025–2026)
- Supporting religious equality, religious freedom and interfaith dialogue locally. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education and Culture 2026)

8 Internal action by the Government and administration

The Non-Discrimination Act imposes a strong obligation on all public authorities to promote equality in both their operations and their personnel policy. This promotion must be based on an assessment of the equality scenario, with measures arranged into a plan that is monitored and updated.

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman supervises compliance with the promotion obligations laid down in the Non-Discrimination Act. Monitoring by the Ombudsman indicates that there are still significant shortcomings in equality planning within central government. Some 65 per cent of public authorities had drawn up an operational non-discrimination plan. 68 per cent of public authorities reporting that they had drawn up such a plan stated that it was based on an impact assessment of operations. Few public authorities had comprehensively included various grounds for discrimination when assessing initial conditions. One key qualitative shortcoming also concerned impact assessment methods, which seldom (7 per cent) included any application of the findings or recommendations of human rights reports or consultation with groups of persons at risk of discrimination that were clients of the authority (9 per cent). Only 30 per cent of agencies arranged regular personnel training on equality issues. 38 per cent of agencies had not trained their personnel on equality issues at all. Equality training of agency personnel in managerial grades was even less common.²⁹

Similar problems have been found in the gender equality and non-discrimination planning of other operators. While numerous national, regional and local measures have been implemented to support better implementation of promotion obligations, there is still no research information on the effectiveness of these measures.

29 Based on information received from the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, spring 2024.

8.1 Thematic cross-cutting measures

New initiatives to boost the realisation of equality

Annual consideration of the decisions, conclusions and recommendations issued to Finland by international human rights monitoring bodies, concept development and first round in 2024. Processing and associated communications annually thereafter. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2024–2026)

Preparation of a training plan of various training modules for political leaders and top public service grades, with annual training arranged as planned from 2025 onwards. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Finance, 2024–2027)

Diversity and anonymous recruitment training to be arranged for central government human resources management and specialists. (Ministry of Finance, Prime Minister's Office, 2024)

Training and background materials on Finnish human rights policy to be produced and disseminated internally for public servants working in international and EU affairs. (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2024–2026)

8.2 Performance management in ministries as a channel for promoting gender equality and non-discrimination work in administrative branches

The Ministry of Finance has overall responsibility for developing performance management in central government. The performance management and agency structure network coordinated by the Ministry of Finance is a forum for ministries to agree on common cross-cutting objectives. Equality has been recognised as a cross-cutting theme in developing performance management of central government agencies, with the Ministry of Justice producing related support material in 2023.

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman has developed a tool to ease the access of ministries to information on completing equality planning and on the need for support in agencies of their own administrative branch. The process of developing this tool included asking ministries what kind of support they needed in their performance management role. The responses suggested a need for such resources as information on good practice in data collection and support in identifying equality-related issues and assessing equality impacts.

Measures of the action plan:

- Ministries will accommodate the equality content of the Government equality statement and the central government personnel strategy 2030 in 2024 performance negotiations and in other communications with their agencies within the context of the performance management process. (Ministry of Finance, Prime Minister's Office, 2024)
- Equality promotion in ministerial performance management will be supported and harmonised by posting support material prepared by the Ministry of Justice in 2023 and steering practices for individual administrative branches on the ministerial performance manager network. The effectiveness of measures will be monitored in the course of developing performance management. (Ministry of Finance, Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2025)
- Uptake of existing online non-discrimination and gender equality training in the ministries and their administrative branches will be boosted as part of performance management. (Prime Minister's Office, other ministries, 2024–2027)

8.3 Equal opportunities and diversity in central government recruitment and advertising of vacancies

One of the aims of the joint central government personnel strategy 2030 is a reform of operating culture, with attention paid to responsibility, a sense of community, equality, diversity and inclusion.

Ministry of Finance guidelines for public appointments recommend that application notices include a *diversity clause* encouraging applicants of varying age and gender, and members of linguistic, cultural or other minorities.

The Prime Minister's Office has produced a report on discrimination in jobseeking. The report examines various methods that have been commonly applied to prevent discrimination in recruitment, such as increasing anonymous recruitment, diversity clauses, structured job interviews, neutrality in advertising vacancies, developing diversity management and equality plans. Most available research findings concern anonymous recruitment, even though outcomes have not always been favourable.³⁰ Trials of anonymous recruitment may nevertheless assist HR specialists and supervisors in reviewing recruitment processes and identifying potential biases of their own.

The new central government recruitment system allows agencies to recruit anonymously by processing applications with no personal identifying details at all.

The Ministry of Finance and a diversity working group from the personnel management forum have jointly produced support material on diversity to assist the diversity work of agencies and institutions.

Measures of the action plan:

- Restarting the work of the central government personnel management forum diversity working group to support diversity work and implementation of the central government personnel strategy within agencies. (Ministry of Finance, 2024)
- The introduction of anonymous recruitment in the joint central government recruitment system will be monitored. All ministries will be urged to conduct trials of anonymous recruitment. (Ministry of Finance, Prime Minister's Office, 2024–2025)

30 https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163080/VNTEAS_2021_27.pdf (description sheet in English)



9 Monitoring and assessment of the action plan

The action plan will be implemented under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office together with other ministries and public authorities. A cross-administrative project group appointed by the Government will monitor the work. Progress of the work and the impact of measures will be assessed at the Government mid-term policy review session in 2025, at which point new measures may be introduced as necessary. An interim report will be prepared for the mid-term policy review, detailing implementation up to that point, and identifying any needs for improvement that may have arisen.

One special focus of monitoring and assessment will be the impact of the action plan, which will be considered in stakeholder surveys and other measures related to the assessment. Both qualitative and quantitative data on the implementation of measures will be collected for assessment.

The views of stakeholders on the progress of the action plan and on the success and impact of measures will be canvassed by inviting specialists to project group meetings, by visiting various key networks and working groups to report on progress of the work, and by arranging individual stakeholder events. Particularly the annual organisation forum referred to in section 4.2 will serve assessment of the action plan, enabling equality-promoting organisations to voice their concerns and influence the direction of implementation.



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ISBN pdf: 978-952-383-981-6

ISSN pdf: 2490-0966