



FINLAND

ASYLUM

In February, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child found that Finland failed to consider the best interests of the child of a lesbian couple when rejecting his asylum request, and to protect him against a real risk of irreparable harm when the family had no other choice but to return to Russia. This was the first time that the CRC made a decision on sexual orientation issues, and the first individual communication ruling by a UN Treaty body on children in same-sex families.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Several hate speech incidents took place again this year. In May, an Oulu police officer said about the local Pride event that it was a “freak circus” that brings disgrace. The police department in Oulu distanced itself from the statement. The investigation is ongoing.

In April, the Prosecutor General announced it would press charges against the Chairperson of the Christian Democrat Parliamentary Group, Päivi Räsänen, who had made several hateful statements against LGBTI people in the past years. The Public Prosecutor received quite some backlash following the announcement. In November, it was reported that the Prosecutor General has received a great number of e-mails in defence of Räsänen from all over the world, with many e-mails being aggressive and homophobic.

Anti-trans hate speech increased at the time of the Olympics, regarding the participation of trans athletes.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In March, a trans woman was physically assaulted in Helsinki and a trans woman was verbally harassed in Tampere. The attacks came in the aftermath of a transphobic murder at a time when trans people feel unsafe - the prosecution is currently ongoing at the district court.

Several attacks took place in the summer. In July, several participants of a party organised by Seta Jyväskylä were physically assaulted by a man who said he “hated homosexuals”. On 1 July a rainbow star sign in Turku was vandalised a few hours after it was painted. In late June, a youth worker was threatened in the street when they helped young people paint a rainbow sign on the sidewalk in Hankasalmi. Rainbow flags were stolen in Lahti and Oulu, and vandalised in Järvenpää.

In February, the government introduced amendments to the Criminal Code, which add ‘gender’ as a protected ground and include it as an aggravating circumstance. In the current legislation trans persons are only included implicitly. LGBTIQ+ organisations had advocated for the inclusion of gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (GIGESC) to better respond to hate crime against trans, non-binary and intersex persons. LGBTIQ+ organisations criticised that the government bill does not only leave out GIGESC, but defines gender in a binary way.

BODILY INTEGRITY

In August, a citizen’s initiative collected the mandatory 50,000 signatures in one month requesting the parliament to ban conversion therapy against children and adults and cover both sexual orientation and gender identity. The parliament will now have to debate the issue.

The government reiterated that it would ban non-consensual and medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children, as set out in the Gender Equality Programme (2020–2023), but has made no concrete steps yet. In April, the UN Human Rights Committee recommended the government to prevent intersex surgeries.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

1 February marked the 50th anniversary of Finland decriminalising same-sex relations.

In October, the Ministry of Justice published an overview of the human rights situation of LGBTIQ people in Finland. The report aims to support the government in its work to promote the fundamental and human rights of LGBTIQ people and includes a set of proposals to enhance them.

FAMILY

In the spring, the government shared the first draft of the new Parental Law, which was met by firm criticism by civil society as it fails children in rainbow families entirely. LGBTIQ+ civil society had advocated for the recognition of more than two legal parents and for gender neutral parenthood recognition instead of naming parents as mothers and/or fathers. The bill was introduced to the parliament in the autumn, but it did not include these issues - a great disappointment to LGBTI organisations.



FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Pride events were held in around 20 different cities and small towns this year.

Prime Minister Sanna Marin acted as the patron of Helsinki Pride Week for the second year in a row. Pride events were broadcast on public TV, featuring interviews with Marin. The indigenous Sápmi Pride was held for the seventh time this year.

A day after the city of Turku celebrated Pride by painting a rainbow pedestrian crossing, the Police Board ordered its removal.

HEALTH

In February, Finland changed the regulations on blood donations and lowered the mandatory deferral period for men who have sex with men from 12 to four months. As of 1 July, PrEP can be accessed for free.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Finland's first association of senior LGBTI people was established in June.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In April, a citizens' initiative calling for legal gender recognition (LGR) law reform to go promptly ahead, centering young people's rights and self-determination, collected the mandatory 50,000 signatures in a day. In November, the citizens' initiative was handed to the Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs and Health after a preliminary parliamentary debate. In April, the UN Human Rights Committee recommended the government to put in place a quick and easy LGR process.

A working group to plan the law reform was appointed by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health in June, but the process has been delayed and received much criticism from civil society. In June, the government announced that the working group would prepare a bill according to the government programme, ie. without the sterility and mandatory diagnosis requirements. This means that legal and medical transitioning will be completely separate. Nonetheless, a reflection period will be included and the age limit will be set at 18. The working group is now preparing the new draft law, to be presented in spring 2022.

The process to reform the social security number is ongoing with a deadline of the end of 2022.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Seta's deputy Chair, Alia Dannenberg, was successfully reelected to serve on the Joensuu City Council.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Civil society called on the government to regulate surrogacy, which is an increasing demand by same-sex couples in Finland. Civil society also shared guidelines on the issue. In September, the Family Federation of Finland also published a statement in favour of making surrogacy accessible in a non-discriminatory way also to single women and men and same-sex couples.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

In June, the city of Helsinki granted a plot of land for *Sateenkaariasunnnot Ry* (Rainbow Apartments Association), which plans to build an apartment building of 14 to 26 housing units for LGBTQ+ people.



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