

# Finland 2024 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Finland during the year.

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

The government had mechanisms in place to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## Section 1. Life

### a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

### b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members.

Public speech intended to incite discrimination against any national, racial, religious, or ethnic group was a crime. Hate speech was not a separate criminal offense but could constitute grounds for an aggravated sentence for other offenses.

### **b. Worker Rights**

#### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided for the right to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The government effectively enforced all applicable laws.

Parliament adopted legislation to restrict the length of sympathy strikes, or “disproportionate solidarity action,” and to increase fines for violating

industrial peace through illegal strikes, which came into effect on May 17. The new law increased fines for unlawful walkouts from €37,400 (\$40,800) to a maximum of €150,000 (\$163,600). The law stipulated political work stoppages could last no more than 24 hours and other industrial action could be limited to two weeks.

Workers without permanent residence could be ineligible to join voluntary unemployment insurance funds. Employers who violated the rights of employees to organize and retain employee representatives faced the possibility of administrative measures, legal proceedings, and fines. The penalties were generally commensurate with those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were regularly applied against violators. Authorities and employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and there were no reports of abuses. All workers, regardless of sector union membership or nationality, were entitled to the same wages negotiated between employers and trade unions in applicable collective agreements.

An official dispute board could make nonbinding recommendations to the cabinet on ending or limiting the duration of strikes when they threatened national security. Employees prohibited from striking could use arbitration to provide for due process in the resolution of their concerns.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

While there was no national minimum wage law, the law required all employers, including nonunionized employers, to pay the minimum wages stipulated in collective bargaining agreements.

The standard workweek established by law was no more than 40 hours of work per week with eight hours of work per day. Because the law did not include a provision regarding a five-day workweek, regular work hours could, at least in principle, span six days. The regular weekly work hours could also be arranged so that the average was 40 hours during a period of no more than 52 weeks. Persons in certain occupations, such as fishers, household workers, road transport workers, and workers in bakeries, were subject to separate workweek regulations. The law entitled employees working shifts or during the weekend to one 24-hour rest period per week. The law limited a worker to 250 hours of overtime per year and 138 overtime hours in any four-month period.

## **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, and OSH experts actively identified unsafe conditions. Workers were able to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The law required employees to report hazards or risks they discovered in working conditions, including in machinery, equipment, or work methods. The law also required employees, where possible, to correct dangerous conditions that came to their attention. Such corrective measures had to be reported to the employer.

## **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

Authorities effectively enforced wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties for work safety offenses, working hour offenses, exploitive work discrimination, and other wage and hour violations were specified in the criminal code. Violations carried a maximum penalty of one year of imprisonment for OSH offenses and six months' imprisonment for working hour offenses. Penalties for aggravated cases included a fine or imprisonment up to two years and were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence. Government resources, inspections, and penalties were adequate to deter most violations. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was responsible for enforcement of labor laws and regulations. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) enforced appropriate safety and health standards and conducted inspections at workplaces. In cases of serious violations, inspectors issued improvement notices and monitored the employer's compliance. When necessary, OSHA could issue a binding decision and impose a fine. If a hazardous situation involved a risk to life, an inspector could halt work on the site or issue a prohibition notice concerning the source of risk. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections. If the employer failed to comply with an improvement notice, OSHA could impose a conditional fine, a notice of termination, or a notice of suspension to enforce the obligation. The number of labor inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance.

According to the Immigration Service, 900 Thai citizens received residency permits during the year and 400 applicants were denied due to evidence of labor exploitation and human trafficking. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment announced in May that it would extend the Seasonal Workers Act to include berry pickers for the 2025 harvest season to ensure fair treatment and better working conditions.

Previously, the law considered wild berry pickers as entrepreneurs not in a wage employment relationship. These workers were vulnerable to exploitation, including labor trafficking, and violations of wage or safety laws

involving foreigners picking natural products were therefore undercounted in statistics of labor supervision violations. The law did not stipulate minimum wage or minimum earnings for berry pickers.

Estimates of the size of the informal economy ranged from 10 to 15 percent of GDP. The country's labor laws applied to the informal sector.

Government enforcement of labor laws in this sector faced challenges and government reports from April 2023 noted deficiencies in wages paid to workers, especially seasonal agricultural laborers.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

The law required police to have a warrant issued by a prosecutor to make an arrest. Police had to obtain a warrant within three days if an individual was

arrested while committing a crime. Arrested persons had to receive a court hearing within three days of arrest, and police were required to promptly inform detainees of the charges against them. Authorities respected most of these rights. Most defendants awaiting trial were eligible for conditional release on personal recognizance. Detainees generally had access to a lawyer promptly after arrest. Persons detained for “minor” criminal offenses, however, did not have a right to an attorney from the outset of detention or prior to interrogation. The government was required by law to provide counsel for the indigent. The latest Committee for the Prevention of Torture report in 2021 noted delays in notification of custody were “frequent and widespread” and could last up to 96 hours, especially if the detainee was a foreigner. Civil society groups reported these delays continued during the year and noted there continued to be insufficient translation and interpretation services.

#### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State’s annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

#### **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.



## **Section 3. Security of the Person**

### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

### **b. Protection of Children**

#### **Child Labor**

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The law provided for employment contracts for children between ages 15 and 18 as long as the work did not interrupt compulsory education. Children between ages 15 and 18 were not permitted to work after 10 p.m. or under conditions that risked their health and safety, which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health defined as working with mechanical, chemical, physical, or biological hazards or involving bodily strain that could result from lifting heavy loads. A child whose 14th birthday occurred during the calendar year could be employed in light work, such as selling refreshments, running errands, or assisting in an office setting, for no more than half of the school holidays or during short-term duties during the school year.

Penalties for violations of child labor regulations were commensurate with those for analogous crimes. There were no reported violations during the year. Child labor violations carried a maximum penalty of one year of imprisonment for occupational safety offenses and six months' imprisonment for working time protection offenses. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment effectively enforced child labor regulations.

## **Child Marriage**

The minimum age of marriage was 18. Under the law, marriage was fundamentally a voluntary choice, and marriage by coercion or compulsion was illegal. The government enforced the law effectively.

The law permitted the dissolution of forced unions (instead of through a divorce, similar to voluntary marriages). Legal specialists expressed concerns regarding the problem associated with providing evidence of a forced marriage in a legal context.

## **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

## **Provision of First Asylum**

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

Local human rights organizations reported significant delays in the processing of asylum applications, noting many asylum seekers existed in “limbo” without full access to social services, such as unemployment benefits. They noted delays began following an influx of asylum seekers from primarily Syria and Iraq starting in 2015, and that some asylum seekers from that period were still awaiting a decision in their cases. An official from the Immigration Service said apparent delays in processing some asylum applications were due to repeat applications and appeals of negative decisions. The official added the average asylum application processing time was eight months.

Migration experts expressed concern regarding the controversial Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalized Migration border security law, or “turnback law,” which came into effect on July 12 and was to remain in force for one year. The law delineated conditions under which parliament – together with the president – could restrict asylum applications for a period of one month at a time based on evidence that an asylum application was the result of instrumentalized migration. According to the Immigration Service, border control authorities could refer asylum seekers at the country’s external borders to a border procedure. Under the revised law,

should the border procedure be put into effect, asylum seekers would not be allowed to leave the area of the reception center while their cases remained under adjudication. As of November 8, the country's 830-mile border with Russia remained closed, despite the passage of the law.

Amnesty Finland expressed concerns the border security law undermined access to asylum, violated nonrefoulement principles, and could lead to violence at the country's eastern border. A local human rights leader expressed concern that, under the border security law, the four-week expedited asylum process would be applied if an asylum seeker's country of origin was one from which asylum applications were most often rejected. According to the Immigration Service, the expedited process could be applied under a variety of circumstances, including if the applicant originated from a safe country of origin where they might be returned, the claims concerning the need for protection were clearly implausible, or authorities considered the applicant a danger to national security or public order for serious reasons.

Changes to the Aliens Act came into effect on September 1. Under the new rule, the state would no longer permit previously denied asylum seekers to apply for residence permits based on employment. Local nongovernmental organizations criticized the change, claiming the new process was unclear and appeared subjective. Additionally, changes to the Aliens Act included the establishment of an accelerated asylum procedure for cases deemed

unlikely to meet eligibility for asylum, in which the Immigration Service had to adjudicate the application within five months of its submission. Aliens Act changes also placed more restrictions on asylum seekers' right to work.

According to statements from the Refugee Advice Center, the amendments to the Aliens Act significantly restricted legal protections for those seeking international protection and who were subjected to border procedures. The Refugee Advice Center expressed concerns that the lack of face-to-face asylum interviews, the complex nature of changes to the Aliens Act, and the expanded grounds for accelerated procedure would restrict access to asylum.

## **Resettlement**

According to the Immigration Service, the government accepted a quota of 500 refugees for resettlement during the year.

## **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

The size of the Jewish population was estimated at 1,300, most living in the Helsinki area. Leaders in the Jewish community suggested the number was closer to 2,000.

Members of the Jewish community experienced increased instances of harassment, according to a May 22 Abo Akademi University Polin Institute report, *Experiences and Views of Antisemitism in Finland: A Report on*

*Discrimination and Hate Crimes Targeting Jews*, which surveyed more than 300 members of the Jewish community. The study found 83 percent of respondents believed antisemitism had increased in the country over the previous five years. Of survey respondents, 88 percent felt they had been held responsible for Israel's actions in Gaza, which they believed had an impact on their safety. While 38 percent of respondents reported having experienced antisemitic harassment directly within the last five years, only 8 percent reported any incidents to authorities. The number of respondents who reported they had encountered antisemitism online increased from 82 to 89 percent following Hamas' October 7, 2023, attacks. According to the survey, antisemitism manifested online, on social media, traditional media, and political discourse. Debates on religious practices of animal slaughter with respect to kosher products and on nonmedical male circumcision sometimes used direct or veiled antisemitic language.

The government provided funding for the security of the Helsinki synagogue. Representatives of the Jewish community reported they believed they were under threat and specifically targeted due to their beliefs.

The Prime Minister's Office issued a press release January 25 announcing that as of January 27, the country would officially observe Holocaust Remembrance Day in line with EU and UN naming conventions. The country's previous name for the remembrance day was the Memorial Day for Victims of Persecution, which first entered into the Finnish calendar in

2003.

For further information on incidents of antisemitism in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at

<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.