

FINLAND 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Finland is a constitutional republic with a directly elected president and a unicameral parliament (Eduskunta). The prime minister heads a five-party coalition government approved by parliament and appointed by the president in December 2019. The parliamentary election in April 2019 and the presidential election in 2018 were considered free and fair.

The national police maintain internal security. Both Finnish Customs and the Border Guard have law enforcement responsibilities related to their fields of responsibility. The Border Guard has additional law enforcement powers to maintain public order when it operates in joint patrols and under police command. The Defense Forces are responsible for safeguarding the country's territorial integrity and providing military training. The Defense Forces also have some domestic security responsibilities, such as assisting the national police in maintaining law and order in crises. The national police and Border Guard report to the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for police oversight, law enforcement, and maintenance of order; the Ministry of Defense oversees the Defense Forces. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces. There were no reports that members of the security forces committed abuses.

There were no reports of significant human rights abuses.

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

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. If police in one municipality kill a person, police in another municipality investigate whether the killing was justified. The director of investigation serves as the prosecutor in such cases.

b. Disappearance

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

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Physical Conditions: There were no major concerns in prisons and detention centers regarding physical conditions or inmate abuse.

Administration: Authorities conducted proper investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers. From September 7 to 18, a delegation from the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture visited the country. The report on the visit was not yet published by year's end.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires police to have a warrant issued by a prosecutor to make an arrest. Police must obtain a warrant within three days if an individual is arrested while committing a crime. Arrested persons must receive a court hearing within three days of arrest, and police must promptly inform detainees of the charges against them. Authorities respected most of these rights. Before trial most defendants awaiting trial are eligible for conditional release on personal recognizance. Detainees generally have access to a lawyer promptly after arrest. Persons

detained for “minor” criminal offenses, however, do not have a right to an attorney from the outset of detention or prior to interrogation. The government must provide lawyers for the indigent.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Authorities generally informed detainees promptly and in detail of the charges against them. Trials are fair and public, and take place without undue delay. Defendants have a right to be present at their trial and to consult an attorney of their choice in a timely manner before trial. The government provides attorneys at public expense if defendants cannot afford counsel. Authorities give defendants adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense. Defendants are provided free interpretation as necessary from the moment an individual is charged through all appeals. They may confront and question witnesses for the prosecution and present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt and have the right of appeal.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies through domestic courts for human rights violations. After they exhaust all avenues of appeal in national courts, persons and organizations may appeal court decisions involving alleged violations of the European Convention on Human Rights to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Property Restitution

The government reports Finland did not confiscate property belonging to Jews during the Holocaust era, that Holocaust-era restitution has not been an issue, and that no litigation or restitution claims were pending before authorities regarding real or immovable property covered by the Terezin Declaration, which the government endorsed.

The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly on July 29, 2020, can be found on the Department's website: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

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

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

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: The distribution of hate material intended to incite discrimination against any national, racial, religious, or ethnic group in print or broadcast media, books, or online newspapers or journals is a crime.

Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views with little restriction.

Nongovernmental Impact: Journalists who covered sensitive topics, including immigration, far-right organizations, and terrorism, reported harassment by private entities, including being targeted for defamation.

On January 10, the Helsinki District Court denied journalist Jessikka Aro's application for a restraining order against Panu Huuhtanen and Tiina Keskimäki, whom she accused of harassment. Aro alleged that since 2018 the individuals harassed her online following her reporting on Russian disinformation activities, causing her fear and anxiety. The court acknowledged that the behavior of the individuals caused Aro fear but reasoned that the actual threat posed to Aro during speaking and other public engagements was not serious enough to warrant abridging the free speech rights of the two individuals. Previously Aro had been the target of a sustained, intense harassment campaign because of her work for which two other persons were convicted.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government continued to accept returned asylum seekers who had first entered

in the country but then moved on to other European countries according to the Dublin Regulation. Transfers were suspended between March and May during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Human Rights Center stated that the government communicated poorly during the COVID-19 pandemic by issuing strongly worded recommendations concerning internal and cross-border travel that were broadly interpreted as legally binding rules. Under existing law the government may only recommend travel limitations for Finnish citizens.

Between March 28 and April 15, the government closed the borders of the Uusimaa region and blocked exit and entry with police officers. The parliamentary ombudsman investigated border controls and found police issued 117 fines, 159 warnings, and turned away 4,383 persons. The report concluded that police issued several unjustified fines for attempts to cross the regional border since, according to the law, attempts to violate movement restrictions are not punishable.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

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

Refoulement: In November 2019 the ECHR ruled that the government violated the European Convention on Human Rights when it deported an Iraqi man to his country of origin, where he was allegedly killed three weeks later. Based on information subsequently received from Iraqi authorities, police believe he faked his own death after returning to Iraq.

The number of Russian-origin members of Jehovah's Witnesses applying for asylum based on alleged religious persecution declined significantly. The Finnish Immigration Service rejected most of the claims by members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and unofficial reports indicated that asylum adjudicators did not consider membership in the church alone to be sufficient basis for an asylum claim. Over 50 cases of Jehovah's Witnesses asylum applicants were pending

before the Supreme Administrative Court. Some Jehovah's Witnesses applicants whose appeals have been denied have already returned to Russia voluntarily.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Parliament sets an annual quota for refugee admissions, and the government decides its allocation. Asylum seekers have the right to free legal representation throughout their application procedure. According to civil society organizations, asylum seekers continued to lack adequate access to legal assistance during the initial stages of the asylum application process and during subsequent appeals. The Human Rights Center, a public institution affiliated with the parliamentary ombudsman, stated that minor improvements in legal assistance to asylum applicants were made during the year, including greater incentives for lawyers to represent applicants and quality controls instituted by the Finnish Immigration Service in the handling of asylum applications.

On July 8, 24 unaccompanied children arrived from Greece. They were being processed as unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The government adheres to the EU's Dublin III Regulation that establishes which EU member state is responsible for examining an asylum application.

Durable Solutions: According to the Finnish Immigration Service, in addition to the parliamentary quota, the government accepted 750 refugees for resettlement in 2019 under the EU's refugee relocation program. The government also assisted in the safe, voluntary return of migrants to their home countries.

Temporary Protection: From January to August, the government provided temporary protection to 289 individuals who did not qualify as refugees but who were deemed to qualify for subsidiary protection. During the same period, the government also offered protection to 125 individuals based on "other grounds," including medical and compassionate grounds.

g. Stateless Persons

According to the UNHCR, 2,801 stateless persons resided in the country at the end of 2019. Involuntarily stateless persons and certain other special groups, such as refugees, have a shorter residency requirement--four years instead of six--than other persons before they are eligible to apply for citizenship. A child may obtain

citizenship from either the mother or father regardless of the child's place of birth and may also acquire citizenship if the child is born in the country and would otherwise be stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The country's national parliamentary election in April 2019 and the presidential election in 2018 were considered free and fair. In January 2019 an evaluation by the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe found evidence that preparations for the election were sufficiently transparent that the ODIHR did not recommend deploying any observers for the April election itself, although it noted a need to review campaign finance limits, self-reporting of financing, and access to the polls for persons with disabilities. The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman issued a similar call for greater accessibility at polling sites.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year.

Financial Disclosure: By law, appointed and elected officials must each year declare their income, assets, and other private interests that could overlap with their official duties. Officials must make their initial declaration within two months of assuming office and declare any potential conflicts of interest that arise during their tenure. The law does not provide for specific criminal penalties for nondisclosure. By law income and asset information from the tax forms of all citizens must be made public each year.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The parliamentary ombudsman enjoyed the government's cooperation, operated without government or party interference, and had adequate resources. The parliamentary ombudsman investigates complaints that a public authority or official failed to observe the law, fulfill a duty, or appropriately implement fundamental human rights protections.

The Human Rights Center operates as part of the parliamentary ombudsman's office. The center's functions include promoting human rights, reporting on the implementation of human rights obligations, and cooperating with European and international bodies on human rights matters. The center does not have authority to investigate individual human rights abuses. A delegation of representatives from civil society who participated in promoting and safeguarding human rights frequently cooperated with the center.

The parliamentary Constitutional Law Committee analyzes proposed legislation for consistency with international human rights conventions. The committee deals with legislation relating to criminal and procedural law, the courts, and the prison system.

The law requires the ombudsman for children, the nondiscrimination ombudsman, and the ombudsman for equality impartially to advance the status and legal protection of their respective reference groups. These ombudsmen operate under the Ministry of Justice. Responsibility for investigating employment discrimination rests solely with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Responsibility for developing antidiscrimination policies and legislation as well as for the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations resides with the Ministry of Justice's Unit for Democracy, Language Affairs, and Fundamental Rights. The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations advocates for policy changes to improve integration.

The nondiscrimination ombudsman also operated as an independent government-oversight body that investigates discrimination complaints and promotes equal treatment within the government. The nondiscrimination ombudsman also acted as the national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings and supervised the government's removal of foreign nationals from the country.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape of persons of both sexes, including spousal rape, and the government enforced the law effectively. Rape is punishable by up to six years' imprisonment. If the offender used violence, the offense is considered aggravated, and the penalty may be more severe. The maximum penalties are six years' imprisonment for rape and 10 years for aggravated rape. All sexual offenses against adults, except sexual harassment, are subject to public prosecution. Sexual offenses against a defenseless person (such as because of unconsciousness, intoxication or a disability) are considered as severe as rape.

Authorities may prosecute domestic abuse under various criminal laws, including laws prohibiting rape, assault and battery, harassment, and disturbing the peace. The penalty for physical domestic violence ranges from a minimum of six months to a maximum of 10 years in prison.

The current legal definition of rape emphasizes intentional violence, which civil society organizations alleged leads courts to find assailants not guilty in cases where the coercion was less explicit. In addition police must inquire about a party's willingness to participate in reconciliation, which is usually engaged in before the case proceeds to the prosecutor. Reconciliation may be grounds for the prosecutor not to press charges, but even reconciliation where a mutual agreement has been reached does not prevent the prosecutor from pressing charges.

Violence against women, including spousal abuse, continued to be a problem. The Finnish branch of Amnesty International estimated that more than 100,000 persons experienced violence annually in the country and that 76 percent of the victims were women. According to Amnesty International, only 10 percent of these incidents were reported to authorities and most of those reported did not lead to prosecution. While police are obligated to investigate domestic violence cases, most of the cases are referred to a mediator after which point the police do not

closely track the cases. The situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in incidents of domestic violence, and the economic pressures the pandemic placed on the government led to a proposed 33-percent reduction in funding for civil society groups engaged with domestic violence and social health in the most recent government budget proposal. The ombudsman for equality at the Ministry of Justice highlighted problems with access to domestic violence shelters in remote rural areas.

The government funds shelters specifically for victims of domestic violence. The number of shelters increased to 29 from 28 in 2019 and the number of places available in shelters throughout the country increased to 211 from 179 in 2018. The number of clients assisted by shelters increased by 6 percent compared with 2018. The Finnish branch of Amnesty International highlighted the need for additional shelters for victims of intimate partner violence, stating that 550 places were needed to support the number of victims properly and that some rural areas had very few shelters and insufficient space in those shelters. The Human Rights Center, a national human rights institution affiliated with the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, acknowledged the problem.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is treated as aggravated assault under the law and may be punished with imprisonment or deportation. Taking a girl living in the country abroad for FGM/C is also considered a crime. The government generally enforced the law. A school health survey released by the Department of Health and Welfare (THL) in June found that 0.2 percent of girls attending high school or vocational school had undergone FGM/C and that at least 10 girls who answered the questionnaire were mutilated in Finland. The population that most reported having undergone FGM/C were Somali-born residents of the country. THL experts believed that the practice decreased over recent years among the country's residents.

Sexual Harassment: The law defines sexual harassment as a specific, punishable offense with penalties ranging from fines to up to six months' imprisonment. Employers who fail to protect employees from workplace harassment are subject to the same penalties. The prosecutor general is responsible for investigating sexual harassment complaints. The government generally enforced the law.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Discrimination: The law provides for the same legal status and rights for women as for men. The government enforced the law effectively. The ombudsman for equality at the Ministry of Justice highlighted problems with workplace discrimination against pregnant women.

Children

Birth Registration: A child generally acquires citizenship at birth through one or both parents. A child may also acquire citizenship at birth if the child is born in the country and meets certain other criteria, such as if the parents have refugee status in the country or if the child is not eligible for any other country's citizenship. A local registration office records all births immediately.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits child abuse, defining children as individuals younger than age 16. Child negligence and physical or psychological violence carry penalties of up to six months in prison and up to two years in prison, respectively. Sexual abuse of a child carries a minimum penalty of four months imprisonment and a maximum of six years. The law defines rape of a minor (younger than 18) as aggravated rape. Rape of a child carries a minimum penalty of two years' imprisonment and a maximum of 10 years. Aggravated rape of a child carries a minimum penalty of four years imprisonment and a maximum of 12 years.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum age of marriage is 18; the law disallows marriage of individuals under that age. An increase in the number of forced marriages continued. In the first half of the year, the Victims of Trafficking Assistance System reported 23 new cases of forced marriage (no gender breakdown provided). In 2019 the National Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking assisted 52 individuals (50 women/girls and two men/boys), more than double the number from 2018, considered to have been subjected to forced marriage. Many of these marriages occurred when the victim was underage.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The country prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography and the sale, offering, or procuring of children for prostitution. The law prohibits purchase of sexual services from minors and covers "grooming" (enticement of a child), including in a virtual environment or through mobile telephone contacts. Authorities enforced the law effectively.

The minimum age for consensual sex is 16. The law regards a person whose age cannot be determined, but who may reasonably be assumed to be younger than 18, as a child.

From January to July, there were 980 reported cases of child exploitation, compared with 1,000 cases during the same period in 2019. In June police passed to prosecutors a case involving a man suspected of multiple counts of aggravated sexual abuse of a child, aggravated child rape, and the possession and dissemination of indecent images of children. All of the more than 30 victims identified as of September were girls between ages eight and 14.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Government statistics and Jewish leaders place the size of the Jewish population between 1,500 and 2,500 individuals, most living in the Helsinki area.

On January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the neo-Nazi group Towards Freedom! (*Kohti Vapautta!* in Finnish) claimed to burn an Israeli flag during a rally in Tampere. Police from the Central Finland Police Department subsequently announced that they were considering the flag burning a case of illegal ethnic agitation. On the same day, the synagogue in Turku was defaced with red paint. Police were investigating the incident as a property damage case but have made no arrests. President Sauli Niinisto and other government officials denounced the incidents in official statements.

On January 31, vandals defaced the building housing, inter alia, the Embassy of Israel with stickers of the banned Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM). The same night similar stickers were also placed on the synagogue of Helsinki's Jewish Congregation. Similar incidents have happened numerous times in the past two years; police made no arrests in these incidents. The government provided funding for the security of the Helsinki synagogue. Representatives of the Jewish community reported feeling under threat and specifically targeted due to their beliefs.

The public broadcaster YLE reported that in April in Hamina, one tombstone was overturned and swastika painted on a second in a cemetery for Jewish officers of the Russian military in the 1800's. On May 1, in nearby Kotka, a statue of Vladimir Lenin was vandalized with graffiti of the Star of David and the words "Mass murderer." Police arrested a single suspect for both acts but released him for lack of evidence.

On September 21, the Supreme Court affirmed in a final decision the police's banning of the NRM. The court found the organization's activities were contrary to the constitution and laws. After an investigation, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) concluded that nine of the NRM's members appeared in a new group Toward Freedom!. The NRM's Finnish-language website came back into operation during the year and was still active at year's end. Public displays of the NRM's symbol decreased in frequency, although members continued to spray graffiti. These individuals held events in multiple cities and recruited new members for the Towards Freedom! group.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution and law prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities in all fields, including the provision of government services. The government effectively monitored compliance with these laws and implemented enforcement actions. The parliamentary ombudsman received more than 700 complaints over the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of which concerned access to disability services.

According to civil society groups, municipalities frequently break the law on the provision of disability services and in many cases do not budget enough money to provide such services. Allegedly municipalities routinely provided only the minimum services required by legislation regardless of the actual need for services. Sometimes services were denied, and the person with disabilities was instructed to appeal the decision, since an appeal lengthens the process of granting services. Representatives for the Association of Finnish municipalities claimed that many of these problems were due to labor shortages in municipal government and not due to intentional bias.

An expert from a civil society group asserted that legislation and practices surrounding mentally disabled persons' labor and daily activities needed comprehensive reform. Conflicts between social welfare legislation and labor legislation created conditions where businesses could employ persons with disabilities for rehabilitative work without pay. The system does not take into consideration that individuals with intellectual disabilities are often capable of full- or part-time wage-labor on the same basis as others. Social welfare legislation defines labor activities as maintaining and improving capabilities, and a municipality may grant tax-free pay of between zero and 12 euros (\$14.40) an hour for such activities. If the work requires guidance, it is seen as a daily activity rather than labor, meaning an employee may not receive even food in exchange for hours of work. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has acknowledged that too many persons with intellectual disabilities are not paid for their work.

In June parliament passed legislation requiring assisted-living facilities to have 0.7 caretakers per resident. The change will take place incrementally, starting with 0.5 caretakers per resident by October and coming fully into effect by April 2023. The legislative change followed findings that many such facilities were understaffed and unable to assist residents adequately during the night.

Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

The law specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of origin and nationality. In June the ombudsman for equality reported that 80 percent of respondents with an African background experienced discrimination because of their skin color, 67 percent encountered discrimination or harassment in education, 60 percent encountered discrimination in the workplace, and 27 percent also experienced physical violence. Over one-half of the respondents answering the survey said they had not reported the discrimination to authorities due to their belief that reporting harassment would not accomplish anything.

Roma continued to face discrimination in all social sectors and were often targeted by law enforcement and security officials. The chief inspector of the ombudsman for equality confirmed in June that security officials, including police, have been observed profiling and discriminating against people based on ethnicity. The statement confirmed the key finding of a 2018 study that found that police officers, security guards, border agents, and customs officers targeted minorities due to ethnic background or skin color.

According to the Program for International Student Assessment of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, an immigrant background disproportionately influenced educational results for students. According to a university researcher, students are often placed in Finnish-as-a-second-language classes regardless of their Finnish proficiency if their native language on record is something other than Finnish or if they have a “non-Finnish” name.

The nondiscrimination ombudsman is responsible for responding to complaints of discrimination and regularly mediated between business owners, government agencies, and public service providers regarding treatment of customers and clients. The Ministry of Justice also responds to complaints of discrimination.

The government strongly encouraged tolerance and respect for minority groups, sought to address racial discrimination, and assisted victims.

Indigenous People

The constitution provides for the protection of the Sami language and culture, and the government financially supported these efforts. The Sami, who constituted less than 0.1 percent of the population, have full political and civil rights as citizens as well as a measure of autonomy in their civil and administrative affairs. A 21-member Sami parliament (Samediggi), popularly elected by the Sami, is responsible for the group’s language, culture, and matters concerning their status as an indigenous people. It may adopt legally binding resolutions, propose initiatives, and provide policy guidance.

A report issued by the Sami parliament in February found that the linguistic rights of the Sami are not realized in the way intended by the constitution and the Sami Language Law. Deficiencies related to the number of Sami language personnel, accessibility of services, and the fact that, against the provisions of the Sami Language Law, Sami people must still separately invoke their linguistic rights for them to be recognized. Speakers of Inari Sami and Skolt Sami are in the most vulnerable positions, according to the report. In addition, as services are moved online and to centralized service telephone lines, authorities did not take into consideration the possibility of accessing these services in the Sami language. The funds appropriated for Sami language social and health care have not been indexed to inflation since 2004, and there were fears that social and health-care reform could further deplete services. There was also poor availability of Sami language

pre-Kindergarten personnel, and the funding of Sami language pre-Kindergarten programs was inadequate.

The ombudsman for gender equality stated that Sami victims of domestic violence were at a disadvantage in accessing public shelters due to the long distances between population centers in the northern part of the country.

Sami objected to plans to develop an Arctic railway running from Helsinki to the northern border, citing the railway's potential impact on natural resources critical for their livelihoods, including reindeer-herding land and Arctic nature tourism. The proposed railway remained on the zoning map released by the Regional Council of Lapland.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation in housing, employment, nationality laws, and access to government services, and the government enforced the law.

The law requires that a transgender person present a medical statement affirming the individual's gender identity and a certificate of infertility before the government may legally recognize their gender identity. In addition to the requirement that an individual submit to sterilization, activists criticized the duration of the legal process, stating it may take up to three years to obtain identity documents with the new gender markers. Trafficking authorities and civil society stated they have no specialized services for transgender victims of trafficking and are unaware of their status among the trafficking-victim population.

While the law prohibits "conversion therapy" in medical settings, it continued to be practiced privately, most commonly in religious associations. The media reported that the Christian organization Journey Finland continued to practice conversion therapy.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

On September 11, the NBI arrested two men with links to far-right groups on suspicion of the attempted murder of the Finns Party election manager for Central Finland, Pekka Kataja. Kataja was attacked at his home on July 17 and suffered a fractured skull, cerebral hemorrhage, and broken ribs and fingers, told the press

that he suspected far-right involvement in his attack because he had enemies in far-right groups. According to press reports, the detained men, Teemu Torssonen, a Jyväskylä city council and city board member, and self-proclaimed ethno-nationalist Tero Ala-Tuuhonen, both had links to far-right groups, including the NRM. Kataja said he prevented Torssonen from running as a Finns Party parliamentary candidate in 2019 and in May expelled him from the party because of his extremism. Ala-Tuuhonen was also reportedly a leading figure in the far-right group Soldiers of Odin.

In February, Oulu city councilor Junes Lokka was fined for two counts of ethnic agitation. The city's district court found that two online videos Lokka had posted in 2016 violated laws on human dignity and religious freedom by depicting Muslims and other immigrants as being inferior to others. One of the videos was a recording of a demonstration in Helsinki featuring anti-immigrant and Islamophobic speech. The second agitation charge was related to another video defaming immigrants and Muslims. Lokka had a previous conviction for ethnic agitation.

In November the Pirkanmaa District Court convicted and fined for ethnic agitation two members of the Finns Party's youth wing, Toni Jalonen, the former deputy chairman of the Finns Party youth arm, and Johannes Sipola, chairman of the Finns Party's Lapland chapter during the 2019 European election campaign. During that campaign, they published on Twitter a picture of a dark-skinned family with the text "Vote for the Finns Party so that Finland's future won't look like this." A Facebook post during the same campaign included two figures dressed in black burkas with the accompanying text "Do you want our country to look like this? Don't stay sleeping. Vote." The court found that images and text published by the organization constituted incitement to ethnic hatred and were not acceptable as political speech. The tweet led the Ministry of Education and Culture to cancel and move to recover state funding granted to the organization. The youth organization appealed that decision in the administrative courts but filed for bankruptcy in June.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The government effectively enforced all applicable laws regarding the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Workers without permanent residence may not be eligible to join voluntary unemployment insurance funds. Employers who violate the rights of employees to organize and retain employee representatives may face administrative measures, legal proceedings, and fines. The penalties were generally commensurate with those for similar crimes. Authorities and employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and there were no reports of violations. All workers, regardless of sector union membership, or nationality, are entitled to the same wages negotiated between employers and trade unions via generally applicable collective agreements.

The law does not permit public-sector employees who provide “essential services,” including police officers, firefighters, medical professionals, and border guards, to strike. An official dispute board may make nonbinding recommendations to the cabinet on ending or limiting the duration of strikes when they threaten national security. Employees prohibited from striking may use arbitration to provide for due process in the resolution of their concerns.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government effectively enforced the law. Penalties for forced or compulsory labor depend on the severity of the crime and were generally commensurate with those for similar crimes. Despite strong penalties for violations, some cases of persons subjected to conditions of forced labor in the country were reported during the year.

Men and women working in the restaurant, cleaning, construction, and agriculture industries were the most likely to face conditions of forced labor. The sexual services sector, legal in certain circumstances, also saw incidences of trafficking and forced labor.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all of the worst forms of child labor but allows persons between ages 15 and 18 to enter into a valid employment contract as long as the work does

not interrupt compulsory education. It provides that workers ages 15 to 18 may not work after 10 p.m. or under conditions that risk their health and safety, which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health defines as working with mechanical, chemical, physical, or biological hazards or bodily strain that may result from lifting heavy loads.

Penalties for violations of child labor regulations are commensurate with those for other similar crimes. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment effectively enforced child labor regulations. There were no reports of children engaged in work outside the parameters established by law.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law broadly prohibits employment discrimination. Penalties for violations are commensurate with those for other similar crimes. The government effectively enforced applicable laws against employment discrimination.

The Occupational Safety Administration (OSHA) received 500 reports of workplace discrimination in 2019. Of the 180 reports that resulted in further inspection, 9 percent concerned ethnicity, nationality, language, or religion, a number similar to previous years, 9 percent concerned age discrimination, and 4 percent concerned disability.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

While there is no national minimum wage law, the law requires all employers, including nonunionized employers, to pay the minimum wages stipulated in collective bargaining agreements. Authorities adequately enforced wage laws.

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

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is responsible for labor policy and implementation, drafting labor legislation, improving the viability of working life and its quality, and promoting employment. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is responsible for enforcement of labor laws and regulations. In addition OSHA enforces appropriate safety and health standards and conducts inspections at workplaces. Individuals who commit work safety or working hours' offenses are subject to penalties commensurate with similar crimes. The center informs employers of inspections in advance unless a surprise inspection is necessary for enforcement purposes. A subsequent inspection report gives employers written advice on how to remedy minor defects. In the case of serious violations, the inspector issues an improvement notice and monitors the employer's compliance. When necessary, OSHA may 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. Workers could remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

Authorities adequately enforced wage and overtime laws. Government resources, inspections, and penalties were adequate to deter most violations.

The law requires employees to report any hazards or risks they discover in working conditions, including in machinery, equipment, or work methods. The law also requires employees, where possible, to correct dangerous conditions that come to their attention. Such corrective measures must be reported to the employer.