

International Association for Democracy in Africa

Universal periodic review: Finland

Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) which assessed 41 highly developed states of the OECD and the European Union across the indexes of policy performance, democracy and governance ranks Finland second in both the democracy and governance indexes, and the country is deemed to be, a model democracy that has established a democratic basis for government reform, problem-solving and social improvement.

Finnish policies emphasise the rights of women and girls, the rights of indigenous peoples, defending minorities, economic and social rights and cooperation with civil society. Finland is a pioneer in promoting gender equality. It was the first country to grant women full political rights. Finland ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1986, and established the first office of Ombudsman for Equality in following year. Finland has provided funding for Unifem, Unicef and other UN institutions. In the wake of the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the status of women in war and post-conflict situations became prominent. Finland also supported the UN resolution on Women, Peace and Security. Among the Nordic countries, Finland's reputation as a model of gender equality has been truly established.

Finland has implemented legislation in order to promote good ethnic relations among its population. Other positive actions taken by States include: legislative measures that introduce higher maximum penalties for racially motivated crimes; the use of ethnic monitoring to ascertain the number of persons of particular ethnic and national origin in various kinds of employment and the setting of targets to increase the employment of persons of minority origins in fields where they were under-represented; the establishment of new advisory bodies on matters relevant to combating racism and intolerance, including the launching and implementation of public awareness campaigns intended to prevent racial discrimination and increase tolerance; and the establishment of human rights institutions and ombudspersons for ethnic and racial equality.

Finland has ensured religious freedom under the national constitution. Residents here have the right to identify with, practice, and refrain from affiliation with any religion of their choice. These choices are protected against discrimination as well. Public education requires children to study at least one religious class in school; however, they are free to choose their personal religious ideology.

Human rights are an essential element of Finland's foreign policy. The Unit for Human Rights Policy was set up in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to promote, on a larger scale, openness on the human rights policy and cooperation with civil societies. Finland became a party to the European Convention on Human Rights in the early 1990s, and the Advisory Committee on International Human Rights has been set up in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.