

118th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Opening Statement by the Delegation of Finland
17 August 2026

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is an honour for the delegation of Finland to appear before your Committee and to present Finland's combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic reports.

Since our previous dialogue, Finland has continued to strengthen protection against racial discrimination through legislative reforms, policy measures, institutional development, and close cooperation with civil society.

One important institutional development is a new whole-of-government process for following up international human rights recommendations, judgments and decisions. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo, the Government held comprehensive discussions in 2024 and 2025 and agreed on concrete follow-up measures. Your Committee's recommendations will likewise be included in the next annual discussion.

Today, I will focus on six key areas: migration and asylum, Sámi rights, racism and hate speech, equality through education, and our national action plans against racism and human trafficking.

Migration and asylum

Migration policy has undergone significant reform during the current Government's term.

The Government Programme aims to improve migration management, enhance the effectiveness of return procedures and prevent abuse of the asylum system. At the same time, it reaffirms Finland's commitment to protecting persons in vulnerable situations, including children, women and persons belonging to minorities.

All legislative reforms are implemented in full compliance with Finland's international human rights obligations, European Union law and the rule of law. Individuals fleeing war, persecution and serious human rights violations continue to have the right to seek asylum in Finland.

Recent legislative amendments have strengthened the coherence and predictability of the migration system. Requirements for permanent residence permits and citizenship now place greater emphasis on integration, particularly employment and language skills.

Finland considers the protection of migrant workers to be an integral part of its labour migration policy. We regard labour migration, integration and the protection of workers' rights as mutually reinforcing objectives. In recent years, Finland has strengthened the protection of workers' rights and increased efforts to prevent labour exploitation through legislative reforms, comprehensive action plans, enhanced cooperation among authorities and strengthened support for victims.

Changes to asylum procedures and family reunification requirements have been aligned with EU legislation and Nordic practice.

An important development has been the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, which became applicable in June 2026. The objective of the Pact is to ensure timely and high-quality decision-making, establish a more uniform European asylum system and prevent abuse of the system.

In Finland, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman independently monitors the protection of fundamental rights during screening and border procedures, including respect for the principle of non-refoulement, the best interests of the child and access to asylum procedures.

The number of asylum applications has remained on a downward trend since the previous reporting cycle. Since the beginning of 2021, Finland has received nearly 20,000 applications for international protection. Moderate yearly levels enable Finland to maintain an asylum system that is both efficient and firmly grounded in respect for fundamental and human rights.

Rights of the indigenous Sámi people

Let me now turn to the rights of the indigenous Sámi people.

A major milestone has been the renewal of the Sámi Parliament Act, which entered into force in August 2025.

The reform responds to concerns raised by international human rights bodies, including your Committee. It strengthens the Sámi people's right to self-determination, including their right to determine who is eligible to vote in Sámi Parliament elections, while clarifying electoral procedures and improving legal certainty and the legitimacy of decision-making within the Sámi Parliament.

The duty of public authorities to negotiate with the Sámi has been strengthened to improve the implementation of the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

The revised Climate Act also requires authorities to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament when preparing climate policies that may affect the Sámi. Finland has also established the Sámi Climate Council, an independent body bringing together traditional Sámi knowledge and scientific expertise.

Combating racism and hate speech

Finland remains firmly committed to combating racism, discrimination and hate speech.

The programme *From Dialogue to Action* brings together young people and local decision-makers to identify local challenges related to racism and agree on practical solutions. The Ministry of Justice also works closely with religious communities to improve awareness of legal remedies and access to justice.

Finland has strengthened its response to hate speech and hate crime through a cross-sectoral coordination network involving public authorities and civil society. The police continue to improve human rights training, the identification and investigation of hate crimes and reporting mechanisms.

Finland also supports civil society efforts, including community-based monitoring and reporting of hate incidents through EU-funded projects and national funding.

Promoting equality through education

Promoting equality through education remains a Government priority. The Development Programme for Equity and Non-Discrimination in Education for 2025–2027 strengthens the capacity of education professionals to promote equality, supports anti-discrimination work and provides practical tools for schools.

Finland is also implementing its National Child Strategy, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Particular attention is given to promoting the rights of children belonging to minorities and children who have experienced discrimination.

The Government also continues its efforts to improve the situation of the Roma population. Under Finland's National Roma Policy, measures focus on equal access to housing, education and services, while work continues to strengthen equality in housing and improve the evidence base for future policy development.

National Action Plan against Racism

In 2024, the Government adopted its second National Action Plan against Racism.

The Action Plan contains 62 measures coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office until 2027. Its objectives include dismantling structures that produce inequality, strengthening relations between different population groups, improving knowledge about racism, and promoting equality among young people from diverse backgrounds.

Key measures include annual roundtable discussions on equality chaired by the Prime Minister, the annual Government discussion on international human rights obligations, as mentioned earlier, a national anti-racism campaign, and the establishment of a national anti-racism cooperation network involving public authorities, civil society and the research community.

Action against human trafficking

Combating human trafficking remains a Government priority.

In May 2026, the Government adopted a new Action Plan against Human Trafficking for 2026–2027. The Plan contains 43 measures focusing on prevention, victim protection, effective criminal investigations, and stronger cooperation among authorities.

Particular attention is paid to trafficking for sexual exploitation, trafficking involving children and young people, forced marriage and trafficking linked to organised crime.

Conclusion

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Finland recognises that eliminating racial discrimination requires continuous effort, vigilance, and openness to improvement.

We remain committed to strengthening our legal framework, improving implementation and engaging in meaningful dialogue with affected communities, civil society and international human rights mechanisms.

At the same time, these efforts are being pursued in a challenging fiscal context. Necessary fiscal consolidation is being undertaken in response to weak growth, high unemployment, rising debt and increasing expenditure pressures, while safeguarding the welfare state and meeting Finland's international human rights obligations. This requires careful prioritisation of new measures, taking into account their effectiveness, sustainability and feasibility within available resources.

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Our delegation includes experts from eight ministries and our Permanent Mission in Geneva, as well as an independent observer from Parliament's Constitutional Law Committee.

We look forward to your questions, observations, and recommendations, which are invaluable in guiding our continued work.

Thank you.

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