

## Summary

The action plan on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society was drawn up by the Prime Minister's Office based on the equality statement submitted by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government to Parliament on 31 August 2023.

The action plan takes into account the material obtained in the consultations carried out while preparing the equality statement, as well as the assessment of the 'An Equal Finland' Government Action Plan implemented by the previous government and feedback from stakeholders concerning that action plan.

Like the equality statement, the purpose of the action plan is to promote equality and non-discrimination in society. It focuses on active, concrete measures to combat racism. Other grounds for discrimination, such as age, disability and sexual orientation, as well as gender equality, are dealt with in a cross-cutting manner throughout the plan in accordance with the planning obligations under the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act.

The goal of the action plan is to give new impetus to the Government's anti-racism work so that equal opportunities can genuinely be realised in the lives of everyone living in this country. The action plan is a comprehensive tool that enables the measures to be implemented at all levels and in different areas of life in a coordinated manner.

### **Current state and operating environment**

Finland's equality policy has in large part been shaped by Finland's membership in the European Union. As a result of EU legislation, Finland's legislation on equality at the national level has quickly become among the strongest in the EU. A 2015 legislative amendment extended the prohibition against discrimination to include discrimination based on age, origin, nationality, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, political activities, trade union activities, family relationships, health, disability and sexual orientation. The obligation to promote equality has also been extended so that authorities, education providers and employers are also required to combat structural discrimination in their work.

While authorities, education providers and employers have usually met their obligations to promote equality in a formal sense, not enough attention has been paid to ensuring that goals are met and monitoring the effectiveness of efforts to promote equality.

The share of people with foreign backgrounds in the total population of Finland has grown significantly over the course of the 2000s. Whereas people with foreign backgrounds were a small minority in 2000, they will make up a significant portion of the population in the future. According to a projection by Statistics Finland, there may be more than one million people with foreign backgrounds living in Finland by 2040. This will pose a more significant challenge for public administration than at present. An equality-focused approach in the work of the authorities supports social inclusion and ensures that different population groups feel they are a part of Finnish society.

Many young people with foreign backgrounds who were born in Finland experience racism and discriminatory treatment in their everyday lives, which leads to insecurity and feelings of exclusion. Anti-racism work and measures aiming to achieve genuine equality are a form of preventive work that also promotes broader social cohesion. Civil society organisations and religious communities also play a key

role, as they are more closely connected to ethnic and religious minority communities than the authorities are.

### **Objectives and priorities of the action plan**

The purpose of this action plan is to implement the policies outlined in the equality statement. The measures in the plan will also continue the work that has already been carried out in recent decades in Finland to combat racism and promote equality. The measures included in the plan are based on an assessment of the work carried out during the previous Government, as well as recommendations from bodies monitoring Finland's compliance with human rights treaties, existing research data and information gained through strategic foresight. Information on the current state of affairs has been supplemented by extensive material collected from stakeholders, based on which the priorities and cross-cutting policies of the action plan have been selected.

The four objectives set in the equality statement also form the basis for this action plan. They are the following: 1) Dismantling social structures in the labour market and elsewhere in society that lead to inequality, 2) Fostering good relations between population groups, 3) Promoting access to the labour market, and 4) Building up the knowledge base on racism. In drawing up the action plan, various stakeholders have also highlighted the need for new initiatives to combat racism and for increased attention to promoting equality among young people. These have been selected as cross-cutting priorities in the action plan.

### **Sets of measures included in the action plan**

The action plan contains new initiatives for improving the social climate and relations between population groups, raising awareness of challenges and solutions and combating racism and discrimination, especially in working life and education. Resources are also allocated to strengthening and expanding tried and tested practices. When it comes to future social cohesion and democracy, paying attention to equality and inclusion among children, young people and families is especially important. Initiatives under the action plan will develop the activities of public administration and enhance the implementation of the obligations to promote equality under the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act. In addition to the central government, this work also requires the contribution of local actors, such as municipalities, wellbeing services counties and other authorities. The implementation of the action plan will involve extensive cooperation with various actors in society, including civil society organisations.

The sets of measures in the action plan reflect those laid out in the equality statement.

#### **1) Social atmosphere and debate, increasing awareness, good relations between population groups**

The Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister will lead public discussions on the direction of work to combat racism and promote equality more broadly in society. All actors in society are invited to take part in this work through an extensive anti-racism campaign spanning the whole government term. The discussions will be based on new information on the attitudes of the population and identified challenges. We will promote dialogue on difficult issues at all levels of society. We will support measures to promote good relations between population groups especially at the regional and local level.

#### **2) Education system and culture, sports, physical activity and youth policy**

Professionals working at different levels of the education system will be supported in planning measures to promote equality and non-discrimination and ensuring that they are targeted effectively. A particular focus

will be placed on employees' ability to identify racist bullying and to support and guide young people who encounter racism. A cross-cutting priority of cultural, sports and youth policy will be to pay more attention to equality in ministry-funded activities and when providing information-based guidance to actors in the sector.

### **3) Equality and non-discrimination at work**

The measures in the action plan aim to improve employers' awareness and competences related to diversity management and the promotion of equality by providing training and producing materials on the topic. The Prime Minister's roundtable also issued new recommendations for measures to promote equality in working life.

### **4) Combating racist harassment and violence**

There has been an increase in antisemitism, including in Finland, since the equality statement was issued. As such, actions to combat antisemitism have been compiled into a separate set of measures in the plan. The measures in the action plan will produce information on religious minorities' experiences of equality and provide training for different target groups so they can better identify racist harassment and violence in their work and support victims.

### **5) Internal measures to be taken in the Government and administration**

The measures in the action plan will improve the efficiency of processes guiding equality work in central government, especially performance guidance. The goal is to launch measures that will bring about real change in agencies' operating cultures and personnel structure. Training, a knowledge base and practical tools will be produced to support this goal.

## **Implementation and monitoring of the action plan**

The action plan will be implemented under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office together with other ministries and authorities. The work will be monitored by a cross-sectoral project group appointed by the Government. The progress of the work and the impact of the measures will be assessed in 2025 in connection with the Government's mid-term policy review, when new measures can be introduced for the second half of the government term if necessary. Leading up to the checkpoint, the project group will draw up an interim report detailing the implementation up to that point and identifying potential needs for development.

Careful monitoring and evaluation of the action plan will enable long-term and knowledge-based work to promote equality in Finnish society. A wide range of stakeholders will be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the action plan, including communities facing racism and discrimination, civil society organisations, representative organisations whose work is related to the topic, key authorities, and actors in working life.