



# City of Helsinki equality and non-discrimination plan for services

# 2026–2029



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# Foreword by the Mayor

In Helsinki, everyone must have an opportunity to live their life as they see fit and pursue their dreams, regardless of their background or starting point. Every Helsinki resident must have an opportunity to grow up, love, live and grow old in a safe and equal city that they call home. Throughout history, our population has been diverse, and that has always been one of Helsinki's strengths.

Promoting equality and non-discrimination are not only our statutory duties, but also core values of the City of Helsinki. We are strongly committed to promoting these values in our new City Strategy, entitled *A Helsinki We Can Be Proud of*. We are committed to preventing racism and discrimination and promoting a fair and

equal city that provides everyone with the ingredients for a good life.

It is important for these core values of Helsinki to be reflected in the City's operations and services. For example, it involves ensuring that Helsinki residents can use the services of the City without having to worry about the realisation of accessibility, linguistic equality or availability – in other words, that the City's services work smoothly for all residents.

It is good that we have, for the purposes of this plan, gathered a wide range of information on the current success rate of our services and operations in terms of achieving non-discrimination. However, as

Helsinki, we must continue to work actively to ensure that the gender, age, sexual orientation, background, state of health, language, religion or beliefs of Helsinki residents do not affect how we as the City interact with them.

Our City-wide equality and non-discrimination plan puts our values into practice and steers Helsinki towards operating better in line with the values set out in our strategy. A safe, equal and non-discriminatory Helsinki is created every day together by all Helsinki residents. Our duty as the City is to set an example in this respect, so that the diversity of our residents will remain a strength of Helsinki in the future – as it has in the past.

**Daniel Sazonov**  
Mayor





# Introduction

Helsinki is Finland's largest city, and its population is becoming increasingly diverse. The diversity of Helsinki residents means not only different ethnicities or linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but also aspects such as different gender identities, beliefs and levels of functional capacity. The strength of Helsinki lies in its residents: their individual backgrounds, abilities and characteristics, and a sense of community spirit and cooperation between people.

As an authority and employer, the City of Helsinki is committed to promoting non-discrimination and gender equality in a systematic and goal-oriented manner, both in the development of services and operations and in HR matters. By promoting non-discrimination and gender equality, the City wants to ensure that everyone can live a good and safe life in Helsinki, as they see fit.

This City-wide equality and non-discrimination plan for services, also known as an operational equality and non-discrimination plan, concerns promoting equality and non-discrimination for Helsinki residents and other service users in the City's services and operations. The promotion of non-discrimination and equality among City staff has its own designated plan that covers aspects such as the recruitment, pay and career paths of City employees.





**Promoting non-discrimination and gender equality is a statutory obligation of the City and an important part of its value base. It is a shared duty of all City employees to take the needs of diverse Helsinki residents into account, and to interact with clients in a non-discriminatory and appreciative manner.**



# 1. Promoting non-discrimination and gender equality is an important part of the City's value base and everyone's responsibility

## 1.1 Statutory obligations and the City's values steering the City's work on equality and non-discrimination

The City's actions in matters of gender equality and non-discrimination are based on the Equality Act (Act on Equality between Women and Men, 609/1986) and the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014). The Equality Act prohibits any discrimination based on sex, gender identity and gender expression, while the Non-discrimination Act states that

no one must be discriminated against based on age, ethnic background or nationality, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, political activities, trade union activities, family relations, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. In accordance with the Equality Act, the City is committed to taking into account gender diversity, i.e. that the legally defined genders 'man' and 'woman' do not cover the full gender spectrum.

Public authorities have a statutory obligation to not only prevent discrimination, but also to actively promote gender equality and non-discrimination in all their operations. This plan contributes to the City's implementation

*Photo: Matthew Schueller / Helsinki Partners*





of its legally prescribed equality promotion obligation.

In addition to obligations pertaining to all public authorities, the Equality Act and the Non-discrimination Act contain additional obligations for employers and education providers. They concern the HR policies of workplaces, which are discussed in the Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan for the personnel, and the drawing up of separate equality and non-discrimination plans for different educational institutions, which falls under the responsibility of the Education Division. In Helsinki, unit-specific equality and non-discrimination plans are drawn up for early childhood education and care providers as well.

In addition to the statutory obligation, the promotion of non-discrimination and gender equality is strongly steered by the

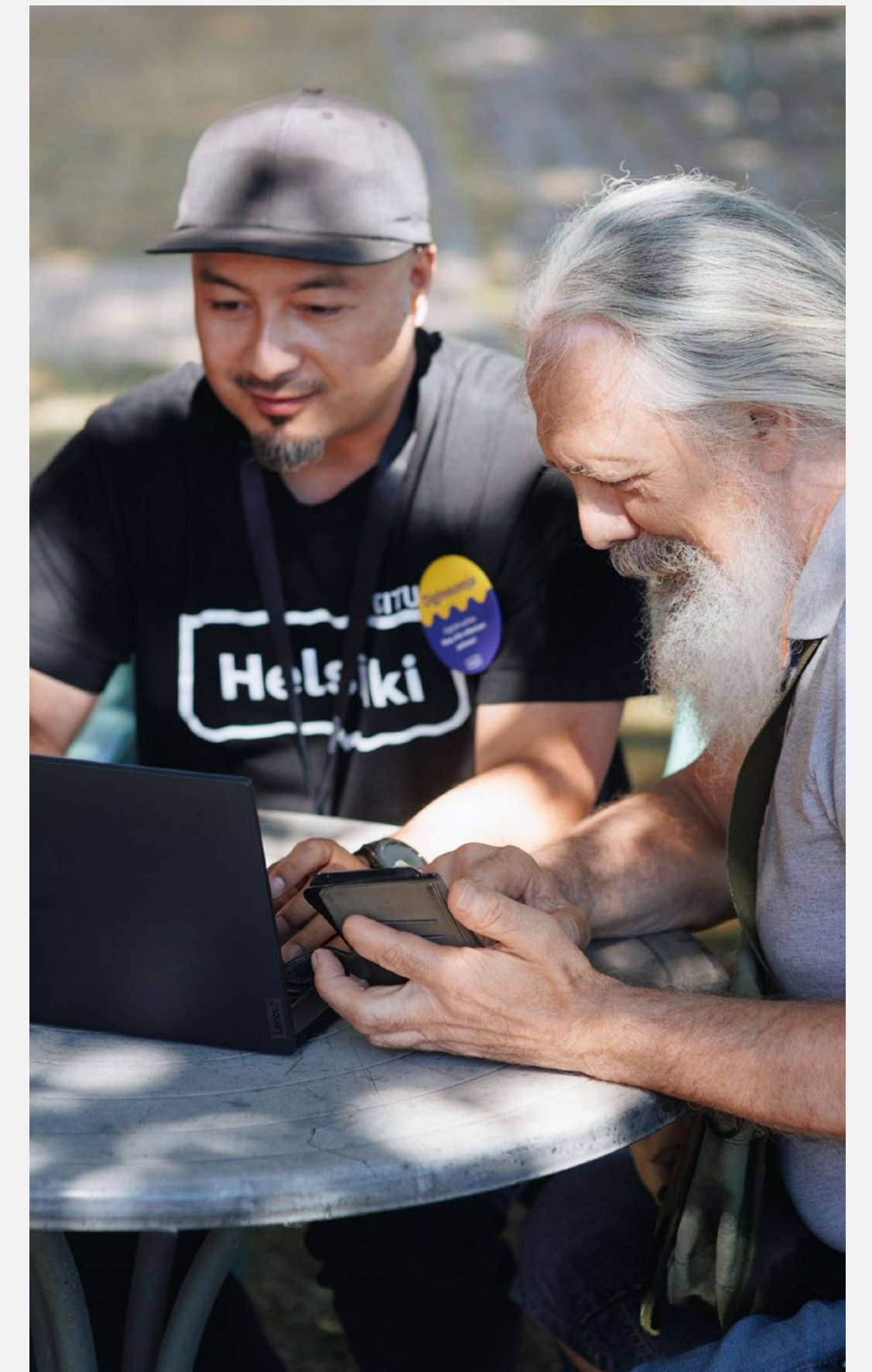
City's value base, which is described in both the City Strategy and the City's ethical principles. The City's ethical principles bind all City staff and elected officials, and their period of validity exceeds council periods of office. The City Strategy 2025–2029 emphasise that equality, non-discrimination and the promotion of human rights are among the core values of Helsinki and our way of operating. According to the strategy, “we intervene in racism and discrimination and promote an equal and fair city, where it is possible for everyone to live a good life.” The City's ethical principles (City Board 2019) state, among other things, that the city is for everyone and every person is equally valuable. The principles also emphasises that equality is a human right and a fundamental value in society.

The City of Helsinki's operational equality and non-discrimination work is based on

human rights. This means that the focus is on respecting the value and dignity of all Helsinki residents, and particularly on promoting non-discrimination and the fulfilment of the rights of disadvantaged Helsinki residents.

Helsinki has also made international commitments to promoting equality and non-discrimination. For example, in 2008 the City Board approved the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, which is a tool for and commitment to gender equality work drawn up by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. In 2022, the Charter was updated and supplemented with nine new articles on matters such as sustainable development, digital inclusion and online violence.

*Photo: Vesa Laitinen*





## 1.2 Promoting equality and non-discrimination is everyone's responsibility

Promoting gender equality and non-discrimination is a shared responsibility of everyone in the City organisation of Helsinki. The commitment of and the example set by the management and supervisors are particularly important for the effectiveness of the work, but each individual employee can play their part in ensuring that these principles are applied in their own work. As service providers, the City's divisions have a key role to play in how well gender equality and non-discrimination are implemented in practice in the City's services and people's everyday lives.

Gender equality and non-discrimination in the City's services and operations are promoted in a variety of ways, in both City-wide cross-divisional and division-specific structures and practices. The City-

wide development of functional equality and non-discrimination is coordinated by the Participation and Citizen Information Unit of the Communications Department of the City Executive Office. The City's cross-administrative equality and non-discrimination coordination group monitors and steers the implementation of the current equality and non-discrimination plan for services approved by the City Board and steers the preparation of the next plan. The coordination group also identifies and coordinates common objectives and measures for equality and non-discrimination work for staff and services, and identifies and coordinates common interfaces between functions, such as communications, certain events and training.

In autumn 2025, the City Board appointed Helsinki's first Equality and Non-discrimination Advisory Board, which continues the work of the former Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Commission. In addition to political representatives, the Advisory Board also includes members of

*Photo: Vesa Laitinen*





organisations working on the theme, which strengthens the City's ongoing interaction with grassroots operators. In accordance with its appointment decision, the Equality and Non-discrimination Advisory Board's duties include monitoring and assessing the implementation of the City-wide equality and non-discrimination plan for services.

The City's statutory influencing bodies – the Elderly Citizens Council, the Council on Disability and the Youth Council – focus particularly on promoting the perspectives of their respective reference groups and promoting equality and participation in the City's operations and decision-making.

Any City employee interested in promoting human rights, preventing discrimination and dismantling structures of inequality can join the City's internal human rights network. The aim of the network is for its members to deepen their own knowledge, share ideas and have discussions, and to receive

support for promoting equality and non-discrimination in their work.

### **1.3 The plan is part of a broader framework to promote non-discrimination, gender equality and socially sustainable development**

The City-wide equality and non-discrimination plan is a key tool for the goal-oriented promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination within the City. It is important to note, however, that the equality and non-discrimination plan alone does not reflect all of the City's actions in this area, and the promotion of gender equality and

non-discrimination is also strongly linked to many other City programmes, plans, policies and structures, as well as to the basic work of the various operators of the City.

In drawing up the various programmes, plans and policies for the City, the aim is to avoid overlapping in terms of content, which is why the equality and non-discrimination plan for services does not, as a rule, include matters that are focused on elsewhere. Other key programmes, plans and policies with clear links to the themes of equality and non-discrimination are described below. Like the equality and non-discrimination plan, they all contribute to promoting socially sustainable urban development in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The City is also involved in the 'Action, not only words' campaign launched by the Prime Minister's Office with its own commitment to fighting racism, which also entails practical measures. The City's commitment and

measures can be found on the Sitoumus2050 online platform.

#### **Bilingualism plans**

According to the City Strategy, the City is to ensure that high-quality and comprehensive services are available in both of Finland's national languages. The realisation of bilingualism in Helsinki is described in more detail in the bilingualism plans drawn up by the City Executive Office and each division, the implementation of which is monitored by the National Languages Board.

#### **City of Helsinki Welfare Plan 2026–2029, including domestic violence work and Child Friendly Cities work**

The City's statutory Welfare Plan for 2026–2029 sets out City-wide objectives for each council period of office regarding



the wellbeing, health and safety of children, young people and families with children, working-age people and seniors. In line with the Helsinki City Strategy, the Welfare Plan focuses on reducing wellbeing and health disparities and promoting everyday physical activity and an active lifestyle. The Welfare Plan also includes objectives for each council period of office regarding substance abuse prevention and domestic violence work, as well as objectives for Child Friendly City work. In 2024, UNICEF presented Helsinki with the Child Friendly City award. The Child Friendly Cities model obligates participating municipalities to actively carry out their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to provide children (under 18) with a wide range of opportunities for participation. The model pays particular attention to children in the most vulnerable position, thus promoting equality for this age group.

### **Immigration and Integration Development Programme 2026–2029**

The Immigration and Integration Development Programme 2026–2029 implements the Helsinki City Strategy and its focus on growth, talent, life and vitality. The Development Programme contains a preliminary set of objectives and key measures related to the attraction, settling down and retention of international talent, the early stages of immigration and integration, and the city community. The programme is being built together with the City's divisions and partners. A draft of the programme will be completed in spring 2026. The Development Programme will be decided on by the City Board's Economic Development Sub-committee in June 2026.

### **Accessibility Policies**

The City of Helsinki's Accessibility Policies concern mobility and activity in buildings and outdoor areas. The purpose of the Accessibility Policies is to serve as general policies for all of the City and its divisions in accessibility work. The different divisions are responsible for implementing the Accessibility Policies as part of their operations. The City has a dedicated accessibility working group, the aim of which is to update the City's Accessibility Policies and monitor the realisation of accessibility across the City. The work of the group is coordinated by the Urban Environment Division.

### **Accessibility Model**

Regarding the accessibility of the digital services, Helsinki's objective is to achieve the AA level or higher as defined in the Web

*Photo: Jonna Pennanen*





Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and its accessibility work is coordinated and reported on in a cross-administrative accessibility network. Practical help with designing digital services is provided by Helsinki's Accessibility Model, which is a set of procedures and guidelines to help the City produce easily available, easy-to-use and thus efficient services.

### Participation and interaction model and participation plans

The aim of the City's participation and interaction model (City Board 13 November 2017, section 40) is to increase the opportunities for residents, organisations, businesses and other stakeholders to participate in and influence the City's services and decision-making. The model steers the City's overall participation and influencing opportunities in a long-term and comprehensive manner over strategy periods, taking into account the equality of Helsinki residents and strengthening

the influencing opportunities of people whose voices are heard the least. The participation and interaction model will be updated in 2026, with residents, organisations, businesses and City staff taking part in the process extensively. As part of the model, each division will draw up its own participation plan for the 2026–2029 strategy period.

### Suburban regeneration

Suburban regeneration is the City of Helsinki's cross-divisional operating model for regional development, the aim of which is to improve the services, pleasantness and attractiveness of residential areas and facilitate high-quality supplemental construction. Suburban regeneration is a tool for achieving the City's strategic objectives in terms of preventing segregation and increasing the vitality of areas. The work focuses on strengthening the experience of participation, agency and pluralism of residents in suburban regeneration areas, and on developing regional services to meet the needs of residents. In line with the City Strategy, the development of the suburban regeneration

Photo: Juho Kuva





areas of Malminkartano, Kannelmäki, Malmi, Mellunkylä and Meri-Rastila will continue in the period of 2025–2029.

### **Ethical guidelines for contract producers**

The City's ethical guidelines for contract producers are used in procurement contracts when justified with the subject of the procurement and the ethical risks involved taken into account. Among other things, the guidelines obligate contract producers to respect and promote human rights. By signing the contract, the City's contract producers commit to adhering to principles that prohibit all kinds of racism, inappropriate treatment, sexual harassment and discrimination and obligate them to promote equality, non-discrimination and diversity at workplaces. The aim of the guidelines is to contribute to the prevention and eradication of labour exploitation in the City's procurements.

*Photo: Vesa Laitinen*





**The plan is based on an extensive analysis of the current situation carried out by the City in autumn 2024 and spring 2025. The process involved Helsinki residents, City employees, organisations and other stakeholders.**



## 2. An analysis of the current situation reveals development needs

### 2.1 A wide range of methods was used to analyse the City's current situation

The equality and non-discrimination plan for services must address real development needs. It is therefore important to gather information on the current situation to serve as the basis for drawing up the plan. Over the course of autumn 2024 and spring 2025, the City carried out an extensive analysis of its current situation, involving residents, City employees, organisations and other stakeholders in the process. The analysis of the current situation also made use of a compilation of literature produced in a

joint anti-racism network project of the six largest cities in Finland, which examined the realisation of equality and the occurrence of racism in Finland from the perspective of minorities, based on recent studies and surveys.

The main areas of the City-wide analysis of the current situation are briefly described below. Additionally, City divisions and enterprises were encouraged to carry out a more detailed analysis specifically from the perspective of their own operations, if needed.

#### Municipal survey

In autumn 2024, the City conducted a survey among the municipality's residents regarding equality and non-discrimination.

Its purpose was to survey the perceptions of Helsinki residents regarding the realisation of gender equality and non-discrimination as well as their experiences of discrimination and inappropriate treatment in the City's services. The survey could be taken in Finnish, Swedish or English, either by post or online. It was sent to 3,500 Helsinki residents aged 16 and over, selected randomly from the Helsinki population register. The survey was taken by 949 Helsinki residents (60% women, 38% men, 1% other, 1% not willing to specify). The survey was carried out by Digitalist as commissioned by the City. A Finnish-language report on the municipal survey can be found on the City's website.

Photo: Vesa Laitinen





### **‘Gender equality in Helsinki – excerpts from statistical data’ review**

In spring 2025, the City published a review of gender-specific statistics on selected indicators linked to the City’s key monitoring operations (health and wellbeing promotion indicators, strategy indicators, sustainable development indicators). The publication also includes a separate section on research data available on gender minorities and the challenges of data collection. The publication is available in Finnish on the City’s website.

### **Cooperation meeting on Roma affairs**

In January 2025, the City held a broad-based cooperation meeting on Roma affairs, attended by employees from the City Executive Office and different City divisions, as well as Roma operators such

as representatives of Roma organisations. Similar meetings were also held in 2022 and 2023. The spring 2025 meeting focused particularly on the current state of Roma affairs and what the City can do over the next four years to promote equality for Roma people.

### **Stakeholder interviews and survey**

Stakeholders’ views on the realisation of equality and non-discrimination and related development needs regarding residents/clients of the City were surveyed both through targeted interviews and an online survey. A request to participate in the interview was sent to 26 parties, and a further 40 or so parties working on matters concerning non-discrimination, gender equality and different minority groups were asked to participate in the survey alone.

A total of 11 organisations participated in the thematic group interviews: Trasek ry, the Helsinki Pride community, Transfeminines, All Our Children, Hilma – the Support Centre for Immigrant Persons with Disabilities and Long-term Illnesses, Kehitysvammatuki57, the Finnish Women’s Association Unioni, Nytkis, Rusetti ry, Uskot-foorumi ry, Suomen muslimifoorumi ry.

Additionally, the chairs of the City’s three statutory influencing bodies – the Elderly Citizens Council, the Council on Disability and the Youth Council – were interviewed separately.

A total of 14 parties took the online survey, two of which were not named: Finnish Romani Forum, Trasek ry, the Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older Adults, the Diverse Families Network (10 organisations), Vammaisfoorumi ry (28 disability organisations), Vammaisperheyhdistys Jaatinen ry, Uskot-foorumi ry, Loisto-settlementti ry / Poikien

talo, Miessakit ry, Miehet ry, Yeesi ry / Muudi activities, Anti-Racist Forum, an organisation working on homelessness, an organisation for immigrant women.

### **Interviews and open online survey for City employees**

The views of City employees were also surveyed through both targeted interviews and an open online survey. A contact person and a representative of supervisor staff were interviewed from every City division and three enterprises, as were the leaders of the City’s internal Queer Stadi and BIPOC networks.

The open online survey was available to any City employee, and information about the survey was provided in particular through the City’s human rights network. The survey was taken by a total of 144 employees across the City organisation.



The interviews and survey were conducted by Pentagon Design Oy as commissioned by the City.

### **Information from the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Equality**

Upon request, the offices of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Equality provided aggregated data on contacts regarding the City of Helsinki in 2021–2024.

### **Feedback from municipality residents**

Feedback classified as related to equality and discrimination in the City's centralised feedback system was processed insofar as information was available. Much of the feedback was excluded from the analysis for reasons such as data protection.

### **Other surveys**

As Sámi issues were not featured at all in the actual analysis of the current situation, specialists from the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and the Wellbeing Services County of Lapland were asked to provide their views on them separately. The views expressed by the THL specialist were largely based on a summary by the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while the views of the specialist from the Wellbeing Services County of Lapland were based on a service needs survey conducted by the wellbeing services county.

*Photo: Jussi Hellsten*





## 2.2 Highlights from the analysis of the current situation: general observations and observations by discrimination grounds

The Non-discrimination Act was partially reformed in 2023. In the partial reform, it was specified in the Act that “the authorities shall evaluate how their operations affect different population groups and how equality is realised in their activities, and take necessary measures to promote the realisation of equality.”

The main findings of the analysis of the current situation, i.e. what kinds of issues and development needs related to non-discrimination, gender equality,

discrimination and harassment came up in the analysis, are described below. Many observations are linked to several different population groups and discrimination grounds at the same time, but some are also clearly linked to specific discrimination grounds and groups. The highlights also include a few issues raised by the City’s statutory influencing bodies and the Equality and Non-discrimination Advisory Board when they examined the plan draft in late 2025.

It was highlighted strongly in different areas of the analysis of the current situation that people can belong to many different reference groups at the same time, and that a person belonging to a minority should also be seen as a whole person instead of just focusing on one characteristic.

**Intersectionality** means taking into account intersections of several different personal characteristics, as they can lead to discrimination on multiple grounds (i.e. multiple discrimination) and increase the risk of inequality accumulating in one area. The importance of taking intersectionality

into account throughout the plan and in the City’s operations in general was considered to be very important. The importance of **strengthening structures** that promote equality and non-discrimination was also emphasised by both employees and stakeholders.

### General observations related to a wide range of grounds for discrimination and the situation and needs of a wide range of population and minority groups:

- A total of 10% of the women and 8% of the men who took the municipal survey on equality and non-discrimination reported they had experienced discrimination in the services of the City of Helsinki in the past year. Age, state of health and language were seen to be the most common grounds for discrimination. Of all respondents, 8% stated that they had experienced other kinds of inappropriate treatment in the City’s services in the past year, either by employees or other clients/residents.

- Municipal survey respondents who identified themselves as a member of a minority group had a poorer experience of participation and inclusion than other respondents. Of the minority respondents, 75% felt that their quality of life was at least fairly good, compared to 92% of non-minority respondents.
- Both employees and organisations were of the view that the City should do even more to prevent and tackle discrimination and harassment.
- Providing City staff with training in interacting with diverse clients and promoting non-discrimination and gender equality is considered to be very important, and there is demand for more obligatory training. Management and supervisors are seen as bearing a major responsibility here.
- Services must be provided via multiple channels and in multiple languages. Digital services alone are not enough. Interpretation must be provided as needed, and it must be provided anonymously by



someone other than the client's family or community member.

- If the client is unable to find information themselves, they must be given understandable information about the options available and a genuine effort must be made to help them move forward.
- Actual opportunities for minorities to participate and influence the City's operations need to be further strengthened.

### Gender

- According to the municipal survey, men feel more positive than women about the realisation of non-discrimination and gender equality in the City's services and operations.
- Operators should have the means to prevent the risk of social exclusion of boys and men at an earlier stage.

- Women's experience of safety is poorer than men's. Experiences of sexual harassment are considerably common among girls of lower secondary school age.
- Girls of lower secondary school age have a significantly poorer experience of inclusion and emotional wellbeing than boys.
- Taking fathers equally into account in child-related services (e.g. maternity and child health clinics) continues to need strengthening.
- Stereotypical assumptions about different genders must be actively dismantled so that aspects such as people's choices of hobbies, studies and employment are not determined by norms but by genuine interest and the person's abilities.
- Domestic violence and honour-related violence affect all genders, but especially girls and women. Clear operating models

*Photo: Maija Astikainen*





are needed for identifying and preventing coercive control and honour-related violence against Muslim girls and women.

- Between 2021 and 2024, the office of the Ombudsman for Equality received only a few contacts regarding the services of the City of Helsinki, of which the Ombudsman has asked the City for an account. The contacts were mainly about gender diversity.

#### **Gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation**

- Attitudes and actions against sexual and gender minorities have become more severe globally in recent years, making the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people particularly important to focus on.

- Not enough data is available on the situation of gender minority Helsinki residents. National survey data shows that members of sexual minorities are in many ways in a more vulnerable position than others.
- Gender diversity should be taken into account even better in the facility design and customer service of swimming halls and other sports facilities.

#### **Age**

- Many seniors have challenges with using digital services. Face-to-face services should not be cut back.
- Seniors whose first language is neither Finnish nor Swedish are a group that will clearly grow in the coming years, and

their needs must be taken into account in services, including the possibility of using their own first language.

- Helsinki should allocate even more resources to the prevention of problems among young people and to outreach youth work that also reaches young people who are in a vulnerable position in different ways.
- Schools are perceived to have inadequate operating models for tackling racism and discrimination.

#### **Origin and nationality**

- Roma people continue to face a lot of discrimination. Progress has been made in education for the Roma population, but more efforts are needed, particularly

in transition phases and cooperation between home and school. Access to employment is a major challenge due to issues such as negative attitudes towards Roma people. Targeted services for Roma seniors are needed. The recommendations for measures set in Finland's National Roma Policy 2023–2030 (ROMPO 3) must also be implemented at the municipal level.

- There is a general lack of knowledge among the population about Sámi people, which affects both attitudes and service experiences. There are many Sámi people living in Helsinki, so it is important to increase City staff's knowledge of the Sámi as an indigenous people, as well as Sámi culture and history. The staff's skills for engaging in culturally safe interactions should be strengthened, particularly in social and health services,



early childhood education and care, and school education. The right to one's first language must be acknowledged and ways to increase guidance towards Sámi-language services and support for the availability of Sámi-language services must be considered. More permanent dialogue between the City and Sámi organisations should be considered in order to increase Sámi participation.

- In spring 2025, the Wellbeing Services County of Lapland conducted a service needs survey on Sámi-language digital services. The survey showed that there is a need for services for families with children in particular outside the Sámi region. Sámi families are often concerned about matters such as the language development of a Sámi-speaking child and how to support the child's identity. This

may also lead to clients being referred to heavier services as the concerns of families cannot be addressed by basic-level services in Finnish.

- For example, studies and surveys by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO) have shown that experiences of racism and ethnic discrimination are common in Finland.
- Brown-skinned and ethnic minority people are often primarily perceived as 'immigrants' and are subject to stereotypical assumptions about lacking competence or language skills, for example. This can lead to erroneous service coordination, denial of access to services or structural discrimination. For example, the only defining factor in

determining level groups for language learning should be the child's actual language proficiency or potential.

- Basic services do not always reach parents with a foreign-language and/or refugee background. Digital service channels, such as Maisa and Wilma, can be challenging to use for many due to language and accessibility problems. This can make it difficult for parents/guardians to adequately support their child's schooling and health.
- Education and employment paths for foreign-language boys in particular must be strengthened. Foreign-language girls must be encouraged to select from a wide range of professions.
- Immigrant boys with a poor socio-economic background are often labelled

negatively, which can greatly undermine their sense of participation and belonging.

- Young people experiencing racism should have safe spaces where they can share their experiences with peer support and be heard in social discussions.

#### **Family relations**

- From the point of view of diverse families, all services that support children and families in situations where everyday life is divided between several homes are essential. For example, this applies to divorced families, partnership families and other types of families in which the parents live apart. The City's services should facilitate smooth alternating housing arrangements and support the child's wellbeing, regardless of the family structure.



- In services for families with children, the professionals involved must pay particular attention to their speech and any preconceptions, so that all different families can trust that they will be treated with appreciation and equality.

#### **State of health and disability**

- Examined by discrimination grounds, disability was the most common reason for contacting the office of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman regarding the City of Helsinki in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. The number of contacts was moderate in relation to the size of the city: a total of 28–47 contacts per year, of which 8–12 were about disability.
- Surveys have shown that people with disabilities face a lot of discrimination. Taking the obligations of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into account to their full extent is important.

- In particular, the Helsinki Elderly Citizens Council and Council on Disability have stressed that a city the size of Helsinki should continue to have a full-time specialist in charge of accessibility matters. This was also a prominent topic in discussions with City employees involved in the plan preparations.

- Winter maintenance challenges (lack of snow ploughing, snow piling) cause significant problems for people with reduced mobility, e.g. people using assistive devices, elderly people and people with prams or pushchairs.
- The City's services should also take into account neurodiversity and the needs of neurodivergent people.
- Access to information about services for people with disabilities is perceived to be poor in some cases, whereby the responsibility for obtaining information lies with the disabled people themselves and their informal carers.

- Based on feedback received by the City from residents of the municipality, many people with long-term illnesses feel that the change in the criteria for receiving the City's special swimming card has had a negative impact on their physical activity opportunities.
- According to organisations, not all health services (e.g. mass screenings) are accessible to women with disabilities, and services such as those related to maternity matters are designed for mothers without disabilities.
- The operation and safety of transport services are perceived to have shortcomings.

#### **Language**

- Access to services in Swedish can be difficult due to a lack of Swedish-speaking staff.

- Speaking a language other than Finnish in a public place may provoke negative reactions, such as disrespectful remarks in public.
- The adequacy of communication in Swedish must be ensured.

#### **Religion and belief**

- Religion as grounds for discrimination, as well as discrimination against religious minorities such as Muslims, are often not taken into account in the framework of preventing discrimination and harassment.
- People often want religion to be invisible, which is not conducive to increasing understanding of different religions.

#### **Opinion, political activities and trade union activities**

- The analysis of the current situation did not reveal any aspects related to these grounds.



### Other person-related reason

- The analysis of the current situation raised general concerns about the situation of the homeless, the undocumented, people at risk of labour exploitation, socio-economically vulnerable people and asylum seekers. The internal diversity of these groups should also be taken into account from an intersectional perspective (e.g. LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, homeless people with a foreign background).
- In particular, it was concluded that the services for undocumented children and asylum-seeking children must be secured and efforts must be made to strengthen their wellbeing.

### Additional observations by the influencing bodies

- In promoting equality, it is also important to take into account the aspect of financial availability, so that issues such as high client fees do not prevent clients from receiving services.

- In addition to domestic violence and honour-based violence, many Helsinki residents are affected by digital or online violence (e.g. online sexual harassment), but the City's services do not have sufficient expertise to identify and deal with the issue.

*Photo: Maija Astikainen*





**The plan contains four priority areas and 10 measures for the entire City. Additionally, the City Executive Office, divisions and enterprises set their own complementary measures. The implementation of the plan will be integrated into the annual financial and operational planning work of the City's operators.**



## 3. City-wide priorities and measures to provide a cohesive framework for the plan

### 3.1 Aiming at a more cohesive, effective and up-to-date plan

The structure of the 2026–2029 equality and non-discrimination plan for services differs from the previous plan for 2022–2025. The previous equality and non-discrimination plan for services was largely organisation-oriented, with the City Executive Office and the City's divisions and enterprises each defining their own development areas and measures on the basis of an analysis of the prevalent situation. The measures and their indicators were set directly for the entire multiannual plan period.

Clarity, coherence and effectiveness in terms of content was pursued in the 2026–2029

equality and non-discrimination plan for services through identifying and setting the most significant thematic priorities and related measures for promoting non-discrimination and gender equality in a City-wide context. The aim is for the priorities and measures to serve the entire City organisation and facilitate making a concrete positive impact on the lives of Helsinki residents, taking into account different grounds for discrimination. On the other hand, the City-wide measures are deliberately somewhat broad and general, as it is appropriate for different City operators to implement them in ways that are suitable to their particular activities.

The City's divisions, Executive Office and enterprises will operationalise, i.e. specify, the practical implementation of the City-

Photo: Vesa Laitinen



wide measures in their annual financial and operational planning processes. They will also be required to set an appropriate number of complementary and more specific measures in their annual planning, allowing for specific attention to be paid to the equality and non-discrimination issues and population and minority groups most relevant to them. The direct targeting of measures also at specific individual groups is justified, as due to the partial reform in 2023, the Non-discrimination Act explicitly steers operators towards demographic-specific examinations and measures. The complementary measures will be linked to City-wide priorities and must be set taking into account the results of the analysis of the current situation.



The aim is to ensure that the promotion of equality and non-discrimination becomes an integral part of the basic structures of the City's operations. The annual cycle also allows for better consideration of possible unexpected changes in the operating environment and the changing needs of target groups.

### 3.2 City-wide priorities and measures defined through co-development

The contents of the plan were developed through an internal co-creation process of the City, based on the results of the analysis of the current situation. The process included several workshops, among other things. Some of them were

aimed at the plan preparation core group, with designated representatives of the City Executive Office, every division and those enterprises that operate at the municipal interface. By contrast, other workshops involved a larger group of specialists across the City organisation. The process was coordinated by the Participation and Citizen Information Unit of the City Executive Office and facilitated by an external service design partner.

As a result of the co-development process, four City-wide thematic priorities were selected for the plan (note: the numbering does not reflect the order of priority):

1. strengthening structures that promote non-discrimination and gender equality;
2. increasing knowledge and understanding of the diversity of Helsinki residents, non-discrimination, gender equality and human rights;

3. developing and delivering services to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients; and
4. preventing and tackling any discrimination, racism, harassment and sexual harassment.

The plan also includes a total of 10 City-wide measures linked to the aforementioned priorities. A City-wide measure means that all or at least a significant proportion of the City's operators (Executive Office, divisions, enterprises) implement it in their own operations. The priorities and City-wide measures of the plan are in line with the City Strategy 2025–2029.

The City-wide priorities and related City-wide measures are described in more detail on the following pages. The descriptions of the priorities provide a brief summary of each

theme, based on the analysis of the current situation and discussions with specialists during the co-development process.



## 1. Strengthening structures that promote non-discrimination and gender equality

The City of Helsinki is a large and wide-ranging organisation and service provider. To be most effective, the promotion of equality and non-discrimination should permeate the entire organisation and all operational levels. Ideally, equality and non-discrimination work would be strongly embedded in the structures, i.e. clearly led and coordinated and adequately resourced, both at the level of the entire City and within its divisions and enterprises and their many subordinate service areas. Without adequate structures and more broadly shared responsibility, the theme is at risk of becoming the responsibility of individual specialists, causing potential gaps and interruptions in the flow of information, implementation and monitoring.

Equality and non-discrimination perspectives should also be taken into account more systematically in the preparation and decision-making process of the City at different levels.

### City-wide measures

**1.1** We will strengthen structures that promote non-discrimination and gender equality across the City and within its divisions and enterprises. We will ensure that the divisions and enterprises have developed and are implementing a model that describes the practices and structures of the organisation for managing, implementing and monitoring the realisation of equality and non-discrimination plans and other equality and non-discrimination work. The model must also describe the role of the management group and the practical division of responsibilities in equality and non-discrimination work.

**1.2** We will clarify the operating model for preliminary assessments of gender equality and non-discrimination impacts and increase the practical implementation of these impact assessments.



## 2. Increasing knowledge and understanding of the diversity of Helsinki residents, non-discrimination, gender equality and human rights

Up-to-date and sufficiently comprehensive research data is a prerequisite for the appropriate planning and implementation of the City's operations and services. The City produces an enormous amount of information, but the findability and usability of said information is seen to have room for improvement. The information produced does not necessarily reflect the full diversity of Helsinki's population. From the point of view of promoting non-discrimination and gender equality, it is particularly important to collect data with different methods on population and minority groups that are in a vulnerable position but are not, for various reasons, sufficiently represented in ordinary register and survey materials. Researched information on discrimination and experiences of discrimination should also be regularly available across the City, so that the development of the phenomenon can be monitored and ways of preventing it can be found.

Strengthening the skills of staff through training was one of the most repeated wishes in the different areas of the analysis of the current situation. The aim of this training would be to increase employees' knowledge and awareness of non-discrimination and gender equality, and to promote understanding and appreciation of the diversity and different needs of people. The hope is for operators' knowledge and skills related to human rights and non-discrimination in general, as well as on the specific characteristics of different population and minority groups, to be developed. Training courses are needed to ensure that client interactions are non-discriminatory and that each client is treated sensitively as an individual. To ensure effectiveness, the training courses should be more obligatory across the whole staff, as opposed to voluntary, highly-focused brief courses.

### City-wide measures

**2.1** We will strengthen knowledge of discrimination and Helsinki residents in different population and minority groups who are often overlooked in conventional register materials, statistics and surveys.

**2.2** We will regularly provide training on non-discrimination and gender equality, as well as on the needs of different population and minority groups, particularly from the perspective of client interactions, and encourage all of our staff to participate.



### 3. Developing and delivering services to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients

The City's services, including its various functions and built environment solutions, are for all Helsinki residents. Because Helsinki residents differ in their backgrounds and characteristics and different groups of people are internally diverse, services cannot be designed for the average person or just for one characteristic or life situation. Instead, the planning, development and implementation must take greater account of the needs of different population and minority groups, e.g. in terms of functional capacity, language skills and gender diversity. The same also applies to the procurement of and tendering for services, systems and facilities.

In particular, each service must identify those people and groups who, due to their background or personal characteristics, are in an unequal position, at risk of discrimination or multiple discrimination, or otherwise disadvantaged or at risk of exclusion from the service. Where necessary, they must be provided with tailored solutions in order to achieve actual equality or non-discrimination. Partially reformed in 2023, the Non-discrimination Act imposes an even stronger obligation to make reasonable adjustments based on individual needs.

The planning and development of services must involve a wide range of residents at the correct time, using accessible methods and in a way that gives them a genuine opportunity to influence matters.

#### City-wide measures

**3.1** We will increase the participation of Helsinki residents with diverse backgrounds and characteristics in the development of services and strengthen non-discrimination in the implementation of services, e.g. through reasonable adjustments or positive discrimination. We will pay particular attention to groups at risk of multiple discrimination or otherwise in a particularly vulnerable position.

**3.2** We will strengthen measures to reduce digital inin the implementation of services, e.g. through reasonable adjustments or positive discriminationlity and increase the multichannel nature of our services.

**3.3** We will update the accessibility details of all of our locations in the accessibility application linked to the location register.



#### 4. Preventing and tackling any discrimination, racism, harassment and sexual harassment

Every Helsinki resident must have an opportunity to live a good life in Helsinki and feel part of the city. Any discrimination, racism, harassment and sexual harassment experienced in the City's services or facilities has a negative impact on aspects such as people's sense of security, experience of participation and wellbeing. Such experiences are particularly damaging for young people in Helsinki who, for reasons such as the colour of their skin or their origin, are constantly subjected to othering and racism in their everyday lives, or who have to live in fear of sexual harassment because of their gender.

As society grows more polarised, the City's role in identifying, preventing and tackling any discrimination, racism, harassment or sexual harassment is highlighted. Helsinki is also expected to set an example for other cities.

The City's different operators must ensure that they have genuinely effective practices and modes of operation in place for identifying and preventing discrimination, racism, harassment and sexual harassment, and for actively and systematically tackling any cases of the aforementioned. There is also a need for extensive and visible attitude influencing and communication towards residents.

#### City-wide measures

**4.1** We will map and strengthen the regular practical application of our existing operating models for preventing discrimination, harassment and racism. If necessary, we will cooperate to develop new intervention methods.

**4.2** We will identify and implement different ways to prevent sexual harassment in the daily lives of residents.

**4.3** We will carry out communication activities that positively highlight the diversity of Helsinki residents and promote equality and non-discrimination and are visible in the urban space, at our locations and on our different communication channels.



## City-wide priorities and measures

### 1. Strengthening structures that promote non-discrimination and gender equality

1.1 We will strengthen structures that promote non-discrimination and gender equality across the City and within its divisions and enterprises. We will ensure that the divisions and enterprises have developed and are implementing a model that describes the practices and structures of the organisation for managing, implementing and monitoring the realisation of equality and non-discrimination plans and other equality and non-discrimination work. The model must also describe the role of the management group and the practical division of responsibilities in equality and non-discrimination work.

1.2 We will clarify the operating model for preliminary assessments of gender equality and non-discrimination impacts and increase the practical implementation of these impact assessments.

### 2. Increasing knowledge and understanding of the diversity of Helsinki residents, non-discrimination, gender equality and human rights

2.1 We will strengthen knowledge of discrimination and Helsinki residents in different population and minority groups who are often overlooked in conventional register materials, statistics and surveys.

2.2 We will regularly provide training on non-discrimination and gender equality, as well as on the needs of different population and minority groups, particularly from the perspective of client interactions, and encourage all of our staff to participate.

### 3. Developing and delivering services to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients

3.1 We will increase the participation of Helsinki residents with diverse backgrounds and characteristics in the development of services and strengthen non-discrimination in the implementation of services, e.g. through reasonable adjustments or positive discrimination. We will pay particular attention to groups at risk of multiple discrimination or otherwise in a particularly vulnerable position.

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**The City Executive Office, divisions and enterprises will regularly monitor the progress of their measures based on the indicators set for them. The progress of implementing the plan will also be monitored at the level of the entire City, and by the City Board at the mid-point and at the end of the period.**



## 4. The realisation of the plan will be monitored regularly

The implementation of the City's equality and non-discrimination plan for services is the joint responsibility of the City Executive Office, the City's divisions and its enterprises that operate at the municipal interface.

The measures linked to the plan will be put into practice as part of the aforementioned operators' own annual operational and financial planning. These parties will also set appropriate indicators for their measures and monitor and assess the implementation of the measures as part of the annual monitoring and assessment of their operations.

In order to form a comprehensive picture of the situation and increase transparency, the implementation of the measures will be monitored and assessed during the planning

period across the entire City as well. City-wide monitoring will be carried out at least by the City's equality and non-discrimination coordination group and the Equality and Non-discrimination Advisory Board. To facilitate the City-wide monitoring, the Executive Office, divisions and enterprises must keep up-to-date records of the measures and indicators that they have set, and their implementation.

In terms of the entire City organisation, the monitoring will also focus on:

- which of the City's operators are implementing the City-wide measures in a way that is suitable for their own operations and how many of these specified measures are in place for each City-wide measure; and

- which of the City's operators are setting their own complementary measures and how many of these measures are in place under each priority.

An interim report on the implementation of the City-wide plan will be submitted to the City Board at mid-term, and a final report will be submitted at the end of the plan period. The plan will be valid until the next updated plan is approved by the City Board.

The City's equality and non-discrimination plan for services 2026–2029 will be available on the City's website in Finnish, Swedish and English.

Photo: Katja Tahja





# Glossary

## accessibility

Accessibility refers to the planning and implementation of both the built environment and other environments, services and communications in a manner that enables as many different people as possible to use them, regardless of their functional capacity and background. An accessible physical environment takes into account different needs related to mobility, eyesight, hearing, comprehension and communication. In digital environments, accessibility means aspects such as clear content, easy navigation and well-functioning technical implementation.

## digital or online violence

Digital violence involves insulting, controlling, monitoring or harming another person through information and communication technology, such as smart devices, apps or instant messaging services.

## discrimination

Discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than others in a similar situation because of one or more personal characteristics, without a justifiable reason. Discrimination is prohibited in the Non-discrimination Act and the Equality Act, which also list prohibited grounds for discrimination.

**Direct discrimination** is when a person is treated less favourably than others on the basis of a personal characteristic, without a justifiable reason.

**Indirect discrimination** is when a rule or practice that appears to be the same for everyone actually puts a person or people at a disadvantage because of a personal characteristic, without a justifiable reason.

Other forms of discrimination include harassment, refusal of reasonable adjustments and instructions or orders to discriminate.

## diverse families

Family diversity refers to families that differ in some way from the traditional concept of the nuclear family. Examples of diverse families include adoptive families, bi-cultural families, LGBTQ+ families, multiple-birth families, reconstituted families and single-parent families.



## diversity

The diversity of a population or other group of people consists of the different characteristics, roles, backgrounds and identities of individuals. They may be related to aspects such as gender, socio-economic status, age, functional capacity, disability, sexuality, religion, belief, language, culture, nationality or ethnic background.

## gender diversity

Each person's experience of gender is unique. Gender diversity refers to a wide



range of gender experiences, means of expression and gendered features of the body. Gender diversity is part of all people and cannot be limited to only pertain to any specific group of people.

### gender expression

Gender expression covers all the actions and behaviours of an individual to express to themselves and others the characteristics and dimensions of their gender. Examples of these means of expression include clothing, appearance, speaking style, facial expressions and gestures. People express their gender either consciously or unconsciously.

### gender identity

A person's fundamental experience of their own gender; may correspond to or differ from their biological sex determined at birth.

### harassment

Harassment is discrimination prohibited by the Non-discrimination Act. The Act defines

harassment as behaviour involving "the deliberate or de facto infringement of the dignity of a person." This behaviour creates a degrading or humiliating, intimidating, hostile or offensive environment related to prohibited grounds for discrimination. The Equality Act also specifically prohibits sexual harassment and gender-based harassment.

**Sexual harassment** refers to verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which is unwanted and deliberately or de facto infringes upon the mental or physical integrity of a person, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or anxiety-inducing environment.

**Gender-based harassment** refers to unwanted conduct related to a person's gender, gender identity or gender expression that is not sexual in nature. The conduct deliberately or de facto infringes upon the mental or physical integrity of a person and creates an intimidating, hostile,

degrading, humiliating or anxiety-inducing environment.

### honour-related violence

Honour-related violence refers to community violence directed at an individual by their family, relatives or other members of the community and justified by a need to maintain or restore honour.

### intersectionality

Intersectionality can be interpreted as intersecting differences or intersecting inequality. The term is used to describe how people's position and experiences in society are influenced by their characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnic background, functional capacity and sexual orientation, and combinations thereof. Intersectionality can also refer to an approach that seeks to take account of the combined effects of intersecting differences, e.g. on exposure to discrimination.



### LGBTQ+

The acronym LGBTQ+ refers to matters concerning gender and sexual minorities. An LGBTQ+ person is a member of a gender or sexual minority group (e.g. gay, lesbian, bi, trans, non-binary).



### multiple discrimination

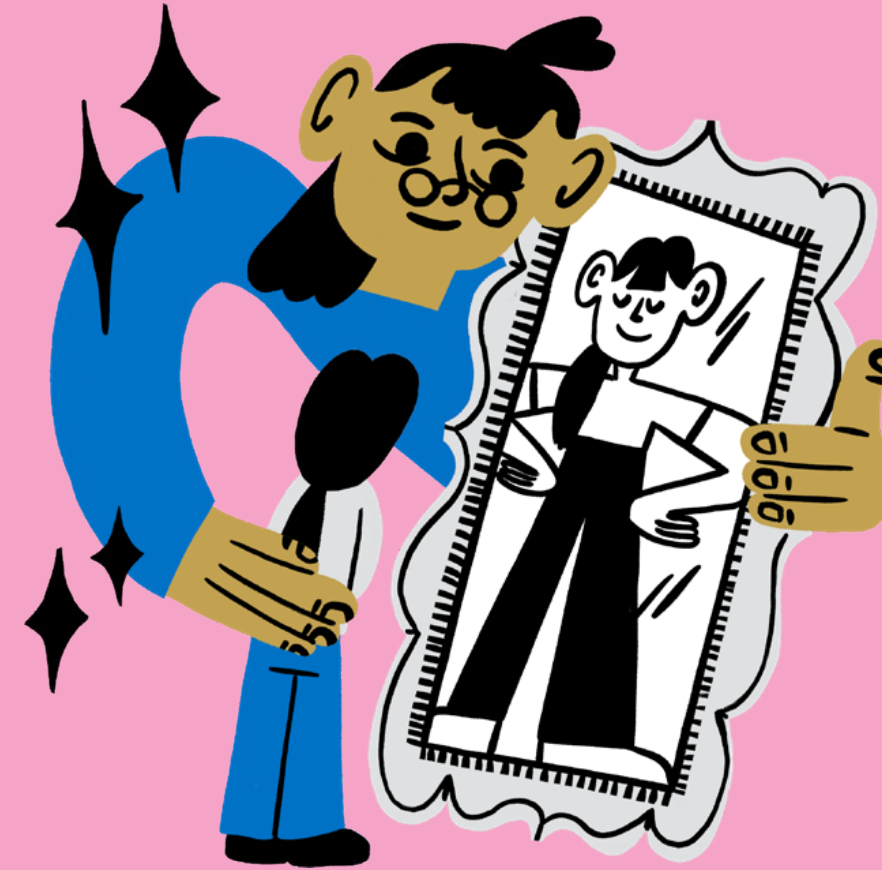
Multiple discrimination is when a person is discriminated against in the same situation on several different grounds or on different grounds in different situations. One factor alone does not necessarily even explain the existence of discrimination.

### neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the natural diversity of human neurological functioning. People's brains function differently from one another, and no one way of thinking or learning is better than another. The concept also covers neurominorities, such as people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia or Tourette's syndrome.

### non-discrimination

Non-discrimination means treating all people equally and without discrimination, regardless of their personal characteristics. The obligations relating to non-discrimination and justifiable exceptions are set out in more detail in the Non-discrimination Act.



### partnership family

A partnership family refers to a family in which the division of parenting is based on a joint agreement as opposed to a romantic relationship between the parents. In partnership families, parenting is often divided between two or more homes from the birth of the child.

### positive discrimination

A proportionate and justified measure aimed at promoting actual equality or correcting issues caused by discrimination.

### preliminary assessment of gender and equality impacts

A process of assessing the impact of decisions or plans in advance from a gender equality and non-discrimination perspective, e.g. in the drafting of legislation or decisions by public authorities.

### racism

The devaluation of a person on the basis of ethnic origin, skin colour, nationality or other similar factor. Racism can manifest itself as a way of thinking, a structural practice or individual acts.

### reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments refer to individualised arrangements that public authorities are obliged to make in order to enable people with disabilities to use services and participate in society on an equal basis to others. The obligation to make reasonable adjustments is set out in both the Non-discrimination Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

### segregation

The separation of different population groups or other groups of people in areas such as housing, education or employment. It can occur in two ways: voluntarily, e.g. when individuals seek to be close to people of a similar cultural background, or structurally, when segregation is driven by factors such as economic differences, detailed plan solutions or discriminatory practices.

### undocumented persons

An undocumented person lives in a country without the right of legal residence. In many ways, undocumented people are a particularly vulnerable population group.

### WCAG guidelines

The international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines define how online content is to be made accessible to all users. The guidelines feature three levels: A (basic level), AA (recommended level) and AAA (highest level). The WCAG are well established in Finnish and EU accessibility legislation.



**Sources used to compile the glossary  
(websites and other online material):**

- Accessibility legislation in the European Union and Finland
- Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities
- The Center for Cultural Policy Research Cupore
- Diverse Families Network
- Perhesuhdekeskus
- Saavutettavasti.fi
- Gender Diversity & Intersex Centre of Expertise
- Autistic Spectrum Finland
- Act on Equality between Women and Men (Finlex)
- Ombudsman for Equality
- Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)



- The Tiedenaiset community
- Non-discrimination Act (Finlex)
- Non-Discrimination Ombudsman
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Helsinki**