SOOLISE VÕRDÕIGUSLIKKUSE
JA VÕRDSE KOHTLEMISE VOLINIK

European Rule of Law Mechanism: input from Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Independence, resources, capacity and powers of national human rights institutions ('NHRIs'), of ombudsman institutions if different from NHRIs, of equality bodies if different from NHRIs and of supreme audit institutions*[1]
- *Statistics/reports concerning the follow-up to recommendations by National Human Rights Institutions, ombudsman institutions, equality bodies, and supreme audit institutions in the past two years.*

In 2024, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner focused on the topic of **racial discrimination**. The Commissioner's office released a report that provided fresh data on racial discrimination experiences in Estonia. To discuss the results of the report, Commissioner organised a conference "What Colour is Equality?" in December 2024, focusing on discrimination experiences due to skin colour.

The Commissioner also released a **report on equality in 2023,** reflecting on the situation of equality in Estonia that presented statistics on different grounds of discrimination. The report also included interviews with people who had experienced discrimination referring, that discrimination is heavily underreported in Estonia.

The Commissioner received **230 cases in 2024**, which is a slight increase in numbers since 2023 (198 cases).

In line with the general austerity measures introduced by the Government of Estonia, there are **cuts in funding of the Commissioner's office** in from 2025 onwards. These cuts have a significant impact on the ability of the office to fulfil its mandate.

[1] Cf. the website of the European Court of Auditors: https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/SupremeAuditInstitutions.aspx#

Concerning the recommendation made in the 2024 Rule of Law Report „Ensure effective public consultation in the context of the legislative process" we would like to express the following:

The Commissioner is very concerned about the declining of transparency and engagement in the public consultation process of legislative proposals. The processes are inclined to rushing and not giving the relevant partners and stakeholders, including civil society organizations sufficient time for communication and opinions.

More specifically the Commissioner is worried about recent developments regarding the proposal to merge Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Acts. The proposal was drafted by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications while engaging the civil society and relevant partners. However, the bill was halted in September 2024 by Ministry of Justice, and the ministry contracted a private law firm to develop a new bill. The new draft has not been consulted with civil society nor with the Commissioner's office. We are deeply concerned of what these developments might mean for the equality policy field as well as the general health of the Rule of Law.