



Country report 2024 on anti-discrimination: highlights



Estonia



Political and Legal Background:

Estonia declared independence in 1918 and adopted modern equality law in 1992 after Soviet occupation. Estonia joined the EU in 2004, and the Equal Treatment Act was adopted in 2009.



Demographics:

According to the 2021 census, Estonia has representatives of 211 nationalities. The largest ethnic groups are Estonians (69.1%), Russians (23.7%), and Ukrainians (2.1%).



Disability and Religion:

There are 149,900 persons with disabilities (11.4% of the population). More than half of the population considers themselves non-religious (58%). The largest religious group is Orthodox (16%), followed by Lutherans (8%).



LGBTQI+ Rights:

LGBTQI+ rights have been a significant part of public debate. In 2023, a law was passed establishing marriage equality for same-sex couples, effective from 1 January 2024.



Main Legislation:

Article 12 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on various grounds. The Gender Equality Act (2005), the Equal Treatment Act (2009), and the Chancellor of Justice Act (1999) shape the structure of equality law in Estonia.



Enforcement Mechanisms:

Victims of discrimination can pursue judicial procedures (criminal, administrative, or civil court) and non-judicial procedures (labour dispute committees, Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, Chancellor of Justice).



Equality Bodies:

The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner promotes equal treatment and addresses discrimination. The Chancellor of Justice ensures conformity with the law and acts as an ombudsman. Both bodies are independent and have specific mandates and funding.



Key Issues and Challenges:

The Equal Treatment Act creates a hierarchy of grounds, which is not aligned with the Constitution. There are debates on widening the scope to include all protected grounds equally. There are no detailed provisions to ensure that sanctions are effective, proportionate, and dissuasive.



Future Considerations:

Legislative proposals have been made to address gaps in the Equal Treatment Act, but political will has been lacking. Enhancing regulations on representation rights and sanctions for discrimination could improve compliance with EU directives.