

Hate Crimes Reported to the Police in Finland in 2010

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Original report in Finnish can be downloaded from:

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Summary

This report reviews suspected hate crimes reported to the police in Finland in 2010. The statistics are based on crime reports retrieved from the national police information system. Reports on racist crime have been published by the Police College of Finland and the Ministry of Interior's Police Department since 1998. In 2009 the system of compiling information on racist crime was developed into a more comprehensive system of monitoring hate crime. For the purpose of this report, hate crime has been defined as a crime against a person, group, somebody's property, institution, or a representative of these, motivated by prejudice or hostility towards the victim's real or perceived ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, transgender identity or appearance, or disability.

The Criminal Code of Finland does not contain definitions of the concepts 'racist crime' or 'hate crime'. A corresponding hate motivation is one of aggravating circumstances. According to police instructions, a report should be marked with a special code for statistical purposes if the crime is racially motivated. However, the use of the racism code could be improved. So far, there is no code for hate crimes more generally. The data collection for these statistics is based partly on the racism code used by the police and partly on the use of different search terms. The final classification of the reports as hate crimes is based on the narrative information about the incidents, written down by the officer who filed the report. To be exact, the data consists of suspected crimes, not actual crimes, as the decisions made by the prosecutor or court in relation to these cases are not described.

In the target year, the search criteria gave 860 such reports of an offence which were classified as suspected hate crime cases. There is a 15 per cent decrease in comparison to the previous year, when 1,007 cases were identified. The majority, 86 per cent, of the cases were classified as racist incidents. Cases motivated by the victim's religious background constituted 6 per cent of the cases. In 5 per cent of the cases the motive was sexual orientation and in 2.4 per cent it was disability. Five

hate crimes were identified as being based on the victim's transgender identity or appearance (0.6%).

Racist crime

As in previous annual reports, a reported offence is classified as a racist crime case if either the victim or the police or any other involved party perceive the situation as racist, or if the incidence involves obviously racist slurs. In the target year, 741 reports of offences with racist overtones were found in the police information system. This represents 146 cases fewer than the previous year.

Over one third (37%) of racist crime cases included verbal offences only, such as insults and threats. The proportion of cases in which physical violence was involved is about the same (38%). Based on the narrative description of the incidents, in the majority of the cases racism was directed towards a member of an ethnic or national minority by a member of the majority population.

The reports of racist offences included 1,168 principal offences, i.e. most severe offences towards a particular injured party. As in previous years, the most common suspected crimes were assaults, which constituted 31 per cent of all principal offences. Other common principal offences included defamation (15%), threat (14%) and petty assault (12%). Attempted assaults and various degrees of assault cases together constituted almost half (47%) of the principal offences. The most common scenes of the suspected racist crimes were public outdoor locations such as roads or city market places, as well as restaurants and their vicinity. Differing from the previous year, the next common location was the yard or staircase of the victim's apartment, which was the scene of 14 per cent of the suspected crimes (2009: 13%). As in previous years, the majority of racist crimes were committed in the evening and at night.

The majority of the injured parties were men (69%). The most common age group for both the male and female injured parties was 15-24 years old. As in the previous year, men were targets of assaults more commonly than women, whereas defamations were more common among female injured parties. The majority of the suspected offenders were Finnish citizens (80%), male (81%) and between 15 to 24 years old.

The majority (58%) of the injured parties in the suspected racist crimes were Finnish citizens. One third (31%) of the Finnish injured parties were born outside Finland. The narrative descriptions of the incidents revealed that some of the Finnish-born injured parties are second generation immigrants, for example, and some belong to the ethnic Roma minority. Among foreign citizens resident in Finland, citizens of Somalia, Russia and Iraq are most commonly victims of racist crime. In relation to the number of foreign citizens resident in Finland, citizens of Somalia experienced the highest frequency of racially motivated crime in 2010. The survey conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2008 also indicates the poor position of Somalis in Finland. According to the survey, of all ethnic minority groups in Europe, the Somalis in Finland are among the groups that experience the highest levels of racist violence and discrimination.

A regional examination reveals that the majority (29%) of the police reports of racist cases were filed in Helsinki. A total of 42 per cent were filed in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The number of suspected racist crimes reported to the police in Helsinki decreased from the previous year, as did the number of cases in other larger cities. Instead, in some smaller municipalities the numbers increased in comparison with 2009. This increase may, in fact, be due either to changes in the way reports are written and filed or to real growth in racist crime.

Hate crime motivated by victim's religion or belief

In the target year, 52 cases of hate crimes motivated by religion were identified. This number is lower compared with the previous year, when 83 police reports were filed. The classification of these cases as hate crimes was primarily based on either the way in which the victim perceived the situation or on slurs that the suspect used during the incident.

In 19 cases Christianity was the target of the hate crime. In the previous year, there were more (44) cases of this kind. In 2008 the number was 15. In some cases the crime was committed against Christians or the Christian faith in general, while in other cases the insults referred to a specific religious group, such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Laestadians. Four hate crimes against Jews were identified; in the previous year the number was 10. The number of hate crimes against Muslims was almost the same as in the previous year. In the target year, 15 such cases were found, whereas there were 14 in 2009. Two reports were filed in the target year where the crime was against members of other individual religious groups. In 12 cases the religion targeted was not specified in the police report.

The majority of hate crimes based on religion involved verbal insults or threats (30/52). Physical violence was involved in 12 cases.

In addition to cases of hate crime identified in the target year, six other cases under investigation were located via the data search. These cases included a hate motive connected with religion, but they were not filed as actual reports due to the character of the cases. In these cases the targets were Christians, Muslims, and Jews, among others.

Hate crime motivated by victim's sexual orientation or transgender identity or appearance

A total of 41 cases of hate crime motivated by the victim's real or perceived sexual orientation were identified in the target year. The number is somewhat higher than in the previous year, when 31 cases were identified. The data search located five cases of hate crime that were based on the victim's transgender identity or appearance, while in the previous year there were three such cases.

As with hate crime based on religion, the classification of these cases as hate crime was based primarily on either the victim's perception of the motive or on slurs made by the suspect during the incident. The majority of hate crimes based on sexual orientation or transgender identity or appearance were verbal threats and insults (22) or one-sided assaults (15). During 2010, five reports of offences were filed that concerned discrimination on the basis of belonging to the above-mentioned groups.

In the target year, one hate crime case motivated by sexual orientation or transgender identity or appearance included exceptionally many offences. Altogether 90 principal offences were filed in a case that involved a gas attack that occurred during a Pride parade in Helsinki in the summer of 2010. One principal offence concerned the invasion of people's freedom of political action, and the others were assaults.

In addition to actual hate crimes, there were four cases that included a hate motive based on sexual orientation and one case where the motive was the transgender identity or appearance of the injured party. However, these cases were not filed as actual reports of an offence.

Hate crime motivated by the victim's disability

In the target year, a total of 21 hate crimes based on the victim's disability were identified. In the previous year the number of these cases was 32. The majority of these cases were discrimination cases (8) and verbal insults or threats (6). In the previous year, only one case of discrimination based on disability was reported to the police. In addition to actual hate crimes, seven other cases under investigation included a hate motive based on disability.

Important to consider when assessing the results

When assessing the amount of hate crime reported to the police, it is important to consider the weaknesses concerning the method of this report and the difficulties concerning the interpretation of police reports. Statistics of racially motivated crime have been compiled for several years, and the police have been required to classify these cases in the police information system for over ten years now. The police have not been instructed to classify other types of hate crime. Therefore, there is no systematic pattern for recording other than racist motivation in the report. With many cases reviewed for this report, the motive of the crime has been interpreted from weak clues only, such as insults shouted by the offender during the incident and recorded in the report of the offence by a police officer.

It is also possible that the differences between the numbers of cases reported to the police partly indicate how often members of various minority groups tend to report their experiences of crime to the police. The differences may also reflect the extent to which victims of crime express their own views about the motive behind the crime to the police, as well as the extent to which and in how much detail the police reveal and document these aspects. For example, a victim belonging to a sexual minority might not report the motive of a crime to avoid revealing his or her sexual orientation. The victim might be afraid of possible prejudice displayed by the police or of having to reveal his or her sexual orientation in public later in the court proceedings. The few studies concerning the topic indicate that only a small percentage of hate crimes are reported to the police at present.

During 2009–2010 there were no changes in the instructions that the police received with regard to filing a report of an offence or classifying various types of crime. The Finnish Criminal Code was amended in 2011 to better protect and take cognizance of other hate crime victims in addition to those of racist crime victims. Possibly these changes will be reflected in future reports on hate crime reported to the police. As religion, sexual orientation and disability, along with the victim's ethnic or national origin as a motive for a crime are now stated as aggravating circumstances, the police must pay attention to these kinds of motives in their preliminary investigation. However, the police have only been instructed to classify racist crimes in the police information system.