



**Report by the Chancellor of Justice of the Republic of Estonia (NHRI)
for the Universal Periodic Review (4th cycle) of Republic Estonia**

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Foreword

1. The [Chancellor of Justice](#) is an independent constitutional institution appointed to office by the *Riigikogu* (the Parliament) on the proposal of the President of the Republic for a term of seven years. The institution was [established](#) in 1938 and restored in 1992. The Chancellor of Justice carries out the functions of constitutional review, ombudsman proceedings, National Human Rights Institution, National Preventive Mechanism under OPCAT, National Monitoring Mechanism under the CRPD, ombudsman for children etc.

2. As of 2019, the Chancellor of Justice is the national human rights institution (NHRI) in Estonia.

The Chancellor of Justice is re-accredited with the “A”-status by the Sub-Committee of the Accreditation and is part of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions.

3. The Chancellor of Justice received over 5000 applications in the previous reporting year. Close to half of them required the Chancellor’s intervention. The steady increase of the number of applications¹ over the years is an indication that people trust the institution and find it to be effective. 80% of the population [believe](#) that the Constitution protects their human rights and 66% find that the Chancellor of Justice stands for these rights. This figure is comparable to people’s trust in courts and significantly higher than trust in government, parliament or the media. Despite the rise in petitions, the budget of the institution has not been increased comparably.

4. Given the broad mandate of the Chancellor of Justice and the limitations on the length of a submission that can be submitted on behalf of an NHRI, the objective of this report is not to give an all-encompassing overview of all the human rights issues in Estonia, but to draw attention to some of the reoccurring and structural problems that need multi-level, urgent yet sustainable and long-term solutions. A more in-depth overview of different issues may be found in the [annual reports](#) that the Chancellor of Justice presents to the *Riigikogu* every year.

1. Right to equal treatment

5. In the previous report, the Chancellor of Justice noted that the [Equal Treatment Act](#) prohibits discrimination based on religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation only in situations related to employment (including vocational training). It is difficult to protect one's rights if discriminated against by a private person outside work.

6. A proposal to merge Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Acts was drafted with the engagement of the civil society and relevant partners. In 2024, the bill was halted and a private law firm contracted to develop a new one. Civil society and the [Equality Commissioner](#) have expressed deep concern over lack of transparency and public consultation in the drafting process of the new bill.

7. To this date, the Equal Treatment Act remains unamended and the protection from discrimination has not been broadened. Thus, the Chancellor reiterates the recommendation made for the previous report.

Recommendation to the State:

- Amend the Equal Treatment Act so that the law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation also in areas other than work (for example, access to social welfare, social security and health care services; access to educational and other public products and services including housing).

2. Right to privacy

8. In recent years, the Chancellor of Justice has received several complaints concerning the use of surveillance devices and access to data systems. For instance, it has come to light that the state had, for years, used automatic number plate recognition cameras to record all passing vehicles, even though until the adoption of the respective legislation by the Riigikogu on 8 October 2025, there was no legal basis for such mass data collection.

9. Facial recognition cameras have also been tested but were found to be ineffective. Again, the legal requirement for recording facial images had not been properly considered.

10. The Chancellor of Justice has [emphasised](#) that the wider use of surveillance technologies must be grounded in law. Currently, various tools are already in use – such as public space cameras, body-worn cameras, drones, and other surveillance equipment – all of which may impact fundamental rights.

11. In addition to surveillance devices, state-run databases and information exchange systems also require clear regulation. For example, the Financial Intelligence Unit has plans to create a system that would analyse data from various state registers to detect potential money laundering – yet without assessing the proportionality and the constitutionality, or risks of such large-scale data processing.

12. Problems have also emerged with the new Enforcement Register. Authorities gained access to banking secrecy, including account statements, even before the register's statutes were established. While steps are now being taken to enable individuals to see which queries have been made about them, the law still does not clearly define which data can be accessed via the

register. The Chancellor [noted](#) that protecting fundamental rights requires that such restrictions be set out in the law, not in subordinate regulations.

Recommendation to the State:

- Ensure that all surveillance measures and state data-processing systems are strictly regulated by law, in line with the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality.
- Strengthen oversight mechanisms and transparency concerning access to personal data.
- Guarantee that individuals are informed about and able to challenge unlawful data collection.

3. Right to education

13. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, every child has the right to education. The education provided must be of high quality and enable the development of each child's abilities. For many years, the Estonian education system has been regarded as one of the most equitable in the world. This has meant that the system was able to mitigate, to a considerable extent, the disadvantages arising from a child's socio-economic background.ⁱⁱ This is no longer the case, as educational inequality in Estonia is emerging.

14. A major challenge lies in the stark differences between regions, particularly between Tallinn and other larger cities on the one hand, and rural areas on the other. The regional education gap is significant both in general education schools, and even more so in terms of opportunities for further studies.ⁱⁱⁱ An increasingly pronounced trend is emerging whereby children from more affluent families concentrate in certain schools, while the children of disadvantaged families are in others.^{iv}

15. The inequality between schools and the education they provide is exacerbated by the shortage of qualified teachers. It has been found that in Estonian general education schools, one in four teachers may not meet the established qualification requirements.^v The lack of qualified teachers is particularly acute in rural areas and in schools attended predominantly by children from lower-income families. The shortage is especially pronounced in the field of mathematics, even though the results of the mathematics examination at the end of basic and upper secondary school play a decisive role in shaping young people's future, often serving as a key factor in determining their further educational pathways.^{vi}

16. On a positive note, Estonia has initiated a reform to end the segregated education system for children whose home language is Estonian and those whose home language is Russian.^{vii} Going forward, all instruction in Estonia's public general education schools will be conducted in Estonian. In addition to facilitating the integration of Russian-speaking children and young people into society and enabling their better access to further education and labour market, this reform is also expected to improve pupils' academic performance in basic school. The results of pupils in Russian-language schools have consistently lagged behind those in Estonian-language schools.^{viii} While the creation of a unified education system is a positive development in itself, it is crucial to ensure that the shortage of qualified teachers and adequate learning materials does not result in a decline in the quality of education for children with Russian as their home language.^{ix}

Recommendations to the State:

- Mitigate rising educational inequalities related to pupils' socio-economic background and regional differences.

- Guarantee that teachers working in schools are qualified and take effective measures to address the shortage of teachers.
- Ensure adequate learning materials for the unified education system.

4. Right to health

17. Unfortunately, patients are unable to see a doctor within a reasonable timeframe. Barriers include long waiting lists for treatment. Sometimes access is limited because healthcare providers are based far from those in need. According to an analysis by [the National Institute for Health Development](#), Estonia has the highest estimated level of unmet medical needs in Europe: in 2023, this affected 13 percent of the population, whereas the European Union average was 2–3 percent.^x

18. Ensuring timely access to psychiatric services has become an area needing particular attention. Extended waiting lists pose challenges to timely psychiatric care. The Chancellor of Justice has received concerns that some healthcare providers are unwilling to add patients to waiting lists. This creates a situation where access to psychiatric care services depends on a person's ability to pay for it, which deepens social and health inequality. A limited number of hospital beds poses an additional issue for inpatient psychiatric treatment.^{xi} Services are not always accessible to people living in more remote areas, as providers are typically located in larger urban centres.^{xii}

Recommendation to the State:

- Ensure access to public health care, including mental health care, in a reasonable timeframe and distance for the patient.

5. Right to social security

19. In 2023, a social welfare reform entered into force with the aim of making general care service provided outside the home of a person, hereinafter service in general care homes more affordable for service recipients and improving the quality of care. However, during the Chancellor of Justice's inspection visits, it has become evident that the reform's objectives have not yet been fully achieved.

20. The quality of care largely depends on whether general care homes have a sufficient number of care workers to assist the residents. The minimum staffing requirement must be met by July 2026 at the latest, but many service providers currently do not comply with this requirement^{xiii}.

21. In addition, the rising cost of living has increased the overall cost of care, and varying co-payment limits set by local governments make it even more difficult to achieve the reform's objectives.

Recommendation to the State:

- Supervise compliance with the minimum staffing requirement in the general care homes that is laid down by regulation.

6. Rights of persons with disabilities

6.1. Accessibility

22. Accessibility is the most fundamental right for persons with disabilities, because without access such individuals cannot exercise their other rights (for example, the right to education, work, independent living). Although some progress has been made in Estonia regarding accessibility, it is not sufficient. In 2021, the [Accessibility Working Group](#) made proposals for how to make Estonia more accessible.

23. For instance, while public transport is by large already accessible, majority of residential buildings remain inaccessible, and neither the state nor municipalities have a plan on how apartment buildings built 40-60 years ago—home to many people—could be made accessible. Individuals have also turned to the Chancellor of Justice because they cannot leave their homes independently due to absence of elevators in their buildings.^{xiv} Municipalities tend to see relocation to social dwellings as a solution, but that does not align with the principle in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that persons with disabilities must have the freedom to choose their place of residence.

24. Although accessibility of public buildings, roads, and transport has substantially improved, individuals are nonetheless unable to exercise their rights because they cannot receive necessary services in time. Over the years, the Chancellor of Justice has received numerous appeals from parents whose children cannot attend kindergarten or school because supportive services—such as support person service—are not provided.^{xv} Thus, the child cannot enjoy the right to education. Moreover, persons with disabilities find it difficult to find employment, and to participate on equal terms in sports, recreational activities, and cultural life.^{xvi}

6.2. Availability of special care service

25. In several proceedings, the Chancellor of Justice has had to address issues arising from lack of access to required services for persons with mental disabilities. Recently also the [National Audit Office](#) drew attention to the same problem. Persons with mental disabilities must wait years in queues to obtain needed services, and this waiting period has only lengthened over time. As a result, people are left without assistance and dependent on help from their family or local government, who are often left alone with the problem. It has been studied that the price the state pays for these services covers only about 60% of the costs. Consequently, staffing is difficult to secure. When services finally become available, they often require travelling far from home because such services are not provided locally. This runs counter to the principle that a person should be able to live where they want and always have the opportunity to maintain contact with loved ones. The greater the distance, the more difficult this becomes. Although the Government and the *Riigikogu* have long been informed about the problems related to persons with intellectual disabilities and mental disorders, nothing has been done to improve the situation.

6.3. Poverty among persons with disabilities

26. According to the latest data (2023), 41.1% of persons with disabilities in Estonia live in relative poverty, compared to 20.2% among the general population. Thus, people with disabilities are over twice as likely to live in poverty. The Chancellor of Justice has also drawn the attention of the *Riigikogu* (see paragraph 5 of the [report](#)) to the fact that the work ability allowance is too low compared to what is agreed upon in the European Social Charter.

Recommendations to the State:

- Ensure the implementation of the Accessibility Task Force's proposals, such as doing everything possible to make residential buildings accessible. To this end, create measures that would help property owners cope with the costs.
- Empower local authorities, schools and kindergartens so that children with special needs can access support services corresponding to their actual needs.
- Guarantee timely, local and quality special care service to those in need.
- Review the work ability allowance to meet the requirements of the European Social Charter.

7. Rights of the child^{xvii}

7.1. Quality of child protection work

27. Although the administrative reform in 2017 changed the administrative-territorial organisation of Estonia, child protection work in local authorities is of varying quality. Ascertaining the needs of a child and family and assessing the need for assistance depends considerably on the competence of the particular specialist, including their knowledge, activism and skills to use the appropriate assessment instruments. Helping a child and family depends on the possibilities of the local authority. The availability of services for children in need of help and their families differs a lot in different municipalities. Preventive programs and support for all families are not equally accessible in all municipalities.

7.2. Effectiveness of State supervision

28. More effective State supervision by the Social Insurance Board over the quality of social services and child protection work provided by local authorities would help to improve and harmonise the quality of child protection work in the municipalities. The Social Insurance Board does carry out thematic supervision in municipalities and child care institutions but supervises individual child protection cases only in very exceptional circumstances. This is partly due to limited resources.

29. To better protect children's rights, the Ministry of Education and Research must carry out supervision of schools and kindergartens both systematically and in individual establishments. For example, there is a need for supervision to resolve the problem of accessibility of preschool education, to ensure a secure mental and physical environment in kindergartens and schools, as well as compliance with the upper limit of the class size laid down by law. State supervision is also needed to ensure that a child with special needs receives the necessary assistance at a kindergarten and school.

7.3. Child-inclusive policymaking

30. Even though child participation is becoming more accepted in schools, municipalities and civil society, there is little proof of how governmental bodies responsible for the welfare of children give children the right to participate in policymaking and legislative decision-making.

Recommendations to the State:

- Take necessary action to guarantee that the help of professional child protection workers, preventive programs, good quality services and assistance are available to all families regardless of a child's place of residence.

- Strengthen State supervision of local authorities, schools, kindergartens and other child care institutions.
- Take action to ensure the child’s right to participate in all decisions concerning them, including in national decision-making.

8. Preventing and combatting gender-based violence

31. A large-scale [relationship survey](#) in Estonia found that 41% of women have experienced intimate partner violence during their lifetime. Psychological violence was reported by 39%, physical violence or threats by 13%, and sexual violence by 9%. Young women aged 18–29 and women with lower education levels are the most vulnerable. Among women with physical disabilities or limitations, 50% have endured such violence. While 56% of recent victims disclosed the abuse to someone, only 2–6% reported it to authorities.

32. According to the [Ministry of Justice](#), registered sexual crimes increased by nearly 25% between 2022 and 2024, with 746 cases reported in 2024. Around 90% of victims were minors, and half of the incidents occurred online. The [Police and Border Guard Board](#) attributes the rise primarily to improved reporting. [Domestic violence](#) cases decreased from 2019 to 2023 but showed a slight increase in 2024. [Authorities](#) note that underreporting remains a concern, as many victims either fear reporting or do not recognize the seriousness of the abuse.

33. In 2023, a study commissioned by the [Ministry of the Interior](#) highlighted systemic weaknesses, including short residence bans, lack of mandatory training, lenient penalties, and insufficient attention to elder abuse. In 2024, research centre Praxis published a [report](#) showing improvements in victim-sensitive investigations of sexual violence but noted ongoing barriers to justice. Another [analysis](#) found that Estonia's [Penal Code](#) is not fully aligned with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, particularly around the consent-based definition of sexual violence. Legislative amendments (so-called “consent law”) are under [consideration](#) by the *Riigikogu*.

34. Growing misogyny and sexism—especially in media—was documented in Praxis's 2024 [report](#), warning of normalization of gender stereotypes among youth. Estonia has not criminalized non-consensual sharing of intimate images, a key form of cyber violence,^{xviii} though [web policing](#) exists.

35. Public outrage followed a case where an employee in a [care home](#) raped several elderly women with dementia, but no charges were brought against the institution. The incident sparked debate over accountability and touched people's sense of security.

Recommendations to the State:

- Continue enhancing work on violence prevention and victim support.
- Strengthen efforts to increase awareness about sexual violence and consent-based sex within society.
- Enhance the expertise and capabilities of investigators, prosecutors, and judges handling cases of sexual violence.

ⁱ In 2024/2025 reporting year: 5542 applications, of which 2529 cases handled; in 2023/2024: 4389 applications, of which 1953 cases handled; in 2022/2023: 4136 applications, of which 1844 cases handled.

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- ii [Estonia: A Positive PISA Experience | SpringerLink](#), 4.1 Educational Equity.
- iii [PISA-pimedus - Sirp](#).
- iv [Ebavõrdsust tootev Tallinna eliitkoolipoliitika - Sirp](#); [Professor: hariduslik ebavõrdsus saab alguse juba koolikohtade jagamisest | Haridus | ERR](#); [Vaimse-tervise-ja-hariduse-valdkonna-probleemid-ning-lahendused.-lopparuanne.pdf](#), p 28; [Eneli Kindsiko: miks ei käi paljud õpilased kodule lähimas koolis? | Arvamus | ERR](#).
- v [Estonia faces teacher shortages at all levels of education for all subjects: Education at a glance 2024 \(OECD\): Estonia](#) p 6; [National Audit Office audits „Õpetajate vastavus kvalifikatsiooninõuetele ja ainepädevus“; Vaimse-tervise-ja-hariduse-valdkonna-probleemid-ning-lahendused.-lopparuanne.pdf](#), p 12-13; [HTM_Aastaraamat-2023-2024.pdf](#), p 85.
- vi [Eneli Kindsiko: kuidas lahendada matemaatikaõpetajate puudust? | Arvamus | ERR](#); [Eesti kooli getostumine algab matemaatikast - Õpetajate Leht](#).
- vii [Eestikeelsele haridusele üleminek | Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium](#).
- viii [Estonia: A Positive PISA Experience | SpringerLink](#); [Kuidas tagada edukas üleminek eesti õppekeelele? - Arenguseire Keskus](#).
- ix [Üleminekuklasse kimbutab eelkõige klassiõpetajate nappus | Eesti | ERR](#); [Enamik vene koolide õpetajaid kukkus eesti keele eksamil läbi | Eesti | ERR](#); [Eestikeelsele õppele üleminekust täitus esimene õppeaasta | Eesti | ERR](#).
- x [Towards better and more sustainable healthcare for all | OECD](#); [Rahvastiku tervise aastaraamat 2025](#).
- xi [Erakorralise psühhiaatrilise abi kättesaadavus on kriitiliselt halb, kuid sotsiaalministeerium ei näi sellest midagi teadvat - Delfi](#).
- xii [PSÜHHIAATRIA ERIALA ARENGUKAVA AASTATEKS 2020–2030](#), p 16, 20-26.
- xiii [Kontrollkaik OP Eakatekodu OU Loxsa kodusse.pdf](#); [Kontrollkaik Tammiste Hooldekodusse.pdf](#); [Kontrollkaik Kehtna eakatekodusse.pdf](#).
- xiv [Eluruumi ligipääsetavus.pdf](#).
- xv [Some positions of the Chancellor of Justice form recent years: Erivajadusega lapse toetamine lasteaias.pdf](#); [Tugi erivajadustega lastele.pdf](#); [Opilase toetamine koolis.pdf](#); [Tugiisik lapsele.pdf](#); [Tugiisiku abi koolis.pdf](#); [Erivajadusega lapse toetamine koolis.pdf](#); [Erivajadusega lapsele tugiisiku tagamine lasteaias.pdf](#); [Soovitus lasteaiale diabeeti põdeva lapse toetamiseks.pdf](#).
- xvi [Laulu- ja tantsupeo esinejate valimine.pdf](#).
- xvii [See also the report by the Chancellor of Justice of the Republic of Estonia on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the combined fifth to seventh periodic reports of the Republic of Estonia](#).
- xviii [European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination](#).