



Estonian human rights report 2012

Introduction

The Estonian human rights report 2012 has been prepared by the Estonian Institute of Human Rights. The aim of the report is to provide an objective overview of problems and issues related to human rights in Estonia. In order for people to be able to stand for their rights, it is of primary importance that they know their rights. Thus, the central question in the report is: how well do people in Estonia know what human rights are. The report also provides an overview of which human rights are well protected and which human rights are less protected. A quantitative survey and in-depth interviews with experts were used for answering these and several other more detailed questions. A comparison of the survey and the interviews conducted with experts allow us to obtain a general idea of people's subjective feelings about the human rights situation and the objective problems. The report also contains a summary overview of international organisations' assessment of the situation of human rights in Estonia. These three components should give a comprehensive, although not an exhaustive overview of the situation of human rights in Estonia. The human rights area is very diverse, multi-layered and elaborate. There are number of topics which could not be addressed in the framework of this report, because they were out of our means or were left out due to insufficient data. There are many individual cases in the human rights area, which should all be studied in detail, but that cannot be done in a generalising report.

The Estonian Institute of Human Rights has compiled reports on the situation of human rights already before. In 1999, the Estonian Institute of Human Rights presented an overview of the situation of human rights in Estonia. The initial plan was to present such overviews annually, but that could not be done due to a lack of resources and the institute prepared the next overview in 2005.

This report is divided into three parts. The first part contains the public opinion survey on human rights in Estonia. The objective of the survey was to:

- determine how people understand the term "human rights"
- give an evaluation on respect for human rights in Estonia
- identify the fields in which problems are seen with adherence to human rights
- establish information sources and desired information channels for the future

One of the central goals of the survey was to gain an overview of how many actual human rights violations occur in Estonia, and to what extent there exist other problems which are not human rights violations but which are considered by people to be so for various reasons.

The second part of the report is a survey of expert opinion, which consists of in-depth interviews conducted with experts in various fields, and of the related conclusions. The objective of the survey of experts was to:

- determine experts' assessment of the situation of human rights in Estonia
- obtain an overview of the activities of NGOs, government authorities, higher education institutions and the media in ensuring/covering human rights



- map the developments in the area of human rights in recent years and future plans for dealing with the topic
- identify expectations for updating legislation
- elicit comments and explanations to the results of the survey of the population

The third part is a summary overview of international organisations' assessments of the human rights situation in Estonia, which are mainly expressed in reports concerning Estonia. A comparison of the surveys and the summary overview provides a good basis for collating the viewpoints reflected in the public opinion and the ways in which the representatives of the Estonian state, the third sector and the scientists as well as international experts see the problems.

The report was planned to have a fourth part – proposals and recommendations on what needs to be done in Estonia to improve the protection of human rights. However, proposals and recommendations should stem from a public debate, and the Estonian human rights report could, indeed, provide a starting point for that. Thus the preparation and presentation of the fourth part should be left for the coming year.

The source material of the first part consists of the results of the surveys obtained in an omnibus survey. The second part is based on in-depth interviews. In the preparation of the third part, international legal acts and other documents concerning Estonia have been examined; the list of the documents is presented at the end of the third part of the report.

The Institute of Human Rights is planning to prepare the Estonian human rights report on a regular basis. There is probably no need to do it every year – a 3-5-year cycle would be appropriate. That would allow for a constant analysis of the human rights situation and changes therein. It would also make it possible to perform comparisons with the aim to plan future steps in ensuring human rights in Estonia.