



COMPARISON BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN GEORGIA AND ESTONIA

ESTONIA

GEORGIA

What are “human rights”?

“People's general rights”

“Protection of people's rights”

“Can't say”

Which rights are violated?

“Ones related to the socioeconomic situation”

The most problematic rights

Integration



Religious
freedoms

Hate speech

Discrimination

Prisoner rights



Primary information sources

Media
Family, friends
the Internet

A human rights survey was undertaken in both Estonia and Georgia. In both of the surveys, the population was asked for their opinion about the human rights situation in their respective country, and experts were also asked to weigh in on the situation.

In the case of both Estonia and Georgia, people's low awareness of human rights was highlighted. The question on definition of "human rights" drew very general and superficial responses, and unfortunately a large share of the population in both countries – in Estonia, 30% of respondents and in Georgia 14% – was unable to provide an exact answer. This figure describes a keen problem in both countries: people are not aware of their rights and cannot stand up for them. The latter is however a learned skill that people should be aware of. Both countries experience problems with teaching civic education and including human rights on school curricula.

Problems with awareness and the complicated socioeconomic situation and resulting low standard of living in these countries may be the reasons that people in both Georgia and Estonia mentioned violations of human rights in the social sphere and problems ensuring social equality. For respondents, these violations were above all breaches of social, economic and property rights that are not generally considered human rights.

Compared to Georgia, people in Estonia take a more positive view of the human rights situation in their country. Among Estonian respondents, 29% said that not everything was good in terms of human rights, which was a surprisingly high percentage. Still, it was better than the 64% figure in Georgia.

Disabled people's problems were mentioned in both surveys, and the experts were also concerned about the situation of Estonia and Georgia in this field. In 2012, Estonia acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but in reality, discrimination is encountered quite frequently. Georgian society has the same areas of concern, where in addition to discrimination, the state support for disabled people is not sufficient.

Another similarity between the two countries is problems ensuring gender equality and lack of protection for rights of sexual minorities. Although these were mentioned in the case of both countries as problem areas for society, the content of the problems is different. In the case of Estonia, the large gender wage disparity and the low level of social inclusion of women are mentioned. But besides these unresolved issues, Georgia also has major problems with harassment, domestic violence and a high

murder rate among women. These problems are often not acknowledged as part of gender discrimination.

In the case of sexual minorities, Estonia's main shortcoming is seen in relation to the right to privacy, social discrimination and incitation of hatred on the Internet and low awareness in every segment of society. The source of the problems faced by sexual minorities in Georgia is often the Orthodox church, which does not recognize same-sex couples and due to the pervasive influence of which stereotypes and condemnation of sexual minorities persist in society, sometimes even leading to violent clashes between the minorities and the church as seen at a demonstration in May 2012.

The violations of religious freedoms and the strong influence of the Orthodox Church in Georgian society is one of the biggest differences between Estonia and Georgia. The Orthodox Church has been able to retain its special relationship with the state and it allows them to effectively disregard some human rights standards. For instance, Georgia's law on anti-discrimination can be mentioned in this regard, as a special clause on the Orthodox Church was added to this law stating that the church's values have immunity under the legislation. In the case of Estonia, neither the population survey nor the experts' opinions cited violations of religious freedoms.

Integration problems were noted as problems for Estonian society in both parts of the survey . The large Russian-speaking community considers it a violation of their human rights that many among them have not been granted citizenship and that possibilities for using Russian in an official capacity are limited. Although the restrictions on conducting affairs in a language other than Estonian and automatic naturalization, ease of applying for citizenship and not holding citizenship are not violations of human rights, they do affect popular sentiment and people's opinions about their situation in Estonia. For that reason, people feel that they are discriminated against on the basis of language proficiency, even though experts say linguistic discrimination does not take place in Estonia. In assessments of Georgian human rights, it has also been noted that low Georgian language proficiency may limit people's chances on the labour market but Georgia does not have the specific type of social divide seen in Estonia.

Experts say the situation of prisoners in Estonia and Georgia has improved, but in the case of Georgia, concern was expressed over the abuse of prisoners. Attention was drawn to such cases going unpunished.

For the populations of both countries, the main information source is the media, which plays a large role in shaping sentiment and opinions. In the case of both countries, experts saw the quality of the media in a somewhat negative light. In both Estonia and Georgia, there was concern about a thirst for scandal, which keeps news coverage from reflecting reality. Georgian experts want to see more positive coverage so that people would not feel despair and that those violating human rights would not sense impunity. For Estonia, it was noted that there was sufficient coverage of human rights, but it was added that this was done in an indirect fashion and in some other context; the reason may be journalists' low awareness of human rights. It is regrettable that the media has taken a disrespectful view of the gender equality commissioner's work, even though Estonia has noteworthy problems with gender equality. Incitation of hatred has also been noted in the media, an area where Georgia has made major progress. Experts said that Georgia had practically removed hate speech in the media. This development has been acknowledged by different minority groups.

It is somewhat surprising that only 27% of people in Estonia and 25% of people in Georgia mentioned obtaining information from the Internet. In the case of Georgia, the reason is presumably limited access to the Internet in several regions, but it is more surprising in Estonia's case, as the Internet is widely available and the country leads the world in Internet freedom. At the same time, this has led to incitation of hatred against sexual minorities.

To sum up, it can be said that both countries still have a number of human rights problems, but both the governments and NGOs and CSOs are working on solving them and raising awareness of them. The activity in regard to raising awareness received a positive rating in the surveys, which encouraged that active efforts continue. Indeed, raising awareness in society is one of the principal challenges in both countries.