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Gender Equality Policies in Finland

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Gender equality development in Finland

Women have traditionally worked alongside men in Finland. Agriculture dominated by small farms required a full contribution from both women and men. The changing occupational structure gave women an opportunity to work in the industry and the service sector, while at the same time they also had to work for their living.

Modern debate on equality between women and men began in Finland in the 1960s. Traditional gender roles were questioned as they were seen to be based on the division of labour in an agricultural society. In an urbanized society both women and men work outside the home. It was also emphasized that women and men should have equal roles in looking after the family, have a right to gainful employment and be able to have an influence in society on an equal basis. It was also stressed that it is the responsibility of the Government to provide social protection and services. The demands for reform appealed to both women and men and established the basis for the gender equality policies of the following decades. The Committee on the Status of Women published a reform programme in 1970, and the Council for Equality was founded in 1972 to promote the implementation of the reforms.

International debate, particularly in Scandinavia, and international agreements and movements have also had a major impact in Finland.

Women in political decision-making

In Finland, women and men received full political rights in 1906 and the following year 19 women and 181 men were elected to the first unicameral Parliament. The percentage of women in Parliament remained at approximately 10 per cent until the early 1950s since when it has been rising steadily. In the 1980s, the proportion exceeded 30 per cent. Of the MPs elected in the 2003 parliamentary elections, 37.5 per cent were women.

From the start, women brought new issues into politics, such as the status of unprotected children and women as well as women's rights and gender equality. Thus, they contributed to building the foundations of the welfare state. In the last few decades, women have gradually entered all spheres of politics and all political positions, although the distribution is not completely even yet. In the last few governments approximately 40 per cent of ministers have been women. The first female Prime Minister was appointed in 2003, and Finland's first female President, Tarja Halonen, was re-elected for a second term in 2006.

In the 2004 local elections, 37 per cent of the new council members were women. The composition of municipal boards and committees must be in accordance with statutory 40–60 per cent quota requirements, which has not caused any major problems.

The first women's associations were founded in the 19th century. Today, the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations (NYTKIS) brings under one umbrella organization the independent women's associations and the women's associations of all political parties. The history of men's associations promoting gender equality is more recent. The first men's association with extensive activities, Miessakit – Fellowship of Men's Associations, was launched in the 1990s.

Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2004–2007

Each Government defines the gender equality policy focus areas for its term of office. The Government appointed in 2003 emphasises the following issues:

- Mainstreaming and promoting gender equality over the entire public administration,
- Reform of the Act on Equality between Women and Men,
- Promoting the principle of ‘equal pay for work of equal value’,
- Increasing the proportion of women in political and economic decision-making,
- Evening out the employer costs of family leave between the male and female dominated sectors and guaranteeing the conditions for women and men to take part in working life,
- Assessing gender equality policies from the male point of view,
- Preventing domestic violence and intimate partner violence,
- Protecting the victims of trafficking,
- Examining the possibilities to criminalize buying sex

The Government Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2004–2007 includes more than 100 projects. A working group chaired by a State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, which represents all ministries, monitors the implementation of the Action Plan.

Gender equality is promoted at various levels

Gender equality issues are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health which coordinates the implementation of the Government’s gender equality policies. The Minister of Social Affairs and Health is also responsible for gender equality, and is assisted

by the State Secretary appointed for one Government term. At the Ministry gender equality is promoted by the following units:

The Gender Equality Unit's tasks include preparation of the Government's gender equality policies, mainstreaming gender equality, preparing gender equality legislation, and EU and international matters.

The Ombudsman for Equality monitors compliance with the discrimination prohibitions of the Act on Equality between Women and Men (since 1987) and promotes and monitors the preparation of gender equality plans at workplaces.

The Gender Equality Board, together with the Ombudsman for Equality, monitors compliance with the Act on Equality between Women and Men.

The Council for Gender Equality holds an advisory position in gender equality issues. The Government appoints its members for each parliamentary term on the basis of the political balance of power.

It monitors the development of gender equality, takes initiatives and promotes dialogue.

The Parliamentary *Employment and Equality Committee* deals with employment and gender equality matters. There is also an unofficial women MPs' network in Parliament to which all female MPs belong.

Nearly all ministries have a gender equality working group. Many public institutions, such as Statistics Finland, the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) and the universities have gender equality specialists and networks of gender equality focal points.

A number of mostly large municipalities have gender equality committees and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities also supports municipal gender equality work. Labour market organizations have networks of focal points and officials dealing with gender equality issues.

Gender mainstreaming

Under the Finnish Constitution and the Act on Equality between Women and Men, public authorities are responsible for the promotion of gender equality. At the same time, each ministry is responsible for the promotion of gender equality in its own administrative sector. Mainstreaming is a strategy in which administrative and operating practices in ministries and authorities are developed to promote gender equality.

All ministries must ensure that the agencies in their administrative sectors give consideration to the gender perspective. The experts in each administrative sector learn to recognize and take into account gender equality issues relevant to their own fields when doing preparatory work. The gender perspective will also be included in the ministries' internal training programmes.

Government instructions require that gender impacts are assessed in connection with the law drafting process. The need for gender impact assessment is to be evaluated at the start of each law drafting project and assessment will be carried out, if required. In all other projects and programmes, the gender perspective must also be taken into account at the project planning stage.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is the pilot ministry for the assessment of the Budget's gender impact. The direct and indirect gender impacts of the ministry's budget were evaluated in 2005. The gender perspective in the Government Budget will be taken into account for the first time in connection with the preparatory work for the 2007 Budget.

Statistics are produced with as much gender disaggregation as possible. This gives information for decision-makers on the situation of women and men, female and male interests, etc. The national portal on women's studies and gender information, Minna, also assists in the collection of information.

Women in public administration and economic decision-making

Public sector

There has been a lot of debate about women's chances of rising to the highest management positions in the last few years. The percentage of women at the top management level in ministries and Government agencies remained low for a long time. The Government's aim is to reach a situation in which approximately half of all new appointees are women. In 2005, 22 per cent of the highest management positions in public administration were held by women. The generation change and women's high level of education make the process easier. The fact that there are more and more women in the bodies making these appointments, such as in the Government, and the President, is also an important factor. Almost half the Government employees are women and in 2004, some 36 per cent of all management positions were held by women.

One fifth of university professors, rectors and vice-rectors were women in 2004.

In the judiciary, approximately a third of all district court judges, judges of the courts of appeal and members of the Supreme Court are women. A woman was appointed Supreme Court President for the first time in 2006.

The composition of municipal boards and committees must be in accordance with a statutory 40–60 per cent quota requirement. However, only 13 per cent of all city and municipal managers were women in 2004.

Private sector

In the private sector just over a quarter of all managers are women.

The Government is a major owner in more than 50 limited companies. In accordance with the Government's targets, the percentage of women had risen, by 2005, to approximately 40 per cent on the boards of companies with full or majority Government

shareholding. However, not all companies have reached the target. Some 17 per cent of the board members in the hundred biggest private companies were women in 2006.

Men and gender equality

Gender equality should also be considered in relation to men. A unit which deals with men and gender equality has operated in the Council for Gender Equality since 1988. Finland's Government Programme for 2003–2007 states for the first time: "Gender equality will also be evaluated from the male point of view."

The theme 'men and gender equality' emphasises the support for fatherhood and parenthood, including encouraging men to take family leave. In Finland, policy preparation concerning men and gender equality has been made part of general equality policy. The central new aim is to increase men's involvement in gender equality policy debate and the promotion of gender equality.

Employment

The Government's aim is to increase employment among women and men, extend working life, improve gender equality and the reconciliation of work and family life and make work more attractive. The Government and the social partners develop working life in accordance with the well-established tripartite principle.

The Finnish workforce is almost evenly divided into women and men. Mothers of small children also work outside the home and Finland has been successful in combining women's high employment with a relatively high birth rate. A system of children's daycare and family leave allow for both parents or the only parent to work. In 2005, the employment rate (15–64 years) for women was 67 percent and for men 70 per cent. As the majority of the workforce belongs to the wage and salary earners' category (87%) the proportion of entrepreneurs is relatively low.

The average unemployment rate in 2005 was 8 per cent and employment is on average equally common among women and men. However, the majority of the long-term unemployed and those with low employability are men.

The Finnish labour market is segregated into women's and men's sectors. Labour market policy measures, such as labour market training, vocational guidance, employment services and employer services support non-gender-specific training and employment choices.

Most women and men work full time. In 2005, over 14 per cent of the employed workforce worked part-time, and almost two-thirds of this number were women. In Finland, few mothers and fathers choose to work part-time so that they can reconcile work and family life better.

More than 17 per cent of wage and salary earners work in fixed-term employment. Fixed-term employment is more common among women than men and is particularly typical among highly educated young women. Fixed-term employment relationships increase the risk of unemployment and mean lower incomes. The resulting uncertainty complicates planning for the future, and makes it more difficult to start a family and use family leave. The Government is aiming to establish permanent jobs to replace fixed-term employment relationships which are particularly recurrent in the public sector.

Trade union membership among women and men is very high in Finland and is equally common among both genders. The majority of labour market leaders are still men.

From gender pay gap to equal pay

The principle of equal pay is laid down in the Finnish Constitution and the Act on Equality between Women and Men. However, women's average income for regular working hours has for the last three decades been only 80 per cent of men's average income. Women's sectors and professions are more poorly paid than men's sectors and professions. This accounts for about half the pay gap.

Since the late 1980s, collective agreements have included

regulations and recommendations regarding the promotion of equal pay. Agreements have been made on such matters as the setting up of a gender equality working group, gender equality allowance and low-pay bonuses, and there have been recommendations concerning the assessment of gender impacts on union-specific agreements.

The Government and the labour market organizations drew up a joint equal pay programme in 2005. The programme lists a number of concrete measures which require long-term action. The aim is to reduce the gap between women's and men's pay by 5 per cent by 2015. In spring 2005, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health set up a high-level follow-up group to monitor the implementation of the programme. The group is chaired by the Speaker of Parliament, and its members include the leaders of all central labour market organizations.

Workplace gender equality plans

Workplace practices are important for the promotion of gender equality. The amendment to the Act on Equality between Women and Men (2005) laid down more precise instructions for drawing up workplace gender equality plans. Every employer with at least 30 employees must have a gender equality plan. The plan of action must include women's and men's pay comparison. The drawing up of gender equality plans is promoted through information and training. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the most important labour market organizations have drawn up joint guidelines for gender equality planning. The labour market organizations are committed to promoting gender equality plans. Good practices are developed in, for example, research and development projects funded by the European Social Fund.

Reconciling work and family life

Reconciling work and family life is one of the core issues of gender equality. It is essential in coping with work and to the well-being of

families. The Government aims to improve the reconciliation of work and family life among women and men and to strengthen women's status in the labour market.

In 2006 family leave comprises

- A 105-day maternity leave,
- A 158-day parental leave, which can be shared by the mother and father; they can also take part-time parental leave.
- An 18-day paternity leave, which fathers often take around the time the baby is born.
- Father's bonus leave: if the father uses at least the last 12 days of parental leave, he gets an extra 12 days as an incentive.

The legislation grants a person in permanent employment the right to return to the same job after family leave. The parent's allowance compensates for the loss of income during family leave. After parental leave, the mother or father can look after the child at home on child home care allowance until the child turns three. Alternatively, the parent can return to gainful employment, in which case the child can, for example, be placed in municipal childcare.

In Finland, all children under school age have a right to municipal, reasonably priced and publicly funded daycare. It is the municipality's responsibility to organize daycare to meet the requirements. The aim is to ensure that the parents have the opportunity to study and work. The quality of daycare is monitored, and detailed provisions have been laid down regarding the personnel's level of education and the ratio of personnel numbers to children. In 2004, 63 per cent of all 3 to 6-year-old children were in part-time or full-time daycare.

Women take the majority of family leaves. It is important to encourage men to take family leave and in this respect a lot has to be done to change attitudes in the workplace and in general. Housework also tends to be more evenly divided between women and men if men take family leave. Moreover, family leave taken by men strengthens the relationship between the father and the child. The Government will prepare improvements to parents' childcare leave during 2006.

The costs of family leave are divided between the Government, employers and employees. Family leaves generate higher costs for employers in sectors dominated by women. Employers' annual holiday costs have been evened out from the start of 2005.

Violence against women

Violence in intimate relationships is mostly directed at women by men. Violence is a major cost item for society at large and for individuals. The expenses for health and social services and the legal sector totalled about EUR 91 million in 2001. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence are crimes subject to public prosecution.

Violence against women is a gender equality issue, and it is also a factor that reduces the safety of the population. Cooperation between ministries to prevent domestic violence and intimate partner violence will be increased. Close cross-sectoral cooperation makes it possible to establish similar cooperation at regional and local level. The aim is to improve the nationwide primary and specialist service networks and boost professional skills and competence. Particular emphasis will be given to helping children and young people who witness and experience violence.

The police can place restraining orders on people threatening violence to prevent them from approaching their victims. Restraining orders for family members became possible in Finland in 2005. A restraining order is an option when an ex-partner or a grown-up child causes disturbances by attempting to contact or visit the victim. In 2005, the police dealt with 120 cases of restraining orders on family members.

Prostitution and trafficking

Prostitution and human trafficking have increased in Finland since the 1990s. Finland's eastern border forms a gap between a high and a low standard of living. The law prohibits procuring and benefiting from someone else's prostitution and human trafficking in all its forms. The action programme against human trafficking was approved in 2005. Selling and buying sex in public places is prohibited.

Prostitution creates a market for human trafficking. It is risky and violates human dignity. In spring 2006, the Parliament was debating a bill on the criminalization of buying sex. The majority of customers in prostitution are men and it is estimated that some 10 per cent of men have bought sex. The aim is to develop social and other services that make it easier to break away from prostitution.

Demographic data

Finland has a population of approximately 5.3 million. Around 3 per cent of this total were born outside Finland, and two-thirds of that number do not have Finnish citizenship. The Finnish population is aging. Approximately 17 per cent of the population are under 15 and 16 per cent over 65. The percentage of children is predicted to decrease slightly, but the percentage of older people is rising rapidly. Life expectancy is increasing steadily. For women, the figure is 82 years and for men 75 years. The decrease in the birth rate bottomed out in the early 1990s and has been increasing slightly over the past few years. In 2004, the total fertility rate was 1,800 children per 1000 women.

On average, Finns marry for the first time at the age of 30 (women at the age of 28 and men at 32). People of the same sex have been able to register their relationships since 2002. One fifth of all couples are cohabiting, and 14 per cent of couples with children are cohabiting.

On average, Finnish women give birth at the age of 30 and first-time mothers at the age of 28. The majority, 81 per cent, of all families have one or two children. Finland's divorce rate is one of the highest in the EU.

Publications in English

- Act on Equality between Women and Men, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Gender Equality Brochures 2005:2
- Gender Equality Planning – Why, What, How? Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Brochures 2005:6
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- www.stm.fi >English > Publications

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Internet pages:

- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health www.stm.fi/english
- Minna – national portal on women’s studies and gender equality (in Finnish) www.minna.fi
- 100 years of full and equal political rights of women in Finland www.aanioikeus.fi/en
- Statistics Finland’s statistics on gender equality in Finland www.stat.fi > In English > Products and services > Themes > Gender equality
- www.virtual.finland.fi

