

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Finland

COUNTRY: Finland

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

Finland has no specific legal provisions to promote gender equality in research nor obligations targeting research institutions. However, § 5 of the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) on achieving gender equality in teaching and education refers to research: “Teaching, research and educational materials must promote the objectives of the Act”. It must therefore prevent discrimination based on sex or gender identity and promote equality between women and men, in particular to improve women’s position in employment. The Act on Equality also requires plans from educational institutions and employers with more than 30 employees, including universities, Universities of Applied Sciences, public research organisations, research funding organisations and research and development (R&D) companies. Those plans must address the following issues: decision-making, employment (salary, segregation, working conditions), reconciliation, studies and teaching, as well as discrimination and harassment. The implementation of gender equality plans is not systematically monitored and their effectiveness is rarely evaluated.

Policy framework

No strategic document deals exclusively with gender and research. Gender is not a priority in research, science and innovation policy, and gender equality in research is chiefly promoted through gender equality policy.

The Academy of Finland is the national research council. It promotes gender equality in research through the “Academy of Finland Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan 2019-2020”. The Plan applies to beneficiaries of the Academy’s research funding, as well as to employees of the Academy’s Administration Office. It covers gender equality and discrimination as per the provisions of the Finnish Non-discrimination Act - no one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. Harassment also counts as discrimination^[1].

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSAH) published the Government Report on Gender Equality in 2010. The report was the first of its kind. It listed four research-related goals:

- Reinforce gender mainstreaming in higher education and science policy;
- Promote universities’ gender equality efforts and integrate a gender perspective into university teaching and research;
- Promote women’s research careers;
- Strengthen the status of gender studies and integrate gender content and expertise into all fields.

The MSAH's Gender Equality Action Plan 2012-2015 embraced these goals but contained no specific measures. Rather, it focused on supporting and monitoring the gender equality efforts of universities and integrating a gender dimension into research policy. The Gender Equality Action Plan 2016-2019 did not include any research and innovation-related measures. The MSAH's 2020-2023 Plan addresses higher education institutions (HEIs) and the research and innovation sector through two explicit actions, with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) publishing two related reports. The 2020 "Report on the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination in higher education institutions" identified shortcomings in universities' obligations to develop gender equality action plans. The Act on Gender Equality obliges Finnish universities to implement a gender equality plan (GEP) and to update that plan every two years based on an assessment of previous actions. The report indicated that most of the GEPs require updating, as there has been no assessment of previous measures. In 2020, the MEC published "Towards more accessible higher education and higher education institutions", which is a plan to increase access to higher education and HEIs. The plan presents 38 objectives and policies to promote accessibility, inclusion and diversity in higher education generally, and for underrepresented population groups and minority groups specifically. The review examines the following background factors: family background, regional accessibility of higher education, gender segregation, migrant background, functional limitations and disability, belonging to linguistic and cultural minorities, diverse learning and belonging to sexual and gender minorities.

The Government Report on Gender Equality is expected to be published in late 2021, outlining future gender equality policy in Finland for the coming decade.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Awards and grants for women researchers include the L'Oréal Finland for Women in Science Fellowship (awarded to one person in alternate years) and small grants for women doctoral students awarded by the Women's Science Foundation (awarded to several people in alternate years). The 2019 Government Report on Gender Equality declared the Finnish Government's intention to establish the International Gender Equality Prize (IGEP) to mark 100 years of independence in 2017. IGEP award winners receive EUR 300,000 and it was awarded for the first time in 2018^[2].

In the context of Finland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019, two high-level gender equality conferences were held in Helsinki and contributed greatly to gender equality in research and innovation (R&I). The MSAH organised the conference "Europe for Gender Equality? Taking stock, taking action", which aimed to improve dialogue between gender equality policy and economic policy^[3]. The MEC arranged the high-level conference "Research and Innovation Excellence through gender equality: New pathways and challenges". As a joint outcome, a Helsinki Call for Action, "Advancing gender equality in research and innovation in Europe" was published on 1 November 2019^[4].

Key actors

The MEC is responsible for research policy and for implementing the measures on gender equality in research from the Gender Equality Action Plan. It also monitors the gender equality efforts of HEIs.

The MSAH's Government Gender Equality Unit (TASY) coordinates the drafting and implementation of the government's Gender Equality Action Plan.

The Academy of Finland integrates gender equality and non-discrimination goals in its research funding and other activities. It actively contributes to creating a transparent research ecosystem that provides equal opportunities for people.

The Ombudsperson for Equality monitors the GEPs required from employers and educational institutions under the Act on Equality. The Ombudsman does not regularly assess the implementation of these plans, but carried out an assessment of Universities of Applied Sciences' GEPs in 2009 and universities' GEPS in 2011. The MEC ordered a subsequent study, with Inkeri Tanhua publishing a national report on promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination in HEIs in 2020^[5].

The Centre for Gender Equality Information^[6] at the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare and Statistics Finland^[7] are the central institutions producing and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and data and information on the higher education and research sector. The Centre for Gender Equality Information organises annual “Gender Equality Days”. In 2021, the two conference days will take place in a hybrid form due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now in their seventh year, they will offer an overview of ongoing gender equality initiatives, as well as talks on selected topics.

Various networks for women researchers provide peer support and promote gender equality in research (e.g. associations of women researchers in universities, discipline-specific groups).

The Women’s Science Foundation is a small private foundation that aims to promote gender equality in research by supporting the education and career paths of women researchers.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

The Act on Equality obliges all research organisations with more than 30 employees to have a GEP. The gender equality work of research organisations focuses on changing structures and attitudes, but there are few concrete career support measures for women. To date, there have been very few initiatives to integrate gender into research content, and human and financial resources for gender equality work are scarce. Research organisations have developed several tools, approaches and initiatives, often as part of their GEPs. The most common tools are guidance on preventing and tackling harassment, and gender equality surveys. The main approaches feature quotas to ensure gender balance in decision-making bodies and changing discriminatory practices in recruitment and appraisal. These aim to promote women’s careers, as well as to integrate gender into general planning and monitoring documents and procedures so as to enhance gender mainstreaming. Other initiatives commonly implemented in research organisations include the creation of support structures, studies and reports, awareness-raising activities and awards. In a number of cases, actions proposed by the gender equality committee comply with national policy but are insufficient to prompt institutional transformation.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Promotion of equality and non-discrimination in the research funding operation

The Academy of Finland's Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan (2019-2020) applies to beneficiaries of the Academy's research funding, as well as to employees of the Academy's Administration Office. The Academy's promotion of equality and non-discrimination includes three measures: (1) design of tools for systematic data collection on research funding and personnel operations, and developing follow-up indicators; (2) developing communications and training; and (3) using concepts and terminology promoting equality and non-discrimination.

Gender equality in regional research and innovation

Gender equality in regional R&I activities is little studied in Finland. This seminar series targeted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and prompted them to consider the business benefits of using the expertise of both women and men in R&I activities. Arranged with the University of Tampere as part of "Research and innovation in the Pirkanmaa region: gender equality as a solution", the seminar emphasised joint development and sharing of concrete tools.

"Future is Female – Discussions with Women in Science and Tech" webinar

Diverse voices, skills and views are needed if technology is to serve everyone. Business Finland, together with national partners, led the discussion for more diversity, inclusion and equality in the science and technology that will transform everyday life. Episode VII of the webinar series discussed the lives, careers and experiences of women, who remain a minority in developing transformative technologies. The episode was broadcast online on 9 December 2020 and remained available to watch afterwards.

Equal by 30 campaign

Gender equality is at the heart of the global transition to a clean energy future. The Equal by 30 campaign is part of the Clean Energy, Education and Empowerment initiative (C3E), which works to advance women's participation in the clean energy transition and to close the gender gap. The Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT) is committed to promoting equality in technology, keeping equality as a basis and paying attention to it in all operations, hiring the best and most suitable people, and ensuring that all kinds of people are visible and active. The international campaign involves the public and private sectors to promote gender equality in the energy sector by working towards equal pay and equal leadership, as well as equal educational and career opportunities.

Funding for small-scale gender equality projects

Between 2002 and 2011, the University of Helsinki made funding available for small-scale gender equality projects across the university. The funding increased grass-roots engagement in gender equality work, helped to identify and address the specific problems and needs of different faculties and departments, and created permanent networks and good practices.

Annual equality implementation plans

Every school within Aalto University adopts an annual Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Action Plan. Those plans support the implementation and follow-up of the University's three-year Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan. The practice addresses several key challenges in equality work in large institutions by turning equality objectives into concrete practices in everyday life across the university. The plans also take into account the special characteristics and development needs of individual schools.

Extending temporary contracts of teaching and research staff due to maternity, paternity and parental leave

Hanken School of Economics extends the temporary contracts of teaching and research personnel to accommodate maternity, paternity and parental leave. This advances women's research careers and facilitates work-life balance in an academic context, where women often have temporary contracts.

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.aka.fi/en/research-funding/responsible-science/equality-and-...>

[2] <https://igep.fi/en/frontpage>

[3] <https://stm.fi/-/korkean-tason-konferenssi-europe-for-gender-equality-ta...>

[4] <https://genderinsite.net/sites/default/files/Helsinki%20Call%20for%20Act...>

[5] <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-263-859-5>

[6] <https://thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality>

[7] https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/tasaarvo/index_en.html