

Finland

About

According to the Finnish Constitution, no one shall be treated differently to others on the grounds of gender or other personal attributes. Gender equality is to be promoted in societal activity, working life, pay and employment (Constitution 731/1999). The background to mainstreaming gender equality policy thus lies in the Constitution, as well as in the 1995 Equality Act, which requires authorities to systematically promote equality and to change circumstances that prevent de facto equality between women and men.

Finland has a long history of endorsing and mainstreaming gender equality. The implementation of gender mainstreaming in Finland dates back to 1980–1985, when the Finnish government's first Action Plan for Gender Equality stated that promoting gender equality was a task for every administrative unit. Efforts to institutionalise gender mainstreaming began in the late 1990s, after Finland committed to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). During the 2000s, development was twofold. Gender equality legislation and the political orientation of the government towards gender equality sharpened and systematised as of 2003, while the subsequent Action Plan for Gender Equality 2004-2007 included more than 100 projects.

Finland is committed to the related European Union (EU) directives [1]. The EU has contributed to the development of gender mainstreaming in Finland through project funding that has allowed the central gender equality agency and ministries to produce materials, design and provide training, and establish effective structures (among other things). The EU has also been influential in the integration of gender mainstreaming into particular policy areas, such as regional development, rural development and the activities of the European Social Fund (ESF). The requirements for gender mainstreaming in programming documents have encouraged the Finnish authorities to include gender considerations in the development and implementation of national strategies and programming documents.

Legislative and policy framework

The gender equality principle in Finland is enshrined in legislation, with the 1995 Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) considered the clearest expression of gender equality policy. The scope of the Act was extended in 2015 and obliges authorities, education providers and employers to promote gender equality in all available measures, including gender equality plans, assessment and quotas. The Act also defines gender-based discrimination in working life, education institutes, NGOs and in the provision of goods and services. The Act is supervised by the independent Ombudsman for Gender Equality, together with the National Anti-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal, which may impose a fine for compliance failures.

The legislative base does not include mainstreaming but there is widespread awareness of the importance of gender equality within the government, as well as shared responsibility for implementation of the government's gender equality plan. This stems from the long history of gender equality in the country and a cultural context in which the social principles of equal treatment of both genders and relatively low hierarchies within working life (even within the government) are firmly embedded.

Gender mainstreaming in the government took significant steps forward in the first gender equality programme of 2012-2015 [2], which was based on the government's Report on Gender Equality [3]. However, the parliament showed little interest in the original Gender Equality Report when it was published [4], with critics in 2015 maintaining that the new government's statements continued to ignore gender equality issues [5]. Since then, other issues have gained ground on the political agenda and are considered more pressing, such as the so-called migration crisis and the need to tackle the sustainability gap through structural reform and financial discipline.

The main operational tool for gender mainstreaming is the government's gender equality action plan, which is renewed every four years. Several subsequent governments have produced gender equality action plans that require commitment by all ministries, different levels of government and related programmes. Dozens of national development projects were launched during the 2000s and have had a major impact on overall awareness of gender equality issues. Among the most prominent achievements of the mainstreaming processes are the tripartite Equal Pay Programme and the adoption of female quotas for government positions, which formed part of current and previous government action plans. Nevertheless, in 2014, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern about 'budgetary and human resource constraints that hinder measures and policies for the advancement of women and effective use of gender mainstreaming in the State party' [6].

Structures

Government responsibilities

Finland has well-developed mechanisms monitoring the implementation of equality legislation. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is responsible for gender equality and coordinates the implementation of related policies.

The government gender equality body has two parts: the Gender Equality Unit (tasa-arvoyksikkö) within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health formulates gender equality policy, mainstreaming, legislation and international matters. The second part is the Council for Gender Equality (tasa-arvoasiain neuvottelukunta), which operates within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The Council has an advisory mission and provides statements in hearings and drafting of laws.

These two gender equality bodies have remained virtually unchanged for the past two decades (the Gender Equality Unit was established in 2001, the Council for Gender Equality in 1972), and no changes are expected in the near future. There is no separate ministry for gender issues. Instead, since the 1980s, the Minister of Equality is appointed in conjunction with another ministerial post. In 2019, for example, a combined Minister for Nordic Cooperation and Equality was appointed under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice. However, despite the changing and less prestigious role of the Equality Minister, the responsibility is shared among all ministries and thus aims to include an intersectional perspective. There also is an inter-departmental coordination structure whose mission is to coordinate gender mainstreaming activities. This structure convenes at least quarterly but does not have the authority to oversee policy implementation.

The Gender Equality Unit has an essential role in forming a platform for evidence-based policies from a gender equality perspective. It has considerable expertise on both gender equality issues and decision-making processes. The Unit is located within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and its staff participate in various cross-sectional working groups and processes to draft law proposals. It coordinates government activity in relation to gender equality policy and is the expert dialogue partner for projects and development efforts undertaken by the government.

Unlike the proactive Gender Equality Unit, the other institutions involved in gender mainstreaming play a more reactive or ad hoc role. They focus either on gender equality information (Statistics Finland, Centre for Gender Equality Information) or responding to questions raised by the parliamentary processes on equality more broadly (not solely gender equality).

Independent gender equality body

The Ombudsman for Gender Equality (tasa-arvovaltuutettu) is an important body in Finnish gender equality policy. It is an independent authority with its own separate budget, role and mandate, whose main duty is to supervise compliance with the Act on Equality between Women and Men. The intervention of the Ombudsman for Gender Equality is chiefly restricted to judicial issues (it operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice) and focuses on the interpretation of the Act. Finally, the National Anti-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal of Finland (yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvolautakunta) was established in 2015 as an independent judicial body that supervises compliance with the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Act on Equality between Women and Men.

The independent gender equality bodies for equal treatment of all persons are important in the Finnish context, in which both Directive 2002/73/EC and the Anti-Discrimination Act [7] are in force. The Ombudsman was established by Act 1328/2914 [8] and has powers on matters related to gender and gender minorities. The Ombudsman is in charge of combating discrimination and promoting equality, and it mainly provides guidance and advice in this respect.

The most important institution is the National Anti-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal, an impartial and independent judicial body appointed by the government. The Tribunal is based on Act 1327/2014 [9] and operates on a permanent basis. Its members are required to have a juridical qualification. The Tribunal supervises compliance with the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Its mission is to provide legal protection to those who believe they have been subject to discrimination or victimised. The Tribunal may prohibit ongoing or repeated discrimination or victimisation, impose a conditional fine to enforce compliance with its injunctions, and order the payment of such fine. The Tribunal may oblige the party to take measures within a reasonable period of time in order to fulfil its obligations under the Anti-Discrimination Act. The Tribunal may not, however, order any compensation. It addresses all discrimination cases on the grounds of age, origin, ethnicity, religion, political activity, opinion, conviction, trade union activity, family relations, health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal grounds.

At the independent equality structures level, there is an inter-departmental coordination structure tasked with coordinating gender mainstreaming activities. This structure convenes at least quarterly but does not have the authority to oversee policy implementation. A wide array of tools are utilised to promote gender mainstreaming, such as analysis, gender audits, gender stakeholder consultations, sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics production, gender procurement, gender planning, gender monitoring, gender indicators, gender evaluation, impact assessments and budgeting, as well as awareness-raising actions and gender equality training activities. Guidelines and related materials on the use of these instruments are publicly available [10].

Parliamentary bodies

Parliament representatives are involved in gender equality policy through regular hearings and proposal drafting processes, especially those representatives involved in expert committees (such as the Employment and Equality Committee (työelämä- ja tasa-arvovaliokunta). There is no mandatory reporting obligation but, in practice, all elected Members of Parliament are engaged in these issues. The progress of the government's Gender Equality Plan is addressed at least every four years.

Parliament representatives are bound by the requirements set out in the Gender Equality Plan. These include the assessment of the gender impact of legislative proposals. In practice, expert hearings are also viewed from a gender-balance perspective. The gender quota is not applicable to the composition of parliamentary committees. Monitoring of the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan is coordinated by the Gender Equality Unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

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Methods and tools

Note: the methods and tools listed under this section were the focus of EIGE's 2018-2019 assessment. If certain methods and tools are not mentioned in this section, this does not necessarily mean that they are not used at all by Finland.

The government's approach was evaluated in 2014 [11], along with Finland's gender budgeting strategy, with recommendations provided by an independent research team in 2018 [12]. Several other studies have also been conducted [13].

Gender impact assessments and gender-sensitive budgeting are expected to spearhead future action on gender mainstreaming, together with training and awareness-raising within the high-level decision-making offices and the government administration. Experts expressed doubt, however, that the gender equality agenda would gain any significant ground compared to its predecessor, which was criticised for neglecting the gender equality perspective and gendered impacts of legislative and policy reform [14]. Mainstreaming actions will continue on the basis of shared responsibility among all ministries.

Training and awareness-raising

There is no legal obligation to undertake gender impact assessment training. No special legislation stipulates training on gender equality content, either in policy-making or other activity fields.

The inter-departmental coordination structure at government level organises awareness-raising actions and gender equality training activities for the Members of Parliament. Awareness-raising is also evident at enterprise level, following the obligation to develop equality plans since 2005 and related joint development activities.

Gender statistics

Sex-disaggregated data are not required by legislation but are necessary to assess the implementation of the ministries' development aims. The Gender Equality Plan obliges ministries to consider the gendered impact of their actions and to be aware of related statistics. The inter-ministerial coordination structure coordinates gender mainstreaming activities promoting sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics production.

Sex-disaggregated data are mainly produced by Statistics Finland, although ad hoc studies and data collection are also provided as part of some ministries' activities. The more specific categorisations depend on the type of data relevant to ministries' particular agendas and thus vary substantially. Nevertheless, sex-disaggregated data production is likely to become more centralised in the future. Some recent achievements of the Gender Statistics Unit within Statistics Finland include:

- 1 [Gender Equality in Finland 2018](#): publication and improvement of the gender equality theme pages.

- 2 [Gender Equality Barometer 2017](#): report commissioned from Statistics Finland by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The project was coordinated by the Centre for Gender Equality Information at the National Institute of Health and Welfare.
- 3 Leadership statistics (developing and participating in the leadership statistics network coordinated by the Ministry of Finance).
- 4 Chairing the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics 2016-2018 and organising the Global Forum on Gender Statistics in Finland in 2016.
- 5 Statistical input to the EU Gender in Science group and the work of She Figures.

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Good practices

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Endnotes

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