

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Finland

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

There are no specific legal provisions to promote gender equality in research or obligations specifically targeted at research institutions. However, the paragraph §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”, that is to 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. As instructed in the Act, the plans address the following issues: decision-making, employment (salary, segregation, working conditions), reconciliation, studies and teaching, and discrimination and harassment.

Policy framework

There is no strategic document dealing exclusively with gender and research. Gender is not a priority in research, science and innovation policy. Gender equality in research is mainly promoted through gender equality policy. The Government Report on Gender Equality (MSAH 2010) lists four research-related goals: reinforcing gender mainstreaming in higher education and science policy; promoting universities’ gender equality efforts and integrating a gender perspective in university teaching and research; promoting women’s research careers; and strengthening the status of gender studies and integrating gender content and expertise in all fields. The Gender Equality Action Plan 2012-2015 (MSAH 2012) embraces these goals but does not contain any specific measures. The focus is on supporting and monitoring the gender equality efforts of universities and on integrating a gender dimension in research policy.

Other stimulatory initiatives

There are some awards and grants for women researchers, like L'Oréal Finland for Women in Science Fellowship (every second year for one person) and small grants for women doctoral students awarded by Women's Science Foundation (every second year for several persons).

Key actors

The Ministry for Education and Culture (MEC) is responsible for research policy as well as for implementing the measures on gender equality in research included in the government gender equality action plan. The MEC monitors the gender equality efforts of higher education institutions.

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

The Academy of Finland, the national research council, integrates gender equality goals in its research funding and other activities. The Academy of Finland promotes gender equality in research through the Academy of Finland Equality Plan 2014-2016 (AF 2013).

The Ombudsman for Equality monitors the gender equality plans required from employers and educational institution by the Act on Equality. The Ombudsman has assessed the plans of universities (2011) and universities of applied sciences (2009), but does not do this regularly.

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).

Women's Science Foundation is a small private foundation, whose purpose is to promote gender equality in research through supporting women's researcher education and women researchers.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

All research organisations have a gender equality plan, because the Act on Equality requires plans from educational institutions and employers. As instructed in the Act, the plans address the following issues: decision-making, employment (salary, segregation, working conditions), reconciliation, studies and teaching, and discrimination and harassment. Only a few plans explicitly discuss research. The implementation of plans is not systematically monitored, and their effectiveness is evaluated only rarely.

Gender equality work of research organisations focuses on changing structures and attitudes, and there are only a few concrete career support measures for women. There are hardly any initiatives to integrate gender in research content. Human and financial resources for gender equality work are scarce. In many cases committed individuals in different parts of the institution do more than official bodies, such as Gender Equality Committees.

The research organisations have in place several tools, approaches and initiatives, which in many cases are part of the gender equality plans. The tools that most commonly available are guidance on the prevention and tackling of harassment and gender equality surveys. The main approaches followed are quotas for ensuring gender balance in decision-making bodies, changing discriminatory practices in recruitment and appraisal of staff in order to promote women's careers, and integrating gender in general planning and monitoring documents and procedures in order 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.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Funding for small-scale gender equality projects

Between 2002 and 2011, the University of Helsinki made available funding 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 of Aalto University adopts an annual gender equality and non-discrimination action plan, which supports the implementation and follow-up of the three-year gender equality and non-discrimination plan of the university. The practice answers to several key challenges in equality work in large institutions, in Aalto University as well as in general. The action plans help to turn equality objectives into concrete practices in the everyday life across the university and take into account the special characteristics and development needs of schools.

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

Hanken School of Economics extends temporary contracts of teaching and research personnel due to maternity, paternity and parental leave. This procedure advances women's research careers and facilitates reconciliation between work and family life in an academic context, where temporary contracts are common, in particular for women.