



*Striving for Gender Equality*  
**in Finland**

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

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## Steps on the road to equality

1864	single women aged 25 are declared legally competent; women are entitled to own property and marry at the age of 21 without their guardian's consent	1926	an act is passed qualifying women for appointment to state posts, and on the same terms as men Finland's first woman minister, Miina Sillanpää, is appointed to the Government as minister in charge of social affairs and health	1984	act on care and visitation rights regarding children (joint guardianship)	1995	partial reform of the Gender Equality Act, e.g. the quota clause is added
1864	women gain the right to hold government posts in the postal system			1985	act on support for child home care parental allowance		a woman is appointed permanent secretary at the Ministry of Justice and at the Ministry of the Environment
1865	elementary school for girls and boys			1986	Finland ratifies the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women		a woman is appointed Foreign Minister
1871	the first woman passes the matriculation examination	1927	the first woman professor – Alma Söderhjelm – is appointed to Åbo Akademi		married women gain the right to keep their own surname	1996	Government Gender Equality Programme (1996–1999)
1873	tax-paying single women and widows in rural areas gain the vote in municipal elections but may not stand for election	1929	a new marriage act is passed granting husband and wife the same rights to children and property; wives are released from the guardianship of their husbands		children allowed to use the mother's or father's surname		children under school age gain the right to municipal daycare
1878	equal inheritance rights for women and men			1987	Act on Equality between Women and Men	1999	act on restraining orders
1889	married women gain the right to their own earnings and some entitlement to the couple's joint assets	1937	act passed on maternity benefit	1988	first women priests in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church	2000	Finland gains its first woman president
1890	the first public kindergarten is set up in Sörnäinen, Helsinki	1943	statutory school meals	1990	children under 3 gain a subjective right to a municipal daycare place		a woman is made chancellor of a university (Turku)
1898	single women become legally liable at the age of 21	1944	act on municipal maternity and childhealth clinics and municipal public health nurses		Finland acquires the world's first woman minister of defence		a woman joins the Board of the Bank of Finland
1901	women allowed to take the matriculation examination on the same terms as men; successful matriculation grants access to university	1949	maternity benefit child benefit for under-16s	1991	separate paternity leave	2003	Finland gains its first woman Prime Minister
1906	all women over 21 become the first in Europe to gain the vote and the right to stand in national elections	1961	contraceptive pills introduced	1992	a woman is appointed to the post of university rector		half of Anneli Jäätteenmäki's Government are women
1907	the first women are elected to Finland's first parliament (19 out of 200 MPs)	1962	ratification of the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, No. 100 (1952)		a woman is appointed Governor of the Bank of Finland		a record number of sections touch on equality in the Government programme
1908	Helsinki's 16 brothels are closed	1964	maternity allowance for 54 weekdays	1994	a woman becomes full-time chair of a central employees' organization	2004	Government Action Plan for Gender Equality (2004–2007)
1916	female teachers at state schools gain the same rights and pay as men	1970	act on abortion education in human relationships and sex education added to the comprehensive school syllabus		a woman is appointed Speaker of Parliament	2005	full reform of the Act on Equality between Women and Men
1917	universal suffrage and the right to stand in municipal elections for all over 21	1972	a woman is made second minister of finance		rape within marriage is criminalized		joint proposal for an equal pay programme put forward by the Government and social partners
	a new decree prohibits keeping women at work for four weeks before giving birth in industrial and certain other physically demanding jobs	1974	maternity allowance extended to 170 weekdays				
1919	in commercial fields, six weeks of maternity leave becomes compulsory	1975	a woman is made minister of justice				
	wives are entitled to go out to work without their husband's permission	1978	parents entitled to share parental leave paternity allowance for two weeks from the child's birth				
		1979	a woman is made chairman of an employees' union				
		1980	first Government programme to promote gender equality (1980–1985)				
		1982	act on the father's right to share parental leave at a later period				

## 1 Introduction

Gender equality policy means all the measures used to achieve or seek to achieve equality between women and men. Though in 2006 Finland is celebrating the centenary of full political rights being granted to women, equality has still not been fully achieved.

The themes on which gender equality policy focuses have changed over the last fifteen years. Priorities have expanded to include issues affecting the whole of life, rather than concentrating merely on public life and the workplace. Long-established gender equality aims for working life have, for instance, now been joined by efforts to reduce fixed-term contracts and to reconcile work and family life more successfully. Other new themes include violence against women and the relationship of men to gender quality. On the

other hand, almost no progress seems to have been made on certain issues – equal pay, for example. One of the main challenges facing gender equality policy is to eliminate the idea that the whole debate is a matter exclusively for women, and that promoting gender equality demands active effort from women alone.

This booklet deals with some of the most important issues related to gender equality in Finland. It also gives an account of the Finnish authorities dealing with gender equality matters and the legislation on the subject. Sadly, its scope is too limited to deal with the valuable equality work done by NGOs.



## 2 The labour market

Nearly half of the Finnish workforce are women, and both women and men usually work full-time. Even mothers with small children are commonly in gainful employment. The labour market participation rate of Finnish women is one of the highest in the EU, while the rate for men is one of the lowest. As women continue to carry most of the responsibility for childcare, public services that provide such care play a vital role in supporting women who want to go out to work. Consequently, working women as well as men help to finance the Finnish welfare state. Paid employment and personalized social securi-

ty underpin the financial independence of Finnish women.

### 2.1 The Finnish dual-earner family model

In 2004, 75 per cent of the entire Finnish population were people of working age (15 to 74), while 18 per cent were under 15 and 7 per cent were over 75. Half the population were members of the workforce, which is now divided roughly equally between women and men. Half of all wage-earners are women, and one third of



all entrepreneurs. For a long time now, women have accounted for around 48 per cent of the total workforce. However, their average hours in full-time work total slightly less than for men; in 2002 women in full-time work did an average of 39 hours a week, while men did around 42.

Though the percentage of women in part-time jobs has been rising slightly since the beginning of the '90s, such jobs are not widely used in Finland as a way of reconciling work and family. At the end of 2004, only one in ten men and two in ten women worked part-time. Part-time arrangements are most common in the private sector, where one in five of female employees work part-time. Unemployment, in turn, affects women and men roughly equally, and the differentials that the recession brought in the early '90s have balanced out since the start of the new century.

Getting married and having children reduce Finnish women's participation in working life hardly at all. Married women in fact go out to work more than the average for all women. About half of all mothers whose youngest child is 1–2 years old have a job. When the youngest child is 3–6, eight out of ten are working mothers. This also means that in most families with children both parents, or the single parent, have a job. The main thing that makes all this possible is Finland's excellent system of family leave and its public daycare provision. Even so, reconciling work with family life remains a major problem for Finnish society.

## 2.2 The public sector provides permanent and temporary jobs

The public sector is an important employer of women, and also provides the welfare services that have made it possible for women to contribute to working life as employees or entrepreneurs. One third of all Finnish wage-earners work in the public sector, where there are far more women than men. Only one in five men worked in the state or municipal sectors in 2004, while the figure for women was nearly half, or 46 per cent.

The fixed-term employment contracts that became common in the '90s as a result of the recession remain a tough nut to crack in work-

ing life. Discontinuous employment is a problem for the public sector, for young people and for women. The fact that they are a special difficulty for the young means that starting a family is hard because it is financially risky. Both central and local government are seeking solutions to this problem.

## 2.3 A labour market split in two

The Finnish labour market – its various sectors, vocational fields, and trades and professions – is sharply split into two by gender. Most women work in what are thought of as 'women's fields', while most men work in 'men's fields'. Though the situation is now somewhat better balanced in individual trades and professions, overall the gender distribution on the labour market has remained almost unchanged for about half a century. Of the whole workforce, only about 15 per cent worked in fields with a roughly equal number of women and men in 2003. One third worked in fields where the majority of those employed (at least nine out of ten) were the same gender, i.e. in female- or male-dominated jobs. The men's fields are typically industrial, while the women's tend to be in caring or commercial fields. Though women are more highly educated than men in all age-groups, women continue to seek training in women's fields, and men in men's fields. In 2003, for instance, over half of all men completing a qualification, and just under half of all women, had been trained in fields dominated by their own sex.

## 2.4 Is the glass ceiling cracking?

The split that exists on the labour market and in areas of training is also reflected in hierarchies at the workplace. Men advance faster in their careers and also rise higher. Nonetheless, there are beginning to be more women than before in leading positions in various sectors of society. When women are promoted to management, they usually work in middle management and expert posts, as personnel managers and heads of environment units, and as marketing and financial managers. Women can also be found in

managerial positions in labour market bodies, in unions and in central organizations; for instance, almost a third of the chairs of member unions of the Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees (STTK) and the Confederation of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (Akava) are held by women. Women are also union members more frequently than men are. However, there are only a few women chairs of employers' organizations.

The Finnish state owns about 50 companies either alone or jointly with other bodies, and 13 of these companies are listed. The Government has approved an action programme for 2002–2005 aimed at increasing the percentage of women on the boards of state-owned companies to 40 per cent. Listed companies with board members appointed by the state as a shareholder also have this target. By July 2004, 30 per cent of board members at state-owned companies were women, against only 8 per cent on the boards of listed companies as a whole.

## 2.5 A widening pay gap between women and men

One of the cornerstones of gender equality is that women and men can both be financially independent. The Finnish Constitution, the Act on Equality between Women and Men, and various international treaties lay down the principle of equal pay for equal work. This also lies at the heart of European Union equality legislation.

The average earnings differential between Finnish women and men widened throughout the 1980s. The process came to a halt when the recession started to bite at the beginning of the '90s and the gap even narrowed slightly as it progressed. Since 1997, however, the pay gap has again started to grow bit by bit, and at the end of 2004 it stood at around 530 euros, calculated on earnings for regular working time. The proportional earnings differential, that is, women's pay as a percentage of men's pay, has remained at around 80–82 per cent, standing at 80.4 per cent at the end of 2004.

About half of the pay gap is explained by the fact that women and men work in different



sectors, different fields and different jobs. More women than men work in the public sector and the caring professions, while men work in the private sector and have managerial jobs far more often than women. Some of the pay gap also exists because women's work is less valued, so fields where women are dominant on average pay less than male-dominated fields, even if their educational requirements are roughly the same.

Under the equal pay principle, the employer should pay the same salary for the same or equally rated work irrespective of gender. In the early '90s, amid efforts to achieve equal pay, assessment of the demands of the job and pay schemes founded on such assessment became a key strategy. Assessing just what work of equal value comprises has proved difficult, however. The Equal Pay Programme approved jointly by the Government and the social partners is seeking to discover long-range ways of narrowing pay gaps between women and men, e.g. by revising pay schemes and eliminating segregation in working life and education. This is also impor-

tant because existing earnings differentials between women and men are reflected in pensions and other social security benefits, for instance, as these are mainly income-tied.

## **2.6 The social partners and gender equality in working life**

The distinctive characteristic of Finnish labour market policy is comprehensive collective bargaining, yielding income agreements which frequently feature elements promoting gender equality – such as gender equality and low-pay allowances. These gender equality allowances are defined as a given percentage of the total payroll in the field concerned and are designed to target women-dominated and low-paid fields of employment. The most recent agreement on such allowances concerns 2005–2006. In it, the central organizations also urge their member unions to hold their own talks to assess the impact of gender clauses in individual collective agreements on the status of women and men in their own fields. Useful parts of these sectoral assessments will then be utilized in the central organizations' future work on equality issues.

Further, a joint working group with members from all the central labour market organizations has been operating since the early '90s. One of its aims is to promote equal pay by furthering efforts to devise better systems for evaluating how demanding any given work is.

## *3 Education and training*

Finns are highly educated, and women of working age are better educated than men of the same age. The percentage of women among those with secondary education and those with a vocational or university degree has risen steadily since the mid '70s. At the end of 2002, 76 per cent of all women between 20 and 64, and 72 per cent of men in the same age group, had a post-comprehensive qualification. One third of all women and a quarter of all men in the age group had a tertiary education.

### **3.1 Women train themselves for demanding jobs**

Education and training tend to be split along gender lines. The female-dominated fields are the caring professions, handicrafts and artistic work, and teaching. Men go in for transport and communications, ITC and various technical fields. Women account for over half of all students at universities and tertiary-level colleges.

At the end of 2004, just over 60 per cent of all university graduates were women, and the number of doctorates completed by women has been rising steadily. In 2002 nearly 46 per cent of all new doctoral degrees were awarded to women. In 2004, women held 22 per cent of professorial chairs. At universities, the number of disciplines dominated by women has risen, and there are more and more women lawyers, physicians and graduates in theology. Today, over 80 per cent of new graduates in veterinary science and psychology, for instance, are women.

Finnish women have trained themselves for demanding work, so it is important that they can also find themselves jobs befitting their education. One topical issue that still needs addressing is how women's higher educational achievements are reflected in their labour market standing.



## 4 Political and economic decision-making

### 4.1 Just over one third of MPs are women

The proportion of women among Finland's politicians and other social decision-makers has grown in recent decades, though men are still in the majority. In 2000 Tarja Halonen was elected Finland's first woman president by a direct popular vote, and she was re-elected for a second term in 2006. Finland gained its first woman prime minister in 2003, and that same year women were appointed to exactly half of all ministerial posts for the first time ever.

Finnish parliamentary elections follow the proportional representation principle. Women gained full political rights in 1906, at the same time as men. For a long time, the number of women elected to Parliament was low, but between 1962 and 1991 the percentage rose from 13.5 to 38.5 per cent, the latter figure remaining the highest to date. In 1979 and throughout the

period 1991–2003, women were more active voters than men in parliamentary elections.

The more women candidates have stood for election, the more have been elected as MPs. In the 2003 parliamentary elections, for instance, women candidates represented 40 per cent of the total, and the final number of women MPs accounted for 37.5 per cent of the seats. In the 2003 election, the number of women candidates was over 40 per cent in all the main parties for the first time.

One important area of an MP's duties comprises committee work, as this is where new laws and other major reforms are discussed and formulated. In the 2005 parliamentary session, there were altogether 15 committees, with a total of 256 seats. Of these, 96 – that is, 38 per cent – were held by women, roughly equivalent to their share of parliamentary seats. Four committees had a woman chair.



### 4.2 Women over a third of Finland's MEPs

Finland became a member of the European Union in 1995. Finnish voters elected 16 members to the European Parliament up to 2004 and have elected 14 thereafter. The first elections to the European Parliament were held in 1996, when exactly half (i.e. eight) of the successful candidates were women. Since then the number of women has fallen; in the 1999 elections seven women were elected, and in the 2004 elections five.

### 4.3 Ministerial portfolios shared almost equally

Finland's first woman minister was Miina Sillanpää, who was appointed minister of social affairs and health in 1926. The portfolios commonly held by women used to be social affairs and health, and education, but it has become increasingly usual for other ministries to go to women, too. For instance, the second minister of finance has been a woman almost continuously since the early '90s. In Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen's second Government, which took office in 1999, over 40 per cent of the portfolios were held by women, and in Prime Minister Anneli Jäätteenmäki's short-lived Government of 2003 exactly half of all the ministers were women. At the beginning of 2005, eight of the Government's eighteen ministers were women, i.e. 44 per cent.

### 4.4 Most top civil servants are men

A clear majority of top civil servants in central government are men. Even so, there has been a distinct rise in recent years and at the beginning of 2005 women accounted for nearly a quarter of posts in the highest bracket, which total just under 200. This bracket includes top managerial posts at ministries (heads of department and upwards), heads of government agencies and official posts at a similar level.

The percentage of women in senior and middle management posts in central government has also risen appreciably, though it still does not reflect the number of women in the state civil serv-

ice as a whole. In 2003, women accounted for 33 per cent of senior and middle management, and 38 per cent of other supervisory posts. By 2011, only 20 per cent of today's top civil servants are expected to be still at work, so this should enable a rapid increase in the number of women in high-grade jobs.

### 4.5 Women's role in regional politics growing steadily

Finland is divided into six provinces, which are further divided into 20 regions. The top civil servant in a province is the governor, and in a region the executive director of the regional council. In 2003 half the country's provincial governors were women, but only one in twenty of the regional executive directors. The regions are further divided into some 450 municipalities, each led by a municipal manager. At the beginning of 2004, only one in ten municipalities/cities had a woman municipal/city manager.

The highest political power in a municipality is exercised by the municipal council, elected once every four years. As in parliamentary elections, women vote slightly more actively than men in municipal elections, too. The percentage of women among candidates and elected councillors has been rising steadily. They accounted for 36.4 per cent of councillors elected in 2004, i.e. two per cent more than in the previous election in 2000. Women represented 38.9 per cent of all candidates, some two percentage points up on the previous election. In 2003, one fifth of Finland's municipal councils were chaired by women.

The municipal board is an important decision-maker at the municipal level of local government. In 1993 only 24.5 per cent of board members were women. However, 1995 saw an addition to the Act on Equality between Women and Men which requires a quota of at least 40 per cent of women and 40 per cent men on all municipal organs with the exception of the council. Since that date the gender breakdown of all municipal boards has been in compliance with the revised law.

## 5 Gender and the media as a new theme

Because we spend a growing share of our time on them, the media exert an ever greater impact on people's lives and thinking. In recent years, this impact has come to be a new theme of the gender equality debate.

The most pressing problems are the sexualization of the entertainment media and the stereotyped gender images presented, which persistently show women and men in traditional roles.

## 6 A long way to go to achieve gender equality in the world of sport

There is hardly any difference between Finnish boys and girls in pursuit of physical exercise and sport in general, and nine out of ten engage in some physical hobby. On the other hand, more women than men exercise sufficiently, though the difference is not great. Even so, society has put little investment into the forms of physical exercise that mainly attract girls and women (riding, dance, aerobics, etc.). Three quarters of the customers using private-sector exercise services are women.

The sexualization of entertainment such as advertising, music videos and computer games takes the form of an increase in the number of lightly clad women and men. Commercial pornography is believed to be a quickly growing business in the Internet era, but no reliable data is available on the turnover or growth of the Finnish porn industry.

In 2004, 58 per cent of the people using sports clubs regularly were men and 42 per cent women. Some half a million Finns do voluntary work in this area, nearly half of them women. Women account for about a quarter of sports club board members on average, but only 14 per cent hold the chair, and something over 20 per cent are executive directors. In the world of sports and physical exercise more attention has been paid in recent years to gender issues, for instance to the different needs of women and men.



## 7 Special challenges for women entrepreneurs

During the last 15 years, there have been some 60,000–70,000 women entrepreneurs in Finland (excluding farming). Businesses owned by women play a vital part in Finnish economic life. Most business women run firms that employ under 10 people. The percentage of women entrepreneurs in Finland is the highest in the Nordic countries. Women face somewhat different challenges from men when running a business, and family responsibilities, in particular, often limit their opportunities and enterprise.

Women entrepreneurs are well educated. About 70 per cent of businesses owned by women are in service sectors, especially retailing,

the hotel and restaurant business, and various caring fields. However, the percentage of women has risen fastest recently in marketing and communications.

Special advisory services for women entrepreneurs were launched at Finland's regional T&E (employment and economic development) Centres in 2001. The advisors operate networks linking bodies promoting women's entrepreneurship both within and between regions, and nationally. They provide personal advice and spread good practices encouraging women to engage in business.





## 8 Growing attention to prostitution and violence against women

Violence against women is a problem in Finland as elsewhere and has come to be an important theme in equality work. Such violence is known to result in direct costs to society and is also an economic burden. Though most attention is given to intimate partner and domestic violence, violence or threat of violence at work is a growing problem, too, especially in health care and hospitals.

Finland has a number of services for victims of violence and prostitution, such as refuges, a rape crisis centre, a 24-hour unit for victims of crime and a support centre for prostitutes. Most of these are run by NGOs.

In 2004 an action programme covering 2004–2007 was launched aiming to prevent intimate partner and domestic violence. In it, efforts are being made to improve the various networks of basic and special services intended for both victims and perpetrators of violence. Another aim is to provide more effective help for children and young people who witness and experience violence, and to develop the necessary professional skills. In 2005, a national programme for reducing violence in Finland was also launched and this includes a section on violence against women.

A 1998 research report called 'Faith, Hope, Battering' studied the prevalence of violence

against women perpetrated by men, one of the first of its kind in the world. Its finding was that 40 per cent of women had at some time fallen victim to physical or sexual violence, or the threat of such, since reaching the age of 15, 14 per cent of them within the previous year. A follow-up study is being made in 2006. A Statistics Finland report published in 2000 put the direct economic cost of violence against women at a minimum of 286 million Finnish marks (approx. 48 million euros).

Prostitution has increased in Finland in the last ten years. The police assess that trafficking in women is in the hands of criminal contacts in Finland but is managed mainly from Estonia or Russia. According to the UN's Palermo Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, human trafficking means forcing people into prostitution or other sexual exploitation for gainful ends. The Convention also requires countries, including Finland, to take steps to reduce the purchase of sexual services. In 2004 clauses were added to the Penal Code that specified the punishability of human trafficking and aggravated human trafficking. At the same time the punishability of acts related to pandering was extended. Finland has also drawn up a plan of action against trafficking in human beings.

## 9 New focus on men in the gender equality debate

Finnish debate on gender equality has usually equated the concepts of women, equality and gender. Study of men's position in the equality debate is thus quite a new focus. At the moment, the 'men and equality' theme is most clearly reflected in gender equality policy through efforts to reconcile work and family and in connection with violence against women.

Work to eliminate segregation also strives to interest men in female-dominated fields, though less emphasis has been put on this area. The legislation on family leave has been revised, increasing men's opportunities to take such leave and generally stressing the importance of active fatherhood. In other respects, the men and equality issue is still at the evaluation stage. The 2003–2007 Government Programme states that gender equality policy matters must also be assessed from the male viewpoint. A separate strategy document was prepared for this purpose.



## 10 Socio-political structures support gender equality

### 10.1 Reconciliation of work and family life as a goal

If work and family are to be reconciled, systems are needed that guarantee quality childcare while parents are at work. Each child under school age (i.e. generally the under-7s) has a subjective right to municipal daycare, and all children have been given free school meals for over 60 years now. If a child falls sick, parents can take temporary care leave in order to organize proper care, or may themselves stay at home for a short time.

Fathers in today's Finland do carry more responsibility for childcare and looking after the home than before. This helps women to cope with the conflicting demands of work and family and also enriches men's lives. However, the responsibility is not yet shared equally between mothers and fathers, and this is reflected in an uneven breakdown of household tasks and use of family leave.

### 10.2 The Finnish family leave system

Reconciliation of work and family by the parents of small children is supported through the family leave system, but successful achievement of such reconciliation is coming to be a greater challenge for good parenthood and in the drive towards greater gender equality. Working life presents its own obstacles that make it difficult to take long family leave, and Finnish fathers take leave rather little compared with fathers in some of the other Nordic countries. In 2003, only some 6 per cent of fathers took family leave. If fathers shared this leave more equally with mothers, the costs to the employer would be spread more fairly. At the moment, they tend to bear hardest on female-dominated fields. In addition, more use of family leave by fathers would strengthen the labour market standing of young women of child-bearing age and mothers of small children, as well as the father's status within the family.

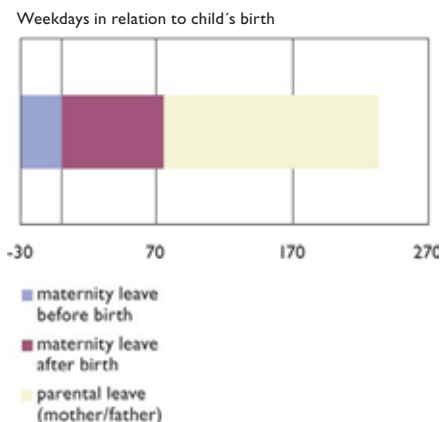


Figure 1. Parental leave in Finland  
Source: Kela (Social Insurance Institution).

In 2005 the total period for which parental allowance was paid was 263 weekdays. The first 105 days of this are the period for which maternity allowance is paid, of which 30–50 days fall before the child's birth. The remaining 158 days are family leave, which can be shared between the parents. Family leave can also be taken on a partial basis, i.e. the parents can share the childcare responsibility by both taking partial family leave and working part-time, though only one parent may look after the child at any given time.

Fathers are also entitled to paternity leave. The total is 18 weekdays, but if the father takes at least the last 12 weekdays of the overall parental leave he gets 12 days extra. The amount of maternity, paternity and parental allowance paid is based on the recipient's earned income. Up to the middle income brackets the parental allowance is about 70 per cent of income, but

an increase to 80 per cent has been proposed. A number of collective agreements stipulate that some of the maternity allowance period is paid leave, and the aim is for this entitlement to be extended to all mothers. At the end of the parental allowance period, either the mother or the father have the right to remain at home on care leave until the child reaches the age of 3.

In the early years of this decade, the main priorities for developing the family leave system have been to make the whole arrangement more flexible, to balance out use of the leave better between women and men, and to spread the cost to employers more equally between female and male-dominated fields.

### 10.3 Different forms of childcare provide greater freedom of choice

The parents of children under 3 can choose between a place in municipal daycare, home care allowance and private childcare allowance. The provision of daycare has been the responsibility of the municipalities since 1973. In 1996 entitlement to municipal daycare was made a subjective right of all children under 7 regardless of whether the parents go out to work. Subsequently, every municipality has to provide a child with a daycare place if the parents so request.

Since 1985, there has also been a system of home care allowance for the under-3s. One of the

parents can thus stay at home on care leave once the parental leave period is over without forfeiting his or her employment relationship. This is a choice mostly made by women.

In the case of children under 10, the parents can also opt to do shorter working hours in the form of unpaid partial care leave, as mutually agreed with the employer. If the children are under 3, the parent on care leave is also entitled to partial childcare allowance to compensate for loss of earnings.

### 10.4 Individual social security underpins financial independence

The key goals of Finnish social policy include increasing people's sense of personal security and evening out financial and social differences. By international standards, the level of Finnish social benefits is about average.

### 10.5 Personal work-based pensions

All Finns are entitled to minimal pension security. For most people, their main pension comprises an earnings-related pension that accumulates separately for each working individual. The size of one's pension depends on both the level of earnings and the overall time spent at work. Women's earnings-related pensions tend to be lower than men's on average, because their



Picture: Jari Vanha-Eskola

pay levels are lower and their overall working lives shorter.

The Finnish earnings-related pension system has changed substantially in the last few years. As of 2005, the pension takes account of one's entire working history. It begins to accrue at the age of 18, and retirement is normally at the age of 63, but if a person chooses to stay on at work, pension can now be accrued up to 68. The government, employers and employees themselves all contribute to the cost of pension security. Pension also accrues while one is studying and for a parent caring for a child under 3.

### **10.6 The health insurance system adds to personal security**

The Finnish health insurance system provides compensation for medicines, doctors' fees, tests needed to diagnose an illness, and loss of income while sick. The daily allowance is proportionate to earnings. The parents of a disabled or long-term ill child is entitled to a special care allowance which is paid like the sickness allowance when a parent cannot go out to work because he or she has to stay at home to care for a child.

## *11 Sources of information on gender equality*

Quite a large amount of gender-specific statistics are compiled in Finland. The portal [www.minna.fi](http://www.minna.fi), opened in 2004, offers up-to-date data on women's studies and gender equality.

There is an expert group at Statistics Finland working on gender equality statistics. Every second year the agency publishes a report in both Finnish and English called 'Women and men in Finland', comprising statistical information on the standing of women and men and gender equality. In alternate years, it also publishes more extensive reports under the general title 'Sukupuolten tasa-arvo Suomessa' (Gender equality in Finland). Statistics Finland has had a gender equality statistics coordinator for several years now.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health maintains a databank on gender equality at the municipal and regional level. This contains information on municipal council members and top municipal elected officers and post holders. These indicators have been compiled in a free databank accessible in Finnish at [www.tasa-arvotietopankki.fi](http://www.tasa-arvotietopankki.fi).

At three-year intervals since 1998, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has issued a 'Gender Equality Barometer' (also available in English) monitoring the Government's gender equality policy. The barometer measures women's and men's experiences and attitudes regarding the implementation of gender equality, specifically in working life, personal relations and society at large. It demonstrates that both women and men in Finland agree that responsibility should be shared both in securing the family's economic livelihood and in everyday family life and parenthood. However, in 1998–2004 the fact that women still carry more responsibility for the everyday running of the household than men did not change during the period 1998–2004.

Nonetheless, the gender equality barometers show that, overall, progress has been made in gender equality: relations between the sexes are better in the workplace and at educational institutions, it is easier for men to take family leave, arrogant or insulting attitudes towards the opposite sex have decreased in all spheres of life, and the percentage of women who experience no gender inequality at work has increased.



## 12 Promoting gender equality

### 12.1 Gender equality in central government

Promotion of gender equality falls within the remit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, which has three organizations for the purpose. The Gender Equality Unit is responsible for policy, the Ombudsman for Equality is an independent agency monitoring compliance with the Gender Equality Act, and the Council for Gender Equality watches over implementation of gender equality in practice and strives to promote gender equality through various initiatives.

At the Finnish Parliament, gender equality matters are the responsibility of the Employment and Equality Committee. Both the Equality Ombudsman and the Equality Board monitor compliance with the law.

### 12.2 Gender Equality Unit at the Ministry formulates Government equality policy

The functions of the Gender Equality Unit are to formulate, develop and monitor the Government's gender equality policy jointly with other ministries. It also drafts new gender equality legislation, does work related to gender equality mainstreaming, and has duties connected with EU gender equality law and policy. The Unit is responsible for Finland's international cooperation in gender equality matters, e.g. at the UN, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Council of Europe.

### 12.3 Government Action Plans for Gender Equality

Several former Governments from 1986 onwards have issued Gender Equality Programmes. The present Government has also published an extensive action plan covering the period 2004–2007. Prior to that, a comprehensive action plan was issued in 1997 based on the Beijing Declaration.

Gender equality issues have also featured in Government Programmes. Prime Minister Matti

Vanhanen's Government Programme for 2003–2007 incorporated a record number of objectives aimed at gender equality promotion. It also stated that a national gender equality programme should be issued, and this was done in December 2004 with publication of the Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2004–2007. This Action Plan introduces and coordinates the measures that the Government is taking to promote gender equality. It includes plans for new legislation, educational and development projects, studies and other measures. It also aims to coordinate implementation of the targets that the Government Programme sets for the furtherance of gender equality.

The action set out in the Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2004–2007 includes reform of the Gender Equality Act, promotion of gender equality in working life, action to further reconciliation of work and family, an increase in the number of women in economic and political decision-making, action to alleviate segregation, the elimination of stereotyped gender images in the media, the reduction of violence against women, attention to men and gender equality, and the furtherance of equality in regional development and international and EU cooperation. The Action Plan includes one project calling for extensive collaboration between the ministries, on the mainstreaming of gender equality in central government.

The Action Plan for Gender Equality will help Finland to implement and monitor the Platform for Action approved with the Beijing Declaration at the fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995, as it incorporates all the main areas covered by the Platform. The earlier Action Plan for Gender Equality had the same objective.

### 12.4 Mainstreaming as a tool for promoting gender equality

Finland committed itself to the principle of gender mainstreaming when it subscribed to the UN's Beijing Platform for Action in 1995,

Gender Equality Unit	Ombudsman for Equality	Council for Gender Equality	Equality Board
Does preparatory work on the Government's gender equality policy and drafts legislation. Also performs international functions.	Watches compliance with the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Implements the purposes of the Act through proposals, advice and instructions.	Monitors and promotes the realization of gender equality.	Watches over compliance with the Act on Equality between Women and Men.
Established 2001	Established 1987	Established 1972	Established 1987

the same year that it became a member of the European Union. The Treaty on European Union also calls for gender mainstreaming.

'Gender mainstreaming' means incorporating a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, making an analysis of the effects on women and men before decisions at every level are taken. The responsibility for mainstreaming is carried by every government officer and not just a specific authority. In central government, the aim of mainstreaming is to develop administrative procedures and modes of action that support the promotion of gender equality as a normal function of ministries and government agencies. Mainstreaming supplements, rather than supplants, gender equality policy and different equality organizations.

In 2004, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Ministry of Finance jointly launched a project aimed at mainstreaming preparation of the State Budget bill. The aim is for the State Budget for 2008 to be drawn up following new procedures that take the gender perspective into account.

To implement the concept in central government, the ministries have since 2004 arranged joint training in mainstreaming and gender impact assessment. The goal is for the gender perspective to be incorporated into all ministries' internal training programmes, from the induction of new staff upwards, by 2007. During 2003–2007, mainstreaming should have been extended to central government as a whole, and mainstreaming as a perspective on gender equality work should also be spreading to local government.

### 12.5 Ombudsman for Equality monitors, advises and influences

The Ombudsman for Equality is an independent officer at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health who watches over compliance with the law and performs the functions laid down in the Gender Equality Act. The Ombudsman's Office began to operate when the first Act on Equality between Women and Men came into force in 1987.

The Ombudsman for Equality monitors compliance with the Gender Equality Act, especially its bans on discrimination, and also provides free guidance and advice to those who suspect they are discriminated against. People usually get in touch with the Office in connection with job recruitment, pregnancy, use of family leave and pay. About 30 per cent of those contacting the Office are men. The Ombudsman also provides advice and guidance for unions, various bodies and the authorities, as well as private individuals.

The Ombudsman's work includes the promotion of gender equality, seeking to further gender equality planning in the workplace, for instance. Further functions are the provision of information on the Gender Equality Act and its application, and monitoring gender equality implementation in various areas of social life.

The Ombudsman has extensive rights to obtain information from authorities, employers and private persons, and to carry out workplace inspections if there is reason to suspect that the employer is violating the Gender Equality Act.

## 12.6 Equality Board monitors compliance with the Gender Equality Act

The Equality Board, too, watches over compliance with the Gender Equality Act. It comprises a chair and four other members, appointed by the Government for three years at a time. The Board can prohibit discriminatory behaviour contrary to the Act at the initiative of the Ombudsman or a central labour market organization, and if necessary threaten the offender with a fine. On request, it also provides courts of law with opinions concerning interpretation of the bans on discrimination in the Gender Equality Act and the ban on discriminatory advertising.

## 12.7 Council for Gender Equality is a political advisory body

The Council for Gender Equality was founded in 1972 to promote gender equality throughout society. It is a permanent body advising the state administration and comprises 13 members appointed by the Government for each parliamentary period in proportion to the party distribution in Parliament. Representatives of the National Council of Women in Finland and the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations for Joint Action (NYTKIS) also act as permanent expert members.

The Council's main function is to raise new gender equality issues and viewpoints in social debate by putting forward initiatives and proposals. It presents opinions designed to further new legislation and other measures with an impact on gender equality. It also promotes gender equality collaboration between the authorities, social partners and other organizations, as well as related research and utilization of research findings in decision-making. The Council gathers representatives of the various parties round the same table to discuss gender equality issues of national importance. The Council for Gender Equality also contributes to international activities promoting gender equality.

The Council for Gender Equality can set up subcommittees and working groups on various

topics. In the past, for instance, there have been subcommittees on the welfare state and gender equality, and on violence. There has been a Subcommittee on Gender and Research since 1981, acting as a meeting place between gender equality policy and research. The 25th anniversary of the Subcommittee's work to promote gender perspectives in research and research policy will be celebrated during 2006. The Council set up its first Subcommittee on Men's Issues in 1988. The task was to study ways of arousing men's interest in gender equality work, and to chart problems specific to men from a gender equality viewpoint.

For the period 2003–2007 the Council for Gender Equality set up Subcommittees on Gender and Research & Development and on Men's Issues and the Media, and also a Working Group on the Sex Trade and Human Trafficking, all of which act as expert bodies for the Council. The Subcommittee on Gender and Research & Development brings research findings on equality, women, men and gender to the attention of decision-makers. Its present priorities include the promotion of gender equality policy in action by assessing its gender impacts and to provide information on gender-sensitive budgeting in municipalities. The aim of the Subcommittee on Men's Issues and Media is to introduce debate on men and equality into the Council's own operations. It is currently focusing on equality work with boys and young men, and support for active fatherhood. The Council makes an annual award called 'A Man's Work' to encourage men who set a good example to continue their efforts for greater gender equality. The award is based on the argument that equality is an issue for both women and men.

The Council for Gender Equality has close links with civil society. During its 30-year history its special role has been voicing concerns about topical equality challenges in the context of national gender equality policy.

# 13 Act on Equality between Women and Men

The Act on Equality between Women and Men came into force in Finland at the beginning of 1987. Since then it has been amended several times. The Act aims to promote equality between women and men, to prevent discrimination based on gender, and to improve the status of women, especially in working life. The Act was amended most recently in 2005, also thereby bringing into effect the EU's revised directive on equality in working life.

The Act extends to every area of social life, albeit its provisions do not apply to activities connected with religious practices of churches or other religious communities. When a religious community acts as an employer, however, it comes under the Act's provisions concerning employers. Relations between family members are also outside the Act.

The Gender Equality Act does not apply to advertising, where the Council of Ethics in Advertising at the Central Chamber of Commerce issues opinions on the ethical acceptability of any given advertisement.

The Act requires both the public authorities and all employers to promote gender equality and demands gender equality planning from all employers with at least 30 employees. It also requires women and men to have the same opportunities for education, training and vocational development, for instance. Employers must also help employees to reconcile their working life and families. The 'quota clause' requires at least 40 per cent of the members of all municipal organs and state bodies doing preparatory work on decisions to be either women or men. The Act also applies to educational institutions and organizations.

## 13.1 Gender Equality Act bans discrimination

The Gender Equality Act prohibits all direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination means placing women and men in different positions purely on a gender basis throughout the Act's scope of application, and for reasons related

to pregnancy. Indirect discrimination can comprise procedures that are in themselves neutral but nonetheless lead to different outcomes for women and men.

In a hiring situation it is not permitted to ask whether an applicant is pregnant or to enquire about family plans, because pregnancy and family leave must not influence the hiring decision. Other banned questions refer to parenthood, responsibility for care of the family or childcare arrangements. Raising such issues automatically creates suspicion of gender-based discrimination.

In practice, the provisions are particularly significant in the case of fixed-term contracts. The employer may not, for instance, discriminate against a pregnant jobseeker when choosing an employee for a fixed-term job. Similarly, a fixed-term job cannot be arranged to last only up to the start of maternity, paternity or parental leave, and the reason for not renewing a fixed-term contract may not be pregnancy or family leave if the work continues to exist. A replacement can be taken on for a fixed-term employee while he or she is on family leave.

## 13.2 Discrimination prohibited in working life, educational institutions and organizations representing labour market interests

The Gender Equality Act includes a special provision on discrimination in working life. The spheres it applies to include recruitment, pay, working conditions, termination of employment and sexual harassment. The Act specifically bans discrimination in job and training advertising. The 2005 amendment of the Act extended the prohibition to cover trainees, family carers and informal carers.

If the employer violates the prohibition on discrimination, the employee can take the employer to court to demand compensation. This must be claimed within two years of the alleged offence except in recruitment cases, where the period is one year. The employee can also seek

compensation under other laws. Any elections of municipal officials that violate the Gender Equality Act can be appealed against and cancelled.

In 2005, provisions on discrimination in educational institutions and organizations representing labour market interests were added to the Act. The amendments prohibit gender discrimination in, for instance, student selection, organization of teaching or evaluation of study performance, and in access to membership in organizations representing labour market interests. Compensation can also be claimed for such discrimination.

### 13.3 Provisions on quotas and equitability secure an equal opportunity to be heard

Many countries have quota systems to safeguard women's standing in decision-making, and there has been a quota clause in the Finnish Gender Equality Act since 1995. It states that there must be a minimum 40 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men on central government committees, advisory boards, working groups, other similar

preparatory, planning and decision-making bodies and on municipal bodies. The quota clause also applies to inter-municipal cooperation bodies. The revised Act does not apply to elected municipal councils, but does concern delegations representing public authorities or administrative spheres in international cooperation. The equitable representation requirement also covers the managerial and administrative bodies of government agencies and institutions, and of companies with a majority state or municipal shareholding. Since 2005 the clause has also applied to bodies exercising public authority, such as pension institutions, chambers of commerce and privately owned educational institutions.

### 13.4 Gender equality planning as an equality tool

The Gender Equality Act requires authorities and employers to promote gender equality systematically and purposefully. All employers must, for instance, promote equal opportunities for women and men to reconcile work and family, and act in a way that prevents gender-based discrimina-

tion. Employers with at least 30 employees must also draw up an annual gender equality plan. The objectives of this plan include the elimination of gender-based work segregation, the promotion of all employees' vocational development and equal advancement, and furtherance of the equal pay principle. With the exception of comprehensive schools, educational institutions must draw up a gender equality plan both as employers and as managers of operations.

At workplaces where the gender equality plan requirement applies, the plan must be drawn up jointly by the employer and the employees, and should provide an analysis of the current equality situation, an account of men's and women's placement in various types of work, details of their pay, plans for action on any deficiencies and an assessment of the achievement of earlier plans. The Gender Equality Act requires the analysis of the current situation to include a pay survey, i.e. to detail women's and men's placement in different tasks, classify these tasks, and itemize women's and men's wages/salaries and any pay differentials. This means analysing existing pay schemes and the way they are put into effect.

The purpose of the pay survey is to establish whether women and men are being paid on an equal basis, and whether work that makes the same demands is viewed as equal. This means making a mutual comparison of women's and men's pay rates. The analysis should cover all personnel in the employer's service, including part-timers and fixed-term workers. Pay and pay differentials should be examined and compared both within different occupations or jobs and between them. As far as possible, pay should also be compared across collective agreement divides, because the equal pay principle should be implemented on an employer-specific basis.

The Ombudsman for Equality monitors the gender equality plans of both private and public-sector workplaces. In the report written before

the more detailed planning requirement took effect in 2003 the Ombudsman mainly focused on the quality and quantity of such planning in the private sector. The report concluded that only 27 per cent of the workplaces covered had drawn up a gender equality plan. Those most active in this respect were large workplaces with over 500 employees, though there were few differences between different sectors of production.

The report found that segregation of workplaces and work into 'women's' and 'men's' was the reason why gender equality planning had not been embarked upon. Many workplaces also seemed unclear about how binding and important the gender equality planning requirement was. Several respondents said that no gender equality planning was needed because they had no cases of discrimination. The quality of the gender equality plans made ranged from general declarations to highly detailed, concrete plans.

In 2005 Statistics Finland studied gender equality planning in the public sector at the request of the Ombudsman for Equality. Its report showed that about one in two public-sector workplaces had done some gender equality planning. This was most common in central government and rarest in the municipalities and joint municipal boards for social affairs and health. Public-sector plans also tended not to be concrete.

The Ombudsman for Equality encourages gender equality planning through workplace visits all over Finland aimed at making employers more familiar with progress made in gender equality and at obtaining information about gender equality problems at individual workplaces. Since 1998, the Minister in charge of gender equality matters and the Ombudsman for Equality have granted awards to exemplary workplaces for exceptional progress made as a result of gender equality planning.



## 14 The EU and gender equality

Within the European Union, promotion of gender equality – especially equal pay – has been one of the goals right from the founding of the original EC. The gender equality principle is stated in the founding treaty of the EU and equality is promoted through directives and the Union's equality policy.

### 14.1 EU law

Up to now, EU directives on gender equality have concerned themselves with related issues in working life, most recently through amendment directive 2002/73/EC on equal treatment for women and men as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, implemented by Finland through the amendment of the Gender Equality Act that took effect on June 1, 2005.

EU directive 2004/113/EC on implementing the principle of equal treatment between women and men in the access to and supply of

goods and services came into force on December 13, 2004. This is the first directive to deal with gender equality outside working life. It prohibits sex-based discrimination in the supply of goods and services outside the area of private and family life. It does not apply to the content of information media and advertising. Violation of the prohibition on discrimination can result in an obligation to redress the matter.

The Member States can adopt or maintain in force provisions to ensure the equal treatment principle that are more favourable than those in the directives. No directive can be used as grounds for decreasing anti-discriminatory protection already existing in a Member State.

### 14.2 Report on gender equality to EU summits

Since March 2003, there has been a practice to submit a report on gender equality to the spring meeting of the European Council. The report

asks the Council to draw the Member States' attention to whatever are considered to be the equality promotion issues of the hour.

### 14.3 New European gender equality institute

In its published conclusions in June 2004, the European Council called for the foundation of a 'European Institute for Gender Equality', urging the Commission to formulate a proposal on the matter. Foundation of such an institute will probably be approved in 2006. The institute's aim will be to help Union institutions and authorities in the Member States to combat gender-based discrimination and promote gender equality. The institute's functions will mainly comprise compilation, analysis and dissemination of information about gender equality, development of ways to improve information quality and support for gender mainstreaming.

### 14.4 Monitoring the Beijing Platform for Action

One of the main documents defining the international gender equality field is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action approved by the UN in 1995. Implementation of the Platform for Action is being monitored using twelve indicators. The work is regularly reviewed by the EU Council for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs.

### 14.5 EU Equal Opportunities and Progress Programmes

The EU's fifth Equal Opportunities Action Programme for 2001–2006 supports projects to promote gender equality carried out jointly by various organizations in the Member States. The key component here is the exchange of information, experiences and good practices. Implementation of the programme is monitored by an administration committee subordinate to the Commission.



From 2007 onwards, this separate action programme will be replaced by a 'Progress Programme'. This will combine current action programmes in four sectors which deal with efforts to combat discrimination and social exclusion, action to promote employment, and gender equality.



## 15 International gender equality work

### 15.1 Cooperation via the Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic countries began to work together on gender equality matters in 1974. The various ministers in charge of equality issues meet annually to discuss topical matters. In addition, gender equality officials meet regularly to implement joint Gender Equality Action programmes. The Nordic countries also collaborate with Russia and the Baltic States on gender equality issues.

### 15.2 Gender equality promotion in the UN

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was approved in 1979, and was ratified by Finland in 1986. The Convention covers every area of life, but pays special attention to women's role in national decision-making, a woman's right to keep her own nationality on marriage, gender equality in working life, education and training, and matters related to family relations. The Convention is monitored through national reporting.

The Convention forms part of an international network of human rights conventions and has also acted as the model for Finland's gender equality legislation. An Optional Protocol was added to the Convention in 1999 granting the right for individuals and groups to complain to the CEDAW committee. Finland was one of the first countries to ratify the protocol, in December 2000.

One central international document on gender equality is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action approved at the fourth UN World

Conference on Women in 1995. The three main aims of the Platform are to strengthen the status and value of women, to implement the human rights of women and to promote gender equality through mainstreaming. Finland has engaged to implement the Beijing Platform for Action goals at the national level.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which is subordinate to the UN Economic and Social Council, deals annually with issues related to gender equality and the status of women at UN level. Finland contributes to the Commission's operations.

### 15.3 Gender equality work at the Council of Europe

At the Council of Europe gender equality matters are dealt with by the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), where Finland plays a part. The Committee started operating in its present form in 1992, and is one of the expert committees working under the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. It has representatives from the 46 member countries and observers from the USA, Canada, Japan and the Vatican. The Committee's function is to plan and activate Council work to promote gender equality, e.g. by monitoring and charting the equality situation in member countries, and by promoting cooperation, compiling reports, developing strategies and drafting decision proposals for the Committee of Ministers. The Steering Committee does preparatory work for Council conferences of ministers, arranges seminars and works in cooperation with other expert committees.

## 16 Links to gender equality-related websites

### In Finland

**Equality authorities**  
<http://www.genderequality.fi>

**Gender Equality Unit**  
[www.stm.fi](http://www.stm.fi) > Gender Equality > Gender Equality Unit

**Office of the Ombudsman for Equality**  
<http://www.tasa-arvo.fi>

**Council for Gender Equality**  
<http://www.tane.fi>

**Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2004–2007**  
<http://www.stm.fi/Resource.phx/publishing/store/2005/12/hu1136884805512/passthru.pdf> or  
[www.stm.fi > publications > 2005](http://www.stm.fi/publications)

**Gender Equality Barometer 2004**  
<http://www.stm.fi/Resource.phx/publishing/store/2005/12/hu1136799010577/passthru.pdf>  
or [www.stm.fi > publications > 2005](http://www.stm.fi/publications)

**Municipal-level gender equality databank**  
<http://www.tasa-arvotietopankki.fi>

**National portal on women's studies and gender equality**  
<http://www.minna.fi>

### Elsewhere

**EU equality web pages**  
[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equ\\_opp/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equ_opp/index_en.htm)

**Council of Europe – gender equality**  
[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/Equality/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/)

**UN – Division for the Advancement of Women**  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/>

**Nordic Council of Ministers gender equality website**  
<http://gender.norden.org>





**TASA-ARVOESITTEITÄ  
JÄMSTÄLLDHETSBROSCHYRER  
EQUALITY BROCHURES**

**ISSN 1236-9993**

2006: I Tasa-arvoa tavoittelemassa  
ISBN 952-00-2073-X (nid.)  
ISBN 952-00-2074-8 (PDF)

2006: I swe Jämställdhet in Finland som mål  
ISBN 952-00-2075-6 (inh.)  
ISBN 952-00-2076-4 (PDF)

2006: I eng Striving for Gender Equality in Finland  
ISBN 952-00-2077-2 (paperback)  
ISBN 952-00-2078-0 (PDF)



Ombudsman for Equality  
Exchange: +358 9 16001  
Internet: [www.tasa-arvo.fi](http://www.tasa-arvo.fi)  
Phone: +358 9 74462

Gender Equality Unit  
Exchange: +358 9 16001  
Internet: [www.stm.fi](http://www.stm.fi) > vastuualue tasa-arvo > tasa-arvoyksikkö  
Phone: +358 9 16001

Council for Gender Equality  
Exchange: +358 9 16001  
Internet: [www.tane.fi](http://www.tane.fi)  
Phone: +358 9 160 74460

**ISSN 1236-9993  
ISBN 952-00-2077-2**

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