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Gender Equality Planning at Workplaces

Why, what, how?



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1 Benefits of gender equality planning

at workplaces

The revised Act on Equality between Women and Men (Equality Act) of 1 June 2005 provides more tools than the former Act for promoting gender equality and wellbeing at work. Both employers and employees benefit from a workplace community that is based on equality, openness and fairness and that encourages employees. The realisation of gender equality increases employees' wellbeing and feeling of justice at work – and thus also their work motivation. In this way the promotion of gender equality can influence the productivity of the staff and the competitiveness of the company. Measures taken in compliance with the Act prevent possible discrimination.

The Equality Act obliges all employers to promote gender equality. In addition, employers with a regular workforce of 30 or more people are required to draw up a gender equality plan.

All workplaces have their distinctive equality plans, depending on what issues need to be emphasised in a particular workplace community. Equality issues need not be dealt with as an issue separate from other activities. The gender equality aspect is often integrally linked to the company's or organisation's everyday functions.

It is not a complicated task to draw up a gender equality plan, and it is easy to update a plan once made. The purpose of planning is to open the eyes of the workplace actors to looking at things in a new light. New perspectives on workplace practices can bring about simple improvements that can be easily realised. According to studies, wellbeing at the workplace is enhanced when women and men work as equals to the fullest extent possible. Equality planning can also be extended, as appropriate, to cover other factors, such as the employees' age, in addition to the gender aspect.

A gender equality plan is needed even when the staff of a workplace consists exclusively or almost exclusively of either men or women. In that case it may be useful to examine if it is possible and justified to increase the interest of the minority gender in the jobs available at the workplace. Job descriptions can sometimes be adjusted, application procedures targeted in particular to the gender in minority, and further education can be enhanced. Reconciliation of work and family life also poses different challenges for equality planning at male- and female-dominated workplaces.

The starting point for equality thinking is not that there are problems in the workplace. Also, those workplaces that are seen to treat women and men equally benefit from examining the state of equality and possible needs for its development.

2 The promotion of gender equality

in working life

2.1 All employers are responsible for promoting gender equality

The promotion of gender equality is widely accepted as a societal goal in Finland. To begin with, the Constitution of Finland prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender.

The promotion of equality in working life means that men and women are treated equally and without discrimination in all situations. One goal is also to achieve a situation where women and men are divided more evenly than today at different levels of jobs and in different professions according to their abilities and inclinations.

The responsibility for complying with the Equality Act at workplaces is vested in employers, but equal behaviour is needed within the entire workplace community. There is a list of issues in section 6 of the Act in regard to which the employers must aim to promote equality between women and men.

Section 6 – Employer's duty to promote gender equality (15.4.2005/232)

Every employer must promote equality between women and men within working life in a purposeful and systematic manner.

In order to promote gender equality in working life, the employer must, with due regard to the resources available and any other relevant factors,

- 1) act in such a way that job vacancies attract applications from both women and men;*
- 2) promote the equitable recruitment of women and men in the various jobs and create for them equal opportunities for career advancement;*
- 3) promote equality between women and men in the terms of employment, especially in pay;*
- 4) develop working conditions to ensure they are suitable for both women and men;*
- 5) facilitate the reconciliation of working life and family life for women and men by paying attention especially to working arrangements; and*
- 6) act to prevent the occurrence of discrimination based on gender.*

2.2.A gender equality plan for workplaces with 30 or more employees

Employers that employ on a regular basis at least 30 persons are under the Act responsible for promoting gender equality on the basis on an annual plan. As employers are regarded, for instance, private enterprises or companies, local authority workplaces and government offices. In large organisations it may be useful to draw up plans taking account of special characteristics of the different sub-organisations. Section 6a of the Equality Act provides for equality plans.

An equality plan can be drawn up as a separate plan or be incorporated into the personnel or training plans or the occupational safety and health action plan. The plan is updated annually. It can be agreed locally that the assessment of the gender equality situation at a workplace (measures under section 6a(2)1) is made at least once in every three years.

Equality plans prepared before the reform of the law must be updated so as to conform to the amended Act.

Section 6a – Measures to promote gender equality (15.4.2005/232)

If an employer regularly has a personnel of at least 30 employees working in employment relationships, the employer shall implement measures that promote gender equality as set out in a gender equality plan to be produced annually that deals particularly with pay and other terms of employment. The gender equality plan may be incorporated into a personnel and training plan or an occupational safety and health action plan.

The gender equality plan shall be prepared in cooperation with personnel representatives and must include:

- 1) an assessment of the gender equality situation in the workplace, including details of the employment of women and men in different jobs and a survey of the grade of jobs performed by women and men, the pay for those jobs and the differences in pay;*
- 2) necessary measures planned for introduction or implementation with the purpose of promoting gender equality and achieving equality in pay; and*
- 3) a review of the extent to which measures previously included in the gender equality plan have been implemented and of the results achieved.*

Instead of the annual review referred to in subsection 1 above, agreement may be made locally allowing the measures referred to in subsection 2(1) to be undertaken no less than once every three years.

3 Preparing and implementing

the gender equality plan

3.1 Start of the planning process

The employer is responsible for deciding on how the plan will be drawn up and for starting the planning process. The plan is drawn up in co-operation between representatives of the different personnel groups applying the Act on Co-operation within Undertakings or comparable provisions regarding the public sector or by setting up, for instance, a separate planning group.

Preferably, the employer will acquaint the chiefs or foremen and staff with this issue, for instance by discussions or training, either as part of the equality planning process or separately as part of normal induction and training.

3.2. Assessment of the current state of gender equality

The equality plan must include an assessment of the gender equality situation at the workplace. It must encompass a separate specification of the breakdown of women and men in different jobs and a pay survey. Because the demands of workplaces vary, each workplace should consider individually what it finds useful to examine in addition to the specification of jobs and pay survey.

3.2.1 Gender equality situation at the workplace

The purpose of the assessment is to provide background information on how the gender equality situation at the workplace should possibly be improved. The assessment of the current state can be based on statistics, questionnaires or other information on the workplace. It can focus on different issues in different years. The issues to be surveyed depend, among others, on the gender structure of the organisation or the conditions at individual workplaces.

The assessment can also make use of personnel reports that are otherwise made at the workplace, such as human resources accounting. If the key figures to be reported are determined by gender, they will also serve the making of the review of the gender equality situation in the workplace. It is also possible to make use of work climate questionnaires and barometers, as well as to add to them such questions as are necessary for examining the equality situation at the workplace.

Examples of the issues to be examined:

Recruitment and employment practices. This can be surveyed, for instance, what is the ratio of the applicants for jobs to those appointed by gender in different jobs and to try to increase, as far as possible, women's proportion in male-dominated jobs and men's proportion in female-dominated jobs.

Career development and task rotation. This can be examined, for instance, in terms of the objectives of the workplace for career development and task rotation from the equality perspective and how they have been realised in practice, as well as the staff's experiences of them.

Education and training: The survey on training could concern the education and training needed for jobs or the distribution of the expenses for it, possibly taking into account the importance of training and education from the point of view of job proficiency or advancement. It may also concern the personnel's experiences of access to staff training or, for instance, the training of employees returning from long periods of leave.

The nature of employment relationships: proportion of women and men of the permanent, temporary, part-time and fulltime staff.

Other comparable issues that could be studied:

- taking of parental leave (maternity, paternity, parental and care leave),
- use of different forms of working hours, overtime work and part-time pensions,
- absence from work (e.g. illness), and
- age structure and education level of the staff.

Views and experiences of the realisation of gender equality can be studied by questionnaires dealing with working climate or with other questionnaires, among others in the following areas:

- pay, fringe benefits,
- management,
- reconciliation of work, family and private life and use of working hour arrangements in support of them,
- work conditions, social premises, sexual harassment,
- attitudes to gender equality.

3.2.2 Specification of placement in different jobs

The assessment must include data on the breakdown of women and men in different jobs.

3.2.3 Pay survey

The assessment must include a specific pay survey. The Equality Act does not define in detail how the pay survey should be made in practice but it can vary according to branch or employer. The pay survey provides up-to-date information on the pay of women and men in all grades and groups of jobs. The survey is to be prepared so that the salaries and wages of individual employees do not appear on it.

The pay survey covers all persons in the employment of an employer, also part-time and temporary employees. If the pay survey is made by comparing monthly salaries and wages, fulltime and part-time employees can be examined as separate groups. If the pay survey is made by calculating wages and salaries per working hour, fulltime and part-time staff can also be examined together.

When making the pay survey the pay systems used are reviewed. It needs to be studied whether the pay systems treat women and men equitably and if they treat the jobs belonging to the same job grade similarly. The evaluation criteria may not be discriminatory for any component of the pay.

The survey is made using the existing job classifications according to the job evaluation systems or other groupings of jobs used at the workplace. It is not necessary for employers to collect and classify employees' pay data in a way that deviates from the classification or grouping already in use in the enterprise, but the survey enables a review of pay data between different collective agreement sectors.

Making the pay survey does not require that the workplace should have in place a pay system based on job evaluation. If a workplace has a pay system based on job evaluation that covers all employees, that makes it easier to compare also the demands of the jobs of employees covered by different collective agreements and their pay according to gender.

In order that the equality plans can tangibly promote pay equality it is important to compare women's and men's salaries and wages and to seek reasons for possible differences in them. Different wages and salaries within a same group do not automatically mean pay discrimination. Differences may be due to such things as personal job performance, hours of work, factors associated with working conditions or other factors on which pay increases are based. Pay differentials can also be caused by differences in the demands of the jobs.

The pay survey improves essentially the opportunities of the shop stewards and other employee representatives to monitor and promote the realisation of equal pay. They are not to disclose information regarding pay and work conditions to others.

The survey may reveal possible structural defects in the pay systems or drawbacks in terms of their content, as well as support the development of the pay systems taking into account equality considerations.

The employer must check the distortions in pay that the survey may reveal and rectify possible pay discrimination situations contrary to the law. These situations should be clarified as soon as possible in the context of carrying out the survey at the workplace.

3.3 Measures to promote gender equality

The assessments and surveys that have been made must be analysed. The employer discusses with staff representatives what measures are needed to promote gender equality and to implement equal pay. Ultimately, it is up to the employer to decide on the possible measures to be taken.

If an assessment or survey discloses drawbacks, ways to correct them have to be put forward, together with proposals on how the implementation of the measures is to be monitored. It may be that a conclusion from the outcome of the survey is that nothing needs to be done concerning the matters studied at the workplace.

Although the equality plan must be drawn up annually it can also include both short- and long-term objectives. It should also be considered how the promotion of gender equality can be incorporated into the organisations' values and other operations.

As regards the measures that should be taken, it is advisable to specify the objectives, how to achieve them, and ways in which the impact of the measures will be monitored.

It is advisable to define a deadline for carrying out these measures, for example 'by the end of 2006' or 'within the next five years'.

A few examples -drawn from existing equality plans:

- The elimination of unjustified pay differentials. Possible suspicions of pay discrimination should be investigated as soon as possible.
- The possibilities to transform temporary posts into permanent ones will be considered, and if there is cause for making a post permanent a plan for that is made, and its implementation is monitored.
- The reconciliation of work and family life will be promoted. The aim is flexible working time enabling the reconciliation of the demands of both the workplace and family and private life. Employees on leaves will be informed of important changes taking place in the workplace.
- Influencing attitudes to gender equality and sexual harassment. Equality issues will be integrated into the training of foremen and chiefs. Favourable attitude to gender equality will be taken into account in information and communication. Instructions for tackling sexual harassment will be issued.
- Women's and men's equal opportunities for career development will be supported. Impartiality will be observed in staff training. The share of women in management posts will be promoted persistently. It should be discussed, for instance, how equal career development opportunities can be taken into account in appointments for temporary posts, internal training, division of tasks and recruitment.
- Obstacles to women's placement in male-dominated jobs and vice versa will be eliminated, for instance by adjusting working conditions. The jobs in which it is particularly necessary to even out the gender breakdown are to be specified. Measures regarding for instance recruitment, the internal division of labour, career advancement and access to training will be discussed.

3.4 Assessment of progress in gender equality

The equality plan must include an assessment of how the measures included in the previous equality plan have been implemented and of their outcomes.

This assessment provides important information of how the implementation of the plan has progressed and in which respects it could still be improved. The assessment is an important tool in drawing up the next equality plan. The purpose of the measures related to the preparation of the plan that are repeated annually is that equality promotion will become a continuous process at workplaces.

4 Information and communication

It is up to the employer to decide how to inform personnel about the equality plan.

Equality plans also serve the development of an atmosphere of equality at workplaces, which is a common challenge for the entire workplace community.

5 Sanctions for neglecting equality planning

If an employer neglects to fulfil the obligation to draw up a gender equality plan, despite the instructions and advice issued by the Ombudsman for Equality, the Ombudsman can request that the plan be drawn up within a reasonable period of time. If this does not produce results, the Ombudsman can urge the Equality Board to request the employer to prepare the plan within a prescribed time. The Board may enforce its order by the threat of a penalty.

6 Equality prizes

It is possible to gain positive publicity by consistent work for promoting equality. The Minister responsible for gender equality affairs and the Ombudsman for Equality have since 1998 rewarded the best equality plans in Finland. In 2005 the prize is awarded to the City of Helsinki and to the Evangelical Lutheran Parishes in Tampere; in 2004 it was awarded to Octel Oy and K-Supermarket Raisio Center.

7 Where to find more information?

This brochure is available in electronic form at the web site of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: www.stm.fi > English > Publications.

The brochure of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ombudsman for Equality dealing with the revised Equality Act, including the text of the law, is available at the web site: www.tasa-arvo.fi/.

More information on equality planning is available at: www.tasa-arvo.fi/ > Ombudsman for Equality > Equality planning at workplaces,

and on the following web pages of the labour market central organisations:

www.vm.fi / > State as an employer > Public personnel policy;

www.akava.fi /;

www.ek.fi /;

www.evl.fi/kkh/heo;

www.kuntaliitto.fi /;

www.kuntatyonantajat.fi /;

www.sak.fi /tasa-arvo;

www.sttk.fi /