

The Equality Act

– Promoting gender equality and preventing discrimination

The Equality Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity and gender expression and obliges to promote gender equality. The Equality Act applies as a rule to all sectors of society and in all areas of life. The official name of the Equality Act is the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986). The Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) forbids discrimination based on other personal characteristics than gender.

Discrimination prohibited

The Equality Act defines and prohibits gender-based discrimination. Gender-based discrimination means for example:

- treating women and men differently on the basis of gender
- discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, parenthood or family responsibilities
- discrimination on the basis of gender identity or gender expression
- sexual or gender-based harassment

The Equality Act applies as a rule in all areas of life.

Schools and workplaces have a duty to intervene in sexual harassment.

Everyone has the right to live in the gender they feel they belong to.

Discrimination on the basis of pregnancy is a problem in the Finnish working life.

Discrimination may occur in recruitment situations, wages or pricing of services. Discrimination includes not continuing a temporary contract due to pregnancy or family leave. The employer, educational institution, organisation representing labour market interests, or provider of goods or services is liable to pay compensation for discrimination to the affected person. Compensation is claimed at the district court.

Promoting gender equality

Authorities, employers and education providers must promote gender equality and prevent discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression. Key tools for this in the Equality Act are:

- **The workplace gender equality plan** which contains an assessment on the gender equality situation in the workplace, necessary measures and a review of the previous plan. A pay survey must be conducted for the plan.
- **The gender equality plan in educational institutions** which involves an assessment of the gender equality situation, necessary measures and a review of the previous plan. Special attention must be given to student selection, learning differences and harassment, for example.
- **Quotas** which oblige that the proportion of both women and men must be at least 40 per cent in governmental and municipal bodies, unless there are special reasons to the contrary. Quotas do not apply in elected bodies.

The Ombudsman for Equality monitors and provides guidance

The Ombudsman for Equality monitors compliance with the Equality Act and provides instructions and guidance on questions related to the act. The Ombudsman for Equality can bring a matter to the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal. The Tribunal can prohibit discriminatory practices and oblige a party to draft a gender equality plan, under threat of a fine, if necessary.

DO YOU SUSPECT DISCRIMINATION?

The Ombudsman for Equality gives instructions and advice if you suspect that you have been discriminated because of your gender, gender identity or gender expression. The Ombudsman for Equality's guidance is free of charge and confidential. You can also contact anonymously.

- Legal Helpline: 0295 666 842 (Mon–Thu 9–11 and 13–15, Fri 9–11)
- You can also fill in an electronic contact form at www.tasa-arvo.fi/web/en/frontpage

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The Act on Equality between Women and Men 2015 brochure:

julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: Gender Equality Unit

The Unit prepares and implements the Finnish Government's gender equality policy and develops gender equality legislation.

www.stm.fi/en/gender-equality