

## Gender equality in Finnish education

Every child permanently residing in Finland must attend compulsory education. Compulsory education usually begins in the year during which a child turns seven and ends when the basic education has been completed or when ten years have lapsed since the beginning of the compulsory education. Schools have mixed-gender teaching groups, and all pupils get a school meal for free every day.

Education, starting from early childhood education plays crucial roles in the promotion of gender equality and gender awareness. High-quality, affordable early childhood education and care, for example, enable mothers of small children to work. The Equality Act requires that the authorities, education providers and other communities organising education or instruction must promote gender equality purposefully and systematically in all their activities.

There are gender differences in learning outcomes, and on average Finnish girls do better than boys at comprehensive school. After comprehensive school the majority of girls choose general upper secondary school, while a small majority of boys choose vocational education and training. There are slightly more women than men in higher education. On average, women have a higher level of education than men.

### **EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION'S GENDER EQUALITY PLAN**

The Equality Act obliges schools and educational institutions to prepare a gender equality plan to develop their activities. It must contain an assessment of the gender equality situation within the institution, the necessary measures to promote gender equality and a review of the previous plan. Special attention must be given to:

- pupil and student selections;
- organisation of teaching;
- learning differences and the evaluation of study performance;
- prevention of sexual harassment and gender-based harassment.

## Segregation and gender stereotypes

Stereotypes and attitudes about what occupations are best suited to women and to men affect the choice of subjects and studies. Finnish education is highly segregated by gender. This is evident already in the choice of subjects in comprehensive school and continues through different levels of education. Boys often choose mathematics and natural sciences as optional subjects, while girls focus more on language studies and often study several foreign languages.

As a rule, women and men end up in different fields of study. Female-dominated fields of study include the humanities, the healthcare and social welfare sector and the services sector, while technology and agriculture and forestry are male-dominated. Gender segregation does not stop in education. Instead, it continues in working life and affects the gender pay gap, for example.

To eradicate stereotypes, teachers and educators must be aware of their personal views on gender, because their views are reflected in their attitudes, behaviour and the way they treat students as individuals. Teachers can promote gender equality, for example, by allowing students to be themselves without being burdened by traditional gender expectations. They can also choose to use study materials and working methods that eradicate gender stereotypes and emphasise the diversity of people.

## Gender at school

Study materials influence students' conceptions about gender and gender roles. As a result, girls and boys may understand differently the opportunities they have in society. Gender and sexual minorities are almost non-existent in study materials.

School bullying is often gendered and sexualised. Boys have more experiences than girls of being bullied and of being under physical threat, while girls more than boys experience sexual harassment and sexual violence. Bullying, harassment and threats against trans young people are common in schools and educational institutions.

### INFORMATION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

The Centre for Gender Equality Information (National Institute for Health and Welfare) is a national information service that offers updated, research-based information on gender equality.

[www.thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality/gender-equality-in-finland/education](http://www.thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality/gender-equality-in-finland/education)