



## Gender equality in Finnish decision-making

Gender equality is a prerequisite for democracy. Gender equality means equal opportunities for women and men to participate in decision-making and to be elected to positions of power in all sectors of society.

### Political decision-making

Finnish women and men gained full political rights in 1906. However, the proportion of women elected to Parliament did not exceed 30 per cent until the 1980s. At present the proportion of women MPs is over 40 per cent, and approximately 40 per cent of members of municipal councils are women. Throughout the 21st century, around 40 per cent of Government ministers have been women. Just one in five municipal and city managers are women. Finland's first female President and Prime Minister were elected in the 2000s.

Gendered division of labour still prevails in decision-making. While there have been several female ministers in Finland, Prime Ministers, Ministers of Finance and Ministers for Foreign Affairs have usually been men. Parliamentary committees, too, are divided into female and male-dominated committees. Men act as experts in the fields of economy and defence and women in the fields of education, gender equality and healthcare and social welfare.

### WOMEN IN TOP DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS

**1926** – The first female minister of Government: *Miina Sillanpää*, Assistant Minister for Social Affairs

**1992** – The first woman as Governor of the Bank of Finland – *Sirkka Hämäläinen*

**1994** – The first woman as Speaker of Parliament: *Riitta Uosukainen*

**1995** – The first woman as Minister for Foreign Affairs: *Tarja Halonen*

**2000** – The first woman as President of the Republic: *Tarja Halonen*

**2003** – The first woman as Prime Minister: *Anneli Jäätteenmäki*

**2011** – The first woman as Minister of Finance: *Jutta Urpilainen*

The realisation of democracy requires that different groups of people be represented in decision-making. So far, young people as well as women and men with an immigrant background have been poorly represented in Finnish decision-making.

### **Elections and societal participation**

Finnish women vote more actively in elections than men. Men especially tend to vote candidates of their own gender. Legal or statutory gender quotas do not apply to the nomination of candidates by Finnish political parties. However, most parties have defined a balanced gender representation as a goal for their candidate lists. The leaders of the largest parties in Finland have usually been men. Finnish NGOs and other civil society actors have an important role in promoting gender equality and raising issues into the political agenda.

### **Preparation for decision-making**

Gender quotas promote equal gender representation in decision-making. The Finnish Equality Act includes a quota provision that applies to state-administration committees, advisory boards, working groups and other similar bodies as well as municipal boards, committees and inter-municipal cooperation bodies. According to this provision, the bodies must have at least 40 per cent of both men and women. The quotas do not apply to electoral bodies.

### **Economic decision-making**

Very few women occupy senior managerial positions in economic decision-making. Women occupy on average 27 per cent of board seats of Finnish listed companies. Women are a notable minority in the CEOs of listed companies. The Government of Finland has set targets for women's and men's representation on the boards of state-owned companies. The long-term determined measures have been effective: in the fully state-owned companies over 40 per cent of board members are women. The equal representation of women and men has been noted to affect the profitability of companies and the wellbeing of staff.

### **REGIONAL GOVERNMENT REFORM**

The ongoing health, social services and regional government reform strengthens the role of counties in the Finnish political regime. In the reform it is important to ensure the equal participation of women and men in the decision-making of the counties.

### **INFORMATION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN DECISION-MAKING**

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