



# FINLAND

– SOCIETY

# COMMITTED TO GENDER EQUALITY

Photo credit:  
Emilia Kangasluoma / Team Finland

Finland has a good track record in gender equality. The Global Gender Gap Report 2013 ranks Finland as 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world. Finland is a country where women usually work full-time and enjoy equal access to education and healthcare. It is also where women are most likely to be able to participate fully in the country's political and economic life. As provided for in the Constitution the Finnish society is committed to gender equality.

# HISTORY

Finland was the first country in the world to extend the right to vote and stand for elections to all women and men in 1906. Finland was also the first country to elect women to Parliament: 19 were elected to the 200-seat Parliament in 1907. The success of Finland as a country is to a great extent linked with improvements in the status of women and gender equality. Already in 1917 a number of Finnish women were given four weeks of maternity leave. Nowadays the parental leave is almost one year and is also used increasingly by fathers.

# OUR STRENGTHS

Women and men are equally represented in the Finnish labour market. This is due to affordable, good-quality child care, measures to reconcile work and family life, and a policy to distribute family leaves more evenly between parents. Discrimination based upon gender is prohibited by law.

All Finnish girls and boys study in mixed classrooms for at least 9 years and receive free meals at school. The level of education of women is higher than that of men: 60% of university graduates in 2014 were women.

Areas for improvement include the gender pay gap and the lack of women in top corporate positions.

Women's fertility rate is relatively high, compared with many European countries. This is supported by child health clinics and other services that provide the best possible health and well-being for the whole family. Finland is famous also for its maternity package sent to every expectant mother or family.



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# FACTS AND FIGURES

There are many female decision-makers in Finnish politics and business. Throughout the 2000s, the share of women MPs elected in Finnish parliamentary elections has remained at a steady 40 percent level.

All the highest political positions in Finland have been held by women: President of the Republic (2000), Prime Ministers (2003 and 2010), Minister of Finance (2011), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1995) and Minister of Defence (1990).

- > 42% of MPs are women
- > 36% of Ministers (5 out of 14) in the Government are women.

Many of the decisions that affect people's everyday life such as public services are made at the municipal level. Often participation in municipal politics is the first step into national political life.

- > 36% of municipal councilors are women
- > 48% of municipal committee members are women (40% quota regulation).

In the private sector, the number of women directors in business and enterprises is among the highest in the world.

- > 23% of the board members in listed companies are women
- > 39% of state-owned company board members are women
- > Women account for approximately one-third of Finland's entrepreneurs, which is a relatively high share in comparison with other EU countries.

Another interesting detail is that in the Finnish Foreign Service women make up about 45% of Ambassadors and over 50% of the 560 diplomats.

## FINLAND PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Promotion of gender equality is one of the three cross-cutting objectives of Finland's new Development Policy. Finland supports, for example, women's participation in decision-making, business and industry, and in conflict prevention. Finland has placed the human rights of women as one of our priorities. As one of the most crucial aspects of violence against women and girls, Finland promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls.



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# FAMOUS FINNISH WOMEN

**Minna Canth** – a Finnish writer and social activist. Minna Canth is the first woman to receive her own flag day in Finland.

**Miina Sillanpää** – Finland's first female minister and a key figure in the workers' movement.

**Helvi Sipilä** – a promoter of women's rights. She was appointed as the first-ever female Assistant-Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1972.

**Elisabeth Rehn** – first female Minister of Defence of Finland in 1990. Rehn is known for her international assignments as UN Undersecretary General and as the special rapporteur for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Tarja Halonen** – First female President of Finland. Tarja Halonen has paid close attention to the issues of human rights, democracy, civil society and gender equality.



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## MORE ABOUT EQUALITY IN FINLAND

Minister for Family Affairs and Social Services (responsible for gender equality)

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: Gender Equality Unit

Council for Gender Equality (TANE)

Ombudsman for Equality

National Discrimination and Equality Tribunal

Employment and Equality Committee in the Finnish Parliament

Minna – Centre for Gender Equality Information

Statistics Finland: Gender equality



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## MILESTONES OF GENDER EQUALITY

**1878** – Equal hereditary rights for men and women.

**1906** – Finnish women get the right to vote and to stand as candidates.

**1926** – The first female Minister: Miina Sillanpää, Assistant Minister for Social Affairs.

**1937** – The Maternity Benefits Act providing maternity grants is adopted.

**1943** – Statutory school meals.

**1944** – The act on prenatal and child health clinics.

**1961** – Usage of the contraceptive pill is accepted.

**1972** – The Council for Gender Equality (TANE) is founded.

**1973** – The Day-care Act takes effect.

**1985** – The Children's Home Care Support Act; the terms maternity, paternity and parental leave are confirmed.

**1987** – The Act on Equality between Women and Men is adopted (Equality Act).

**1990** – Children obtain the subjective right to municipal day care until age 3.

**1990** – The first female Minister of Defence in the world appointed – Elisabeth Rehn.

**2000** – The first female President of Finland – Tarja Halonen.

**2007** – Over 40 percent of female MPs for the first time; female majority in Finnish Government (60 percent).

**2015** – Non-discrimination of gender minorities included in the Equality Act.

**2015** – Equal Marriage Act (takes effect in 2017).