

SOME FACTS ABOUT WOMEN IN FINLAND

Women's full political rights

In 1906 Finnish Women became the first in the world to gain full political rights. It was the gateway to a new world. However, in New Zealand women got the right to vote in 1893 and in Australia 1902. But on the contrary, they were not able to be candidate and they could not vote for a woman. Then, first in the world Finnish women over 21 got the right to vote a woman candidate.

Europe's most reactionary system of representation, the Diet of the four Estates, was reformed in one fell swoop in 1906. In its place came Europe's most modern single chamber parliament, whose members were chosen by universal and equal suffrage.

The first initiative in the Diet on women's suffrage was proposed by three members of the town of Kuopio (the city where I live) at the initiative of Kuopio's feminist association in 1897. The pressure to give women the vote was great, for many reasons. First, women had already risen to leading social positions, had been admitted to universities and had assumed an important role in education and culture. Second, women took part in working life alongside men in Finland more than in any other European country. Third, women's organizations, on both the right and left, had also worked hard for voting rights. Then, men's opinions had also matured. Furthermore, women had joint men in the constitutional struggle against the Russian Bobrikov administration. By and large, all these arguments for giving women the vote were used. Finally, after many discussions, the Diet took its decision on the reform in May 1906.

In spring 1907, nineteen Finnish women became the first women in the world to become Members of Parliament. They formed 9,5 % of the first members of Parliament in Finland. By the way, nine out of 19 were single. Finnish women were the first in Europe to receive the right to vote for parliamentary representatives, and at the same time, they became eligible for public office, in other words they were able to stand as candidates for parliament. At that time Finland belonged to the Russian Empire. The themes that women brought to the parliament rose from the every day life (such as the system of health care and social security, free basic education, the right to parental leave and a day-care system). The women carried out the idea of a social motherhood. The Finnish welfare state is to a great extent the result of women's work, expertise and innovations. Therefore, the welfare state is reason behind the high fertility rate and women's employment numbers staying high. So, the politics that they have had visions and driven for has brought good results. Finland got the independency in 1917.

Hundred years later

The most important event during centennial is the parliamentary elections on 18 March 2007. Then, every Finnish citizen who had reached the age of 18 by the election date, was entitled to vote. The number of women in parliament increased significantly from 75 to 84 among the 200 members. As result of the last elections, the composition of the new Cabinet of 20 members is 12 women and 8 men, which makes 60 % of women. This implies that Finland has the cabinet of the highest proportion of women in the whole world.

About female ministers

The first female minister was appointed in 1926 as Minister in charge of Social Affairs and Health. Accordingly, the number of female ministers began rise significantly in the 1960s. Then in 1972 a woman was made Second Minister of Finance and in 1975 Minister of Justice. Furthermore in 1990 Finland acquired the world's first woman Minister of Defence. In 1994 a woman was appointed to Speaker of Parliament, in 1995 Permanent Secretaries at the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Environment. In 1995 a woman was also appointed to Foreign Minister. The President is elected by direct popular vote for a period of six years, and can be re-elected once. In 2000 Finland gained the first female President of the Republic, Tarja Halonen and she was re-elected in 2006. Finally, Finland gained the first female Prime Minister in 2003 (unfortunately only for a short time).

Members of the European Parliament

Now Finland has 13 Members in the European Parliament, eight of them are women MEPs.

Municipal Councils

The municipal council is the body exercising the highest decision-making power in a municipality. Women's proportion of the members of the municipal councils is 36,7 % after election in 2008.

The Election Act

Finland uses proportional representation. The Finnish Election Act has no mentions or quotas regarding the gender candidates. The registered political parties nominate candidates for the elections.

Gender Equality

The Act on Equality between Women and Men was approved in 1987. Consequently, in 1995 a partial reform on it was approved, e.g. The quota clause was added on 40 %. Government had Gender Equality Programme 1996-1999 and the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2003-2007 contained nearly one hundred measures. The Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2008-2011 consists of thematic entities that implement the key gender equality priorities in the Government Programme. It aims at promoting the realisation of gender mainstreaming, bridging gender pay gaps, promoting women's careers, alleviating segregation, increasing gender awareness in schools, improving reconciliation of work and family life reducing violence against women, reinforcing resources for gender equality work, and drawing up a Government report on gender equality. The Equality Act was revised in 2005 and 2009. The main purpose of the amendments of 2005 was to incorporate EU directives into Finnish legislation, to make gender equality planning more effective and successful, and to promote equal pay. The preparation of a gender equality plan each year in cooperation with the personnel became obligatory (with sanctions, if not implemented) for workplaces with more than 30 employees as well as for educational institutions. The amendments of 2009 had to do with incorporating the EU directive prohibiting discrimination in the supply of goods and services into the Act.

Finland has ratified Palermo Protocol in September 2006 and is also a member to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has signed its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Finland has signed the Council of Europe Convention on Action against trafficking in Human Beings in August 2006 and is defining the prerequisites for ratification. Trafficking in human beings and aggravated trafficking in human beings were criminalized as offences in the Penal Code of Finland in August 2004. According to the Penal Code, a person convicted for trafficking in human beings shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a minimum of four months and a maximum for six years and for aggravated trafficking in human beings to imprisonment for a minimum of two years and a maximum of ten years. The European Union Council Directive 2004/81/EC on residence permits issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking and who cooperate with the competent authorities has been transposed into national legislation in July 2006 by amending the Aliens Act. An amendment to the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers to set up a system of measures to help victims of human trafficking entered into force in the beginning of 2007. In addition, to criminalising the purchase of sexual services from young persons, an Act criminalising the purchase of sexual services from victims of human trafficking or pandering, entered into force in October 2006. The penal scale of the latter two imposes a fine or imprisonment for a maximum of six months. A Revised National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by the Government on 25 June 2008. It represents an update and further specification of the measures described in the first National Plan Action against Trafficking in Human Beings adopted in 2005. Mainstreaming of gender equality is a key objective of government's gender equality policy. Thus, the Government Programme 2007-2011 states that more resources will be allocated to government agencies and women's organisations engaged in promoting gender issues. In 2007 the Parliament also approved an Act that regularises the largest women's organisations in Finland a yearly state subsidy.

In the Government report 2009 on Human Rights Policy for Parliament, the human rights of women continue to be a main priority area, with a specific focus on participation of women in democratic processes, sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as violence against women and girls.

Finland has been actively promoting gender issues in international fora, e.g. In the EU, in OECD and throughout the UN system, including specialized agencies, operational programmes and international financial institutions. In multilateral cooperation, Finland has financially supported UNIFEM programmes targeting the prevention and elimination of violence against women. Finland's substantial support to UNFPA can be considered an important contribution towards the advancement of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In 2008, Finland launched its programme on National Action Plan for implementing UN SCR 1325, "Women, Peace and Security". The national action plan was developed as a joint effort between five different Ministries, the Office of the President, academia and civil society.

The Finnish Government approved the Finland's National Strategy for Civilian Crisis Management in August 2008. Finland promotes the principles of social and gender equality and tolerance in all component areas of civilian crisis management. The Ministry of the Interior mainstreams the organization and actions of Crisis Management Centre Finland (CMC Finland), Kuopio.

In the context of co-operation with neighbouring areas, Nordic Council of Ministers, Baltic States and Russian Federation, Finland has promoted gender equality and women's empowerment with the objective of increasing stability, welfare, equality and social stability in the region. Concrete examples of this include e.g. Support projects on preventing trafficking in women, violence against women and sexually transmitted diseases, and on promoting women's entrepreneurship and awareness of equal rights.

Immigrants

In 2009 the National Institute of Health and Welfare was launching a comprehensive research project on health and wellbeing of immigrants. The project was focusing on Russians, Somalis, Kurds and Kosovo Albanians residing in Helsinki, Vantaa, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa.

The Act on Safeguarding Equality entered into force in 2004. The Act forbids discrimination based on age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, status on health, disability, sexual orientation and other personal reason. The special aim is to tackle multiple discrimination, which has also been a major concern for doubly marginalized women.

The Ombudsman for Minorities started as an authority on 1 September 2001, when the Act and the Decree on the Ombudsman for Minorities entered into force.

Women and Poverty

The relative Poverty in Finland has almost doubled since 1995, and it has risen also in the past few years. The rise of poverty has been strongest among single parent families where it has quadrupled from 1995 to 2007. Poverty in single parent families is gendered: nine in ten poor single parents are women. Finland's key macro-economis measures are divided into three areas: to ensure a sustainable pension system, to curb public spending and to secure welfare services and increase public sector productivity.

Education of women

All Finnish girls go to school and women are well-educated. Consequently, among 20-64 year-old women, 75,4 per cent are secondary-level graduates, as opposed to 71,5 per cent of men. Over 90 per cent of those aged 16 to 18, half of the 19-24 year olds and one quarter of those aged 25-29 were studying in some post-basic level education leading to qualification. Also the share of women among university-level graduates in Finland is higher than that of men. Although especially young women are highly educated in

Finland, the educational fields are strongly divided into women's and men's fields. Over 80 per cent of those with a technical education were men in 2001, while 89 per cent of those with social or health care education were women. Also the education, service and art fields are female-dominated with a share of 70 per cent. The total reform of the legislation on education entered into force on 1 January 1999. Gender-sensitive training will be increased in the education and continuing education of teachers and kindergarten teachers.

In Finland, in spite of better education, women earn around 80 per cent less than men for regular hours of work. The difference has remained approximately unchanged since the early 1990s. The Government continues to implement the Equal Pay Programme together with the social partners.

Measures eliminate violence against women

Violence against women has not diminished much in Finland during the past decade. Ministries concerning the progress of the measures written down in the Programme for The Government Programme of the first Cabinet of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen (2003-2007) made the commitment to make interfering with incidencies of violence more effective. In accordance with the Government Programme, the Ministries drafted programmes for the reduction of violence. One of the problems faced in the prevention of close relationship and domestic violence has been the fact that the activities connected to it have been disparate and uncoordinated. The National Council for Crime Prevention set up a department for violence to improve the coordination, with representatives from all relevant Ministries as regards the reduction of violence. Also a Ministerial Group has been set up with the task of reducing close relationship and domestic violence more effectively. Within the Action Programme to Prevent Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence, launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health for 2004-2007, local approaches have been created and a contact person for intimate partner and domestic violence has been appointed in nearly every municipality/economic region.

Finnish shelter home services still have lackings. Following the EU recommendations, Finland should have around 500 shelters instead of the existing 120. Each municipality has designated certain places as refugees for women and children threatened by violence. Nearly everywhere across the country, there is a social worker on call 24 hours and during weekends.

Trafficking in human beings

Finland enforced actively the effective implementation of EU's Action Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings by organizing, for example, a seminar on the identification of child victims of human trafficking at the end of October 2006 in Helsinki, during the Finnish EU Presidency. Trafficking was also one of the main priorities during the 2008 Finnish Presidency of OSCE.

Since 2006, victims of human trafficking are entitled to a fixed-term residence permit issued for six months to one year when there are well-founded reasons to believe that they are victims of human trafficking, they have broken the contacts with the criminals and are willing to help the authorities to solve the crime. A system to providing services and support measures for victims of human trafficking was formalised in the beginning of 2007.

In June 2008, the Government appointed the Ombudsman for Minorities the National Rapporteur on action against human trafficking, acting as an independent authority.

Gender mainstreaming

The basis for gender mainstreaming is provided by the fundamental rights in the Constitution Act by the Act on Equality. Thus, the general obligation of the public authorities to promote gender equality has been integrated into legislation. Gender equality and mainstreaming is well represented in the current Government Programme. It states that gender equality is a central value in the Finnish society and that the entire Government commits itself to promoting equality in all decisionmaking. The State Budget 2008 has been prepared in accordance with the new instructions that take the gender perspective into account.

Gender equality and mainstreaming is well represented in the government action plan for gender equality 2008-2011. More resources will be allocated to government agencies and women's organisations engaged in promoting gender issues. All government decisions and measures will be evaluated so as to discover their impact on men and women. So, each ministry has to establish a working group on gender equality. They will focus on implementation of Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) into the key processes of the ministry.

Support to women's organizations

The participation in societal life through different NGOs is a significant form of participation in Finnish democracy. Finnish civil society is also characterized by an extensive and active group of women's organisations. This is quite unique with regard to its scope and variety even in Nordic comparison. For example the National Council of Women of Finland (I was a boardmember of NCWF two different times) has been working to promote equality since 1911. The National Council has 62 member organisations with a total membership exceeding 500 000. NYTKIS, the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations, has, as its members, the women's associations of all the political parties represented in Parliament, as well as three politically unaffiliated women's associations.

NGOs are vital in providing services in Finland in many sectors, such as support services to victims of violence, promotion of environmental planning, health and social services. Many objectives and actions of the Beijing Platform Action are undertaken by the organizations with the financial support of the Government, mostly with fixed-term project funding. Many organisations have raised concerns of continuity and sustainability of such a funding mechanism.

Year 2007 Finnish Parliament approved a law that regularises certain women's organisations in Finland a yearly state subsidy. An annual appropriation is provided in the State budget for the activities of two umbrella organisations, the above mentioned NYTKIS and the National Council of Women of Finland. By making State funding a system established by law, it is possible to ensure a more stable perspective. This promotes the implementation of gender equality and women's possibilities of participating in the activities of society.

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