

1. What are the concrete steps your Government or organization has taken to ensure the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl? Please also elaborate on the impact these steps have had, where appropriate.

According to section 6 of the **Constitution**, everyone is equal before the law. No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the grounds of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person. The Constitution also decrees, in section 16, on the right to basic education free of charge.

The national legislation on education and core curricula are based on the principle of equal treatment of all students, and where necessary, access to positive special treatment. Thus, **discrimination in education is fully outlawed in Finland**.

Children of compulsory school age and pre-primary education age are entitled to education. According to the **Basic Education Act (628/1998)**, the local authority shall have an obligation to arrange basic education for children of compulsory school age residing in its area and pre-primary education during the year preceding compulsory schooling. This obligation covers all children residing in the area of a local authority, including those seeking international protection.

According to Section 29 in the Basic Education Act, a pupil participating in education shall be entitled to a **safe learning environment**. The education provider shall draw up a plan, in connection with curriculum design, for safeguarding pupils against violence, bullying and harassment, execute the plan and supervise adherence to it and its implementation.

Via an amendment to the Children's daycare act, pre-primary education has been stipulated to be compulsory for children of the age of six, starting 1 August 2015. Pre-primary education is provided both in day-care centres and in schools. At pre-primary education children will adopt basic skills, knowledge and capabilities from different areas of learning in accordance with their age and abilities. Learning through play is essential.

In Finland **education is free at all levels** from pre-primary to higher education. In pre-primary and basic education the textbooks, daily meal and transportation for students living further away from the school are free for the parents. At secondary level and in higher education the students themselves or their parents purchase their own books. At secondary level the students have the right to a free meal and in higher education meals are subsidized by the state.

The new **national core curricula** have been issued by the Finnish National Board of Education (for Pre-Primary Education in 2016, for Basic Education in 2014 and for General Upper Secondary Schools in 2015). They emphasize equality and gender equality in many ways, including in the **underlying values**. Education is underpinned by the idea of the specific value of childhood. Each pupil is unique and valuable just as he or she is. Each pupil has the right to grow into his or her full potential as a human being and a member of society. To achieve this, the pupils need encouragement and individual support as well as experiences of being heard and valued in the school community. Each pupil has the right to a good education and success in their studies. Encouraging feedback and fair treatment are essential. The starting point for provision of education, guidance and support is attendance to a good and safe school day.

Basic education is built on respect for life and human rights. It directs the pupils to defend these values and to appreciate the inviolability of human dignity. Basic education promotes well-being, democracy and active agency in civil society. The development of basic education is guided by the goals and extensive principles of equality and equity. Education contributes to promoting economic, social, regional and gender equality. The mission of basic education is to **prevent inequality and exclusion and to promote gender equality**. Basic education encourages girls and boys to study different subjects equally and promotes information and understanding of the diversity of gender. Each pupil is supported in recognizing their personal potential and selecting **learning paths without role models determined by gender**.

Education providers' obligation to promote non-discrimination and gender equality

The new **Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)** entered into force on 1 January 2015. The act prohibits discrimination based on ethnic origin, age, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. The new Act expanded the obligation to promote equality to education providers and educational institutes. By 1 January 2017, they are required to draw up a plan to promote equality and non-discrimination. The plan must cover all discrimination grounds pursuant to the Non-Discrimination Act (previously the obligation only covered promotion of ethnic non-discrimination).

The provisions on gender equality and prohibition of discrimination based on gender are laid down in the **Act on Equality between Women and Men (1329/2014)**, which was renewed when the Non-Discrimination Act entered into force. Prohibitions of gender-based discrimination were expanded to cover discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. There were also improvements concerning the provisions on equality planning within basic education as well as at workplaces. According to the Act on Equality between Men and Women, **each educational institution (including basic education) is now obliged to prepare an annual plan to promote gender equality**. The non-discrimination and gender equality plans can be combined, and together they can help to tackle discrimination in education faced by girls belonging to minorities.

The Act on Equality between Women and Men obliges all educational institutions to ensure that women and men have equal opportunities for education and training. Instruction and the study material used shall support the attainment of the objectives of the Act.

In addition, according to the Non-Discrimination Act education providers must, where necessary, make reasonable accommodations to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to education and training. This can have a significant impact on the realization of the right to education for girls with disabilities.

Yhdenvertaisuus.fi (in English: equality.fi), a website administered by the Ministry of Justice, contains information on and examples of equality plans for education providers and other actors.

2. Which measures would your Government or organization propose and implement in order to eliminate gender disparities in education by 2030, taking into account goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other relevant SDGs?

In Finland, the **planning, preparing, coordinating and ensuring the national implementation of Agenda 2030** is mandated to the **National Commission on Sustainable Development**, which includes all ministries (including the Ministry of Education and Culture) and a wide range of stakeholders. The secretariat of the commission is in the **Prime Minister's Office**. **Equality, youth and children** are essential priorities in the national implementation plan.

Please also see the answers provided above concerning the right to education and the promotion of non-discrimination and gender equality.

3. What are the challenges that your Government or organization faces in implementing policies and programmes towards the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl? Please elaborate on the nature of these challenges and the steps taken to address them.

From the perspective of education and training, important issues related to equality include the significance of gender in educational choices, learning results, teaching and everyday school life, the gender-based segregation of educational fields and degrees, and gender equality and the position of gender studies in the fields of science and research. Finland's key gender equality policy goal has long been the **reduction of gender segregation** in matters such as educational choices.

The Government Action Plan for Gender Equality (2016–2019) specifies concrete objectives for the promotion of gender equality and elimination of gender-based discrimination in Finland and determines measures for gender mainstreaming in all administrative sectors. The action plan also addresses the issue of segregation and proposes a solid set of actions to improve the comprehensive gender equality planning in education, including in pre-service and in-service teacher education. The Finnish National Board of Education continues to support schools and educational establishments in gender equality planning.

The Action Plan consists of **approximately thirty measures** concerning working life, equal pay, economic decision-making, immigrant reception and integration services, reconciliation of work and family, parenthood, gender segregation in education and labour market, education, sports resources and library services, violence against women and intimate partner violence, and men's health and wellbeing. The Action Plan also includes other measures to ensure that all Ministries assess the gender impacts of their activities and take them into account in their decision-making.

A working group will be appointed to support and monitor the implementation of the measures of the Action Plan and to report to the Government. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health coordinates the work in relation to the Action Plan and its follow-up.

According to the Action Plan, the Government's objective is **to strengthen awareness of gender equality in early childhood education and care and education, as well as to support equality planning in basic education and secondary level educational institutions**. The Government will strive to ensure that the training provided for teachers, professional educators and student counsellors gives them tools for practical equality work. The goal is to develop cooperation between educational institutions and working life actors so that in the future, students will have versatile opportunities for getting to know various fields. The Government will promote gender equality in resource allocation for physical exercise and in library activities. Concrete measures will be coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Moreover, last year the National Board of Education published a guide on promoting gender equality in basic education. The purpose of the guide is to instruct education organisers and schools how gender equality measures can be carried out in practice in schools. The guide provides plenty of suggestions and practical examples of how systematic gender equality work can be carried out.

4. In the view of your Government or organization, what are the obstacles and barriers faced by girls in particular in effectively accessing education? Please elaborate on the nature of these obstacles, how they manifest in practice, and what steps have been taken to address them.

In 2015 the Ministry of Justice published a **study on discrimination in education in Finland**, with special focus on experiences of the realization of equality in study guidance provided to young people belonging to different minority groups. The study was commissioned from authors Laura Jauhola and Jukka Vehviläinen as a part of the national discrimination monitoring system. The aim of the study was to provide an analysis of the occurrence of discrimination and measures furthering equality in education. The study covered basic education, vocational upper secondary education and training and general upper secondary education. In the study, various minority groups consist of foreign citizens and persons of foreign origin, persons whose native language is neither Finnish nor Swedish, religious minorities, disabled persons, Roma and Sami people and sexual and gender minorities. The study did not focus on gender-based discrimination but it can provide insights into multiple discrimination faced by girls belonging to different minority groups.

According to the study, a clear area requiring development is the climate in schools and educational institutions. The attitudes and prejudices of staff were also viewed as contributing to failure in providing equal support to student learning. Attitudes affect the Roma and immigrants in particular. In addition, disabled children or children requiring considerable special support do not always receive the support they need. Examples of discrimination faced by girls belonging to minorities included, for example, other students making intrusive questions about female genital mutilation and questioning a girl's

motivations for wearing a headscarf. In addition, staff found it frustrating that certain religious minorities did not want girls to be educated. Different forms of discrimination are manifested in the mutual relations between the students to a considerable extent. If methods of intervening and supporting an atmosphere of equality are not supported, potential bullying can have wide consequences. Even if staff members realise that equality issues are important, the issues are often not addressed sufficiently nor were notification or consequence channels regarding discrimination always recognised.

According to the study, equality themes should be included not only in the equality plans of education providers but also as part of identification of competence needs and the continuing education of counsellors, teachers and other professional groups. More attention should be paid to the readiness and competence of teachers to realise individual and wide-ranging teaching arrangements and teaching and assessment methods for different learners. The competence of staff should also be ensured through continuing education. Sufficient resources for adequate personal guidance and provision of a comprehensive picture of different occupations and options should be allocated. In addition, teacher and study guidance training should ensure that the equality issues should be taken into account as part of the curriculum.

Finland's **National Human Rights Action Plan 2017–2019** is currently being drafted. The Action Plan is prepared by the Government network of contact persons for fundamental and human rights, which includes representatives from all ministries. The Action Plan will include measures aiming to tackle discrimination in schools, including in-service training for teachers on how to combat hate speech, racism and sexual harassment as well as improving multiliteracy especially among children and children with an immigrant background. These measures will be executed by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO), which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice, has paid attention to the need to promote **extra-curricular activities for girls with an immigrant background**. For these girls the threshold for taking part in leisure time and extra-curricular activities, such as community youth activities and sports clubs, can be significantly higher than for other children. In addition, activities aimed at immigrant girls specifically currently cannot accommodate everyone interested in them. ETNO emphasizes that girls with an immigrant background need more personalised and small-group activities, such as multicultural girls' community centres aimed at all girls as well as girls-only sports activities.

5. Does your Government or organization have experience with the use of qualitative and quantitative indicators to assist in monitoring the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, and if so, which have been used and why?

The Ministry of Justice coordinates the national monitoring system for discrimination. The monitoring system for discrimination has three functions: (1) to compile and publish updated information and research on discrimination on a designated website, (2) draft an annual discrimination study and (3) to publish a report on discrimination in Finland (*Syrjintä Suomessa*) every four years. The studies and reports are available on the *yhdenvertaisuus.fi* (equality.fi) website. The website is a material bank for authorities, organisations and those interested in equality and non-discrimination and it includes information on legislation, research and different minorities. The annual discrimination study for 2014 examined discrimination in education (see above).

The National Human Rights Action Plan 2017-2019 will include measures that aim to further develop indicators related to discrimination. The Ministry of Justice will publish indicators for equality and non-discrimination on the *yhdenvertaisuus.fi* website. In addition, the Ministry of Justice together with the Human Rights Centre will carry out a national fundamental rights barometer, which will target different population groups and investigate their knowledge and views on fundamental rights as well as the realization of rights in their everyday lives.

The discontinuation of education is monitored by the Statistics Finland. The data can be disaggregated by gender. For example, a total of 347 students had discontinued studies in one way or another in comprehensive school during the 2013/2014 academic year. More than half of school drop-outs were boys. http://www.stat.fi/til/kkesk/2013/kkesk_2013_2015-03-19_tie_001_en.html