



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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# Good Practice Gender Equality Policy in EU27 Nations.

## 1 Introduction

This paper discusses examples of good practice policy for the promotion of gender equality within the labour market. The paper will initially briefly discuss the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland. It will then briefly discuss the policy used in Finland, Denmark and Austria.

## 2 Key Points

### **Northern Ireland**

- In Northern Ireland 70.6% of men are in employment in comparison to 62% of women. It should be noted that the same figures for the UK as a whole were 76.2% for men and 66.7% for women;
- There is a higher rate of economic inactivity amongst women than men (34.9% and 21.4% respectively);
- Northern Ireland has a number of pieces of legislation in place to ensure the equal treatment of women and men within the workplace;
- Northern Ireland has a Gender Equality Strategy (GES) which runs from 2006-2016 and has eleven key action areas and nine Strategic Objectives;

- Action Plans for both women and men are used to implement the GES objectives. The most recent Action Plans available on the OFMDFM website are for 2008-2011;
- A review was planned for five years into the strategy. This is currently ongoing;

### **United Kingdom**

- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed an index which highlights the level of equality within EU 27 nations;
- The UK ranks fifth highest in the Index for gender equality, Nordic countries taking the top four positions;
- In terms of labour market equality the UK ranks fourth;

### **Finland**

- Finland is one of the leading nations in gender equality. It scores above the EU average on all the EIGE indicators, with the highest indicator in Work at 82.0;
- One of the main drivers of gender equality in Finland is the 1995 Equality Act between Women and Men;
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSAH) has responsibility of promoting gender equality across the country;
- Four bodies work for the promotion of gender equality: the Gender Equality Unit; the Ombudsman for Equality; the Council for Gender Equality; and the Gender Equality Board;
- Finland routinely updates its policies to take into consideration changes in the labour market and has developed gender equality policy up to 2020;

### **Denmark**

- Denmark was one of the first countries to embrace equal rights for women, with the right to vote brought into legislation in 1915;
- A Ministerial post for Equality was developed in 1999 and a law on gender mainstreaming passed in 2000;
- In Denmark, gender equality is perceived to be already achieved, partially as a result of women and men having an equal footing via legislation. However, there is still extensive work ongoing via legislation and policy to ensure that this 'legal' equality is replicated in a real world manner;
- One of the main provisions made to enhance gender equality in Denmark was the Gender Equality Act. The Gender Equality Act (2002) consolidated a number of other pieces of legislation;
- In Denmark a Minister carries the remit for gender equality and is responsible for the government's overall activities in the field of gender equality and the coordination of the equality work of other ministries;
- The Department identifies priority work areas for each year via a Perspectives and Action Plan. For 2013 there are four priorities:
  - Theme based efforts;
  - Gender equality assessments in the public sector;

- Gender equality as a fundamental right; and
- Gender equality in an international perspective.
- A European Parliament report found that a key factor in the development of gender equality in Denmark was a result of universal welfare systems and extensive childcare facilities;

### **Austria**

- Austria highlights the differences that can be found within a nation regarding the levels of gender equality. Whilst it has the fifth highest index for gender equality at work, it is below the EU average in general levels of gender equality;
- In order to tackle gender equality issues, Austria has adopted a number of policies, including the appointment of a Minister for Women and Gender Equality;
- In addition to a Department tasked with increasing gender equality, Austria has enshrined gender equality in its constitution. They have also linked equality issues to government department budget management;
- A National Action Plan on Gender Equality was published in 2008 for the period 2008-2013;
- The NAP set out 55 measures, detailing the department responsible, any partner organisations and the date it was expected to be completed. In March 2013, 32 measures had been fully implemented;

### **Recommendations**

- The Committee may wish to ask OFMDFM about its progress in reviewing Northern Ireland's Gender Equality Strategy and the impact it has made in improving gender equality in Northern Ireland and the Labour Market; and
- The Committee may also wish to ask the Department for Employment and Learning about its input into the strategy and its actions to improve gender equality in Northern Ireland's Labour Market.

## **3 Gender Equality in Northern Ireland**

The most recent labour market statistics available for Northern Ireland are for April to June 2013. Relevant headline statistics for this period include:<sup>1</sup>

- 70.6% of men are in employment in comparison to 62% of women. It should be noted that the same figures for the UK as a whole were 76.2% for men and 66.7% for women;
- The unemployment rate is higher for men than women (9.8% in comparison to 4.6%);
- There is a higher rate of economic inactivity amongst women than men (34.9% and 21.4% respectively); and

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<sup>1</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Labour Force Survey, <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index.htm>

- The gender pay gap continues to persist with men's gross weekly full-time pay £39 higher than women's. It should be noted however that the gap is narrowing over time.

Northern Ireland has a number of pieces of legislation in place to ensure the equal treatment of women and men within the workplace. These include:<sup>2</sup>

- The Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970;
- The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976; and
- The Maternity and Paternity Leave Regulations 1999.

In addition, Northern Ireland has a Gender Equality Strategy (GES) which runs from 2006-2016. The Strategy's vision is:<sup>3</sup>

*A society in which men and women are equally respected and valued as individuals in all of our multiple identities, sharing equality of opportunity, rights and responsibilities in all aspects of our lives.*

The Strategy has eleven key action areas which are based on consultations with representatives of women's and men's groups. In addition, they take into consideration the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Based on these key action areas, the following objectives were developed:<sup>4</sup>

- To achieve better gender disaggregated data collection. Analysis and dissemination on all aspects of women's and men's lives;
- To ensure the economic security of both men and women and address the gender inequalities which lead to poverty and promote social inclusion;
- To achieve equal value for paid work done by women and men, and promote their equitable participation in the paid and unpaid labour force;
- To improve the health of women and men, including their reproductive health;
- To achieve a gender balance on all government appointment committees, boards and other relevant official bodies;
- To ensure the active and equal participation of women and men at all levels of civil society, economy, peace building and government;
- To promote and protect the rights of girls and boys by increasing awareness of their different needs;
- To eliminate gender based violence in society; and
- To ensure women and men, including girls and boys, should have equal access to education and lifelong learning.

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<sup>2</sup> RaISe, August 2011, Potter, M, Equality and Human Rights Legislation in Northern Ireland: A Review

<sup>3</sup> OFMDFM, Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

The strategy states that gender mainstreaming and gender action measures will be used to implement the strategy. Gender mainstreaming is a tool which challenges decision-makers to question whether a policy or programme will have the same impact on women and men. Gender action measures are actions which specifically benefit either men or women, such as improved provision of childcare and targeted measures to improve women's access to the labour market.<sup>5</sup>

Please note, an updated Gender Equality Strategy was published in 2010. The Vision, Key Action Points and Objectives remain unchanged.

The GES makes use of Action Plans on Gender to provide targets for NI Government Departments. The Action Plans cover issues for both women and men.

The most recently available Action Plans on Gender are for the period 2008-2011. The Action Plan lays out a number of initiatives based on the objectives of the GES.

The GES is the main tool of the NI Executive in promoting Gender Equality. It has previously been an Action in the Programme for Government 2008-2011 (Under PSA 7, Objective 5: Promote equality and enforcement of rights).<sup>6</sup> However, it was not included within the 2011-2015 PFG, although there is a general commitment towards eliminating inequalities.

The Committee may wish to note that in response to an Assembly Question, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister stated that:<sup>7</sup>

*To a large extent the success of the Gender Equality Strategy will be judged in the light of progress demonstrated through the cross-departmental action plans, and we will review and report on performance against targets in these plans, annually.*

A review of the OFMDFM website did not find any publications related to an analysis of the initiatives laid out in either the 2006 - 2008 or the 2008 - 2011 Action Plans.

There have, however, been a number of other documents produced, including an implementation report published in June 2009. It stated that:<sup>8</sup>

*The Strategy is robustly derived from international obligations and legislative requirements, and relates closely to gender-related human rights undertakings and equality duties.*

The implementation report does not directly discuss the results of the work of the 2006 – 2008 Action Plan (such as by stating how it has met targets set out in the action plans). Rather it discusses issues from the GES in broad terms.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Northern Ireland Executive, Programme for Government 2008-2011 <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/work-of-the-executive/pfg-budget-economic-strategy/pfg/pfg-2008-2011.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, AIMS System, Assembly Question AQW 6018/08 16 April 2008

<sup>8</sup> OFMDFM, Implementing the Gender Equality Strategy: Progress Report 2006 – 2009, Monitoring and Review

A statistical publication on the GES has been issued in 2011 and 2013. The 2013 publication states that indicators for the GES were agreed through formal consultation and are used to measure change in the longer term position of women and men and:<sup>9</sup>

*...facilitate the assessment of progress in tackling gender inequalities and promoting gender equality.*

It should be noted that these indicators do not track *performance indicators which measure success in achieving specific goals and targets.*

Rather, broad, high level statistics are provided regarding issues such as education, training and health.

The implementation report states that there should be a mid-term review after five years. This review is yet to be completed.

An Assembly Question to the First and Deputy First Minister in February 2013 asked for an update on the Gender Equality Strategy received the following response:<sup>10</sup>

*A review of the Gender Equality Strategy and its associated cross departmental Action Plans is currently underway. The review, which is scheduled to be completed in April, will consider how effectively the Strategy has performed against its objectives; assess the effectiveness of the Action Plans; and make recommendations for the aims, objectives and delivery of the Strategy and Action Plans in the years remaining – 2013-16.*

A review of the Department's website did not find any publications related to this review.

However, the Minister for Employment and Learning stated in June 2013 that:<sup>11</sup>

*OFMDFM is in the process of completing an interim review of the strategy and its action plan, and it is expected that a revised strategy and action plan will be in place by autumn 2013.*

The Committee may wish to ask OFMDFM for an update on the development of the strategy and its action plans.

## 4 Gender Equality Index

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed an index which highlights the level of equality within EU 27 nations.<sup>12</sup> The index is based on six domains:

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<sup>9</sup> OFMDFM, Gender Equality Strategy Statistics: 2013 Update, <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/gender-equality-strategy-statistics-update-july-2013.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, AIMS System, Assembly Question AQO 3557/11-15 21 February 2013

<sup>11</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, 4 June 2013, Ministerial Statement Minister for Employment and Learning: Gender Issues

<sup>12</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>

- **Work:** relates to the position of women and men in the European labour market;
- **Money:** examines inequalities in the financial resources and economic situation of women and men;
- **Knowledge:** shows differences between women and men in terms of education and training;
- **Time:** Focuses on the trade-off between economic, care and other social activities (including cultural, civic, etc.);
- **Power:** Examines differences between women's and men's representation in the political and economic spheres; and
- **Health:** focuses on differences between women and men in terms of health status and access to health structures.

The EIGE also monitors Intersecting Inequalities and Violence.

The table below provides an example of the indicators. The index assigns a score from 1 (total inequality) to 100 (full equality).

**Table 1:** Gender Equality Index

Domain	EU 27	UK	Sweden	Romania
<b>Work</b>	69	76.6	78.6	60.4
<b>Money</b>	68.9	74.3	80.2	39
<b>Knowledge</b>	48.9	68.8	66.3	28.8
<b>Time</b>	38.8	43.2	63.9	17.8
<b>Power</b>	38	35.2	74.3	24.9
<b>Health</b>	90.1	95.4	93.1	84
<b>Index</b>	54	60.4	74.3	35.3

The UK ranks fifth highest in the EU27 for gender equality.

The top five nations for gender equality are (in order of highest level of equality):

- Sweden;
- Denmark;
- Finland;
- Netherlands; and
- UK.

In terms of equality within the work domain, there are some variations. It runs from a low of 49.9 for Bulgaria to 82.2 for Finland. The top five EU nations in this domain are:

- Finland (82.0);
- Denmark (81.6);
- Sweden (78.6);
- UK (76.6); and
- Austria (73.9).

This paper will discuss examples of the systems in operation in these nations in order to identify 'good practice' in promoting gender equality within the labour market.

The paper will discuss Finland, Denmark and Austria. Sweden is not discussed as the Nordic states share a number of policies and approaches.

## 5 Finland

Finland is one of the leading nations in gender equality. It scores above the EU average on all the EIGE indicators, with the highest indicator in Work at 82.0.

Participation in employment is particularly high in Finland for women, with 47.8% of working age women in full time equivalent employment. This is comparison to a figure of 55.7% of men. The major differences within the labour market in Finland are within occupation segregation. For example, 38.1% of women are employed within Education, Health and Social Work Activities, against only 8% of men.

One major issue in Finland is the Gender Wage gap. Mean monthly earnings for women are €2,236 and €2,823 for men.

In June 2012, 43% of Finnish MP's and 47% of government ministers were female. In comparison, in the USA 17% of the Senate and House of Representatives are female. In the UK, 22% of MP's are female. In Northern Ireland 20% of MLAs are female and 80% male.<sup>13</sup>

One of the main drivers of gender equality in Finland is the 1995 Equality Act between Women and Men. The act carries a number of stipulations, including:

- The obligations of Authorities on promoting equality in all their activities;
- Quotas in national and municipal organisations;
- The obligations of employers and educational institutions, such as the use of equality plans for those with more than 30 employees;
- Prohibition of discrimination;
- Prohibition of sexual or gender based harassment; and
- Compensation in cases of harassment or discrimination.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and health (MSAH) has responsibility of promoting gender equality across the country.

Four bodies work for the promotion of gender equality:

- **The Gender Equality Unit (MSAH):** Aims to promote gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination in Finland. The unit prepares and implements the Finnish governments gender equality policy and developed gender equality legislation;

<sup>13</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, AIMS, Members Statistics.

- **The Ombudsman for Equality:** Independent authority who are responsible for promoting gender equality. Provides guidance and advice on rights and supervises the protection of gender minorities against discrimination. Also monitors the implementation of equality between women and men in different sectors of society;
- **The Council for Gender Equality:** Advisory body within state administration. It is appointed for the electoral term of Parliament in accordance with the relative strengths of the parliamentary parties. Contributes to decision making and identified and takes up new gender equality issues;
- **The Gender Equality Board:** Independent board of the MSAH that supervises compliance with the Gender Equality Act. The Board gives opinions to courts about the application of the act.

In addition to this there are a number of organisations with a role in promoting gender equality:

- The Finnish Parliament has an equality issues sub-committee;
- Occupational Health and Safety authorities supervise compliance with equality legislation in the work place; and
- Employers and Higher Education institutions are obliged under the Equality Act to draw up equality plans for promoting gender equality. This comes into action if they have more than 30 employees.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the main strategies used by the MSAH to promote gender inequality are:

- **Gender Mainstreaming:** This aims to ensure that gender perspectives are included in all areas of decision-making. The authorities must ascertain in advance what the gender impact is of activities and decisions, to prevent direct and indirect discrimination and actively promote gender equality. In addition, civil servants are trained in the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

The Equality Act and the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality entrust the authorities with planning their own initiatives for gender mainstreaming. All Ministries are charged with setting up equality working groups to plan and carry out mainstreaming. Finnish guidelines for drafting legislation stipulate that gender impacts are assessed in all such activity.

- **Equal Pay:** The government and the central labour market organisations have taken on a commitment to promote equal pay. The aim is to have the gender pay gap reduced from 20% in 2006 to 15% by 2015. In 2012 the pay gap was 17%. Strategies to tackle the pay gap include:
  - Contract policy;
  - Decreasing gender based segregation in occupations;
  - Development of pay systems; and

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, May 2011, Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality: Comments paper – Finland, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange\\_of\\_good\\_practice\\_be/fi\\_comments\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_be/fi_comments_paper_en.pdf)

- Support for women's career development.
- **Gender Glasses:** This is an approach used to ensure legislation, policy or strategy is developed with consideration for both the female and male perspective. Gender glasses can be used in all preparatory work, for example in matters involving legislation and decision-making, and in preparation of broad projects, programmes and measures.

It should be noted that gender mainstreaming has been in action in Finland since 1980 (although it was known as 'equality permeation').

Despite having the highest level of gender equality in the EU27 (as determined by the EIGE index), Finland is continuing to develop policy in order to achieve full equality. Policy objectives for up to 2020 include:<sup>15</sup>

- Improving gender equality planning provisions in the Equality Act;
- Enhancing non-discrimination protections through legislation;
- Resources for gender equality matters to be increased;
- Regulations on gender mainstreaming will be reinforced;
- Equal representation of genders will be promoted among senior management in central government administration and in the private sector; and
- A high employment rate will be aimed at through gender-aware economic and employment policy.

## 6 Denmark

As with the other Nordic countries, Denmark was one of the first countries to embrace equal rights for women, with the right to vote brought into legislation in 1915. A Ministerial post for Equality was developed in 1999 and a law on gender mainstreaming passed in 2000.<sup>16</sup>

On the EIGE index, Denmark is second highest in terms of gender equality in the labour market. Employment segregation is marginally less pronounced than in Finland with 43.3% of women employees working in education, health and social work activities in comparison to 13.5% of male employees.

It should be noted that in Denmark, gender equality is perceived to be already achieved, partially as a result of women and men having an equal footing via legislation.<sup>17</sup> However, there is still extensive work ongoing via legislation and policy to ensure that this 'legal' equality is replicated in a real world manner.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2011, Government Report on Gender Equality,

[http://www.stm.fi/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=2765155&name=DLFE-15811.pdf](http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=2765155&name=DLFE-15811.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>

<sup>17</sup> European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2011, The policy on gender equality in Denmark, [http://www.edge.aau.dk/digitalAssets/60/60340\\_the-policy-of-gender-equality-in-denmark.pdf](http://www.edge.aau.dk/digitalAssets/60/60340_the-policy-of-gender-equality-in-denmark.pdf)

One of the main provisions made to enhance gender equality in Denmark was the Gender Equality Act. The Gender Equality Act (2002) consolidated a number of other pieces of legislation. Its main aim is to:<sup>18</sup>

*Promote gender equality, including equal integration, equal influence and equal opportunities in all functions in society on the basis of women's and men's equal status. The purpose of the Act is also to counteract direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of gender and to counteract sexual harassment.*

The actions of the Act include:

- Prohibition against equal treatment on the grounds of gender;
- Measures to promote gender equality;
- Establish obligations for public authorities;
- Set quotas on gender compositions of public committees, commissions and similar bodies (i.e. that they should consist of an equal number of women and men);
- Boards, assemblies of representatives or similar collective management bodies within the public administration should have an equal gender balance; and
- Establishment of a gender equality board.

The Act established formal equality for women and men in Denmark, with everyone having the same and equal rights under the law.

In Denmark a Minister carries the remit for gender equality and is responsible for the governments overall activities in the field of gender equality and the coordination of the equality work of other ministries.

Ministerial tasks include:<sup>19</sup>

- Develop the governments gender equality policy;
- Place focus on special action areas;
- Draw up an annual report and an action plan for gender equality for the Folketing (The Danish National Parliament);
- Administer the Act on Gender Equality and monitor gender composition n councils, boards and committees.

The Department of Gender Equality acts as the secretariat for the Minister and has a number of obligations under the Act:

- Launch special gender equality initiatives;
- Co-ordination and development of inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming work;
- Set out government gender equality policy for the year ahead; and

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Legislation, [http://www.stm.fi/en/gender\\_equality/legislation](http://www.stm.fi/en/gender_equality/legislation)

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2011, Government Report on Gender Equality, [http://www.stm.fi/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=2765155&name=DLFE-15811.pdf](http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=2765155&name=DLFE-15811.pdf)

- Provide information about the Act, in the form of specific advice to ministries.

The Department identifies priority work areas for each year via a Perspectives and Action Plan. For 2013 there are four priorities:

- Theme based efforts;
- Gender equality assessments in the public sector;
- Gender equality as a fundamental right; and
- Gender equality in an international perspective.

A report for the European Parliament on gender equality in Denmark found that:

*Developments in gender equality in Denmark have, in many areas, been achieved through women-friendly welfare measures rather than a progressive gender equality policy.*<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the report found that a key factor in the development of gender equality, especially in terms of women's labour market participation was a result of universal welfare systems and extensive childcare facilities.<sup>21</sup>

With the perception that gender equality is largely a reality for the majority of women in Denmark, the focus has shifted from women to men and on ethnic minority women. For women from ethnic minorities government policy is turning towards issues such as arranged and forced marriages, honour violence and lack of integration within the labour market.<sup>22</sup>

For men, the focus is on areas such as access to paternity leave, the educational achievement of boys and ethnic minority men and their rights.

## 7 Austria

Austria highlights the differences that can be found within a nation regarding the levels of gender equality. Whilst it has the fifth highest index for equality at work, it is below the EU average in general levels of equality.

The EIGE found that in Work, Money and Health Austria rates fairly high, but is significantly lower in terms of Knowledge, Power and Time.<sup>23</sup>

Labour market participation for women and men in Denmark is markedly different:<sup>24</sup>

- Women account for 85% of part time jobs and only 35% of full time jobs;

<sup>20</sup> European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2011, The policy on gender equality in Denmark, [http://www.edge.aau.dk/digitalAssets/60/60340\\_the-policy-of-gender-equality-in-denmark.pdf](http://www.edge.aau.dk/digitalAssets/60/60340_the-policy-of-gender-equality-in-denmark.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

- Women are employed in mainly precarious employment relationships characterised by low wages, atypical employment and few working hours;
- There is extensive vertical and horizontal segregation with the Austrian LM; and
- There is a high gender wage gap of 22%.

The 2010 Report on Women<sup>25</sup> found that the large pay gap in Austria was mainly a result of occupational segregation, with women mostly attending commercial and business schools. A review of apprenticeships found that 70% of young women chose from just ten apprenticed trades, with 0.1% of Mason apprentices and 94.3% of hairdresser apprentices female.

Gender segregation in training for trades is not restricted to vocational courses. In Higher Education 40% of women studied Arts and Humanities courses with only 6% choosing technical subjects.

In order to tackle gender equality issues, Austria has adopted a number of policies.

As with Finland and Denmark, Austria has appointed a Minister who has a specific remit in delivering gender equality. The Minister has a Division (Department) tasked with providing secretariat support.

The Division for Women and Gender Equality has six departments:<sup>26</sup>

- Gender equality policies and legal matters;
- Public relations, public management and promotion of women's projects;
- Equal treatment in the private and public sectors;
- Violence against women and women specific legislation;
- Women's service, budgetary and parliamentary co-ordination; and
- Socio-economic equality, international and European Union Affairs.

In addition to a Department tasked with increasing gender equality, Austria has enshrined gender equality in its constitution. They have also linked equality issues to government department budget management. As stated in the National Action Plan on Gender Equality:<sup>27</sup>

*Every ministry will be obliged to link its budgeting to the definition of effect targets – including an equality target – and to specify measures for pursuing these impact targets, among them a gender equality measure.*

The National Action Plan covers the period 2008 – 2013<sup>28</sup> and has the overall aim:

*To improve the position of women in the labour market, reduce gender-specific differences in employment, in its quantitative and qualitative*

<sup>25</sup> Ministry for Women and Gender Equality, 2010, Report on Women, <http://www.bka.gv.at/site/7207/default.aspx>

<sup>26</sup> Bundeskanzleramt: Österreich, Women and Equality, <http://www.bka.gv.at/site/6811/default.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> Ministry for Women and Gender Equality, National Action Plan: Gender Equality in the Labour Market,

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

*aspects and to make progress on the path to true equality of women and men in the labour market.*

The plan has four strategic goals:

- Diversifying educational paths and career choices, and providing gender sensitive careers guidance;
- Increasing labour force participation and full time employment, reducing gender specific differences in employment, supporting transitions to full time employment, skills training for women, reconciliation of work and care-giving responsibilities;
- More women in leadership positions; and
- Reducing the gender pay gap.

The NAP set out 55 measures, detailing the department responsible, any partner organisations and the date it was expected to be completed. In March 2013, 32 measures had been fully implemented.

## 8 Summary

The three nations discussed above have a number of similar approaches in improving gender equality in the labour market and in society in general:

- Ministers and Departments specifically tasked with tackling gender equality issues;
- Gender equality legislation that can include actions such as quotas in companies and board rooms;
- Strategies that are regularly assessed based on performance indicators;
- Strategies that are updated to tackle issues as they become apparent; and
- In the case of Finland and Denmark, extensive welfare systems that encourage women's labour market participation.

In light of this, the Committee may wish to ask OFMDFM about its progress in reviewing Northern Ireland's Gender Equality Strategy and the impact it has made in improving gender equality in Northern Ireland in general and in the labour market. The Committee may also wish to ask the Department for Employment and Learning about its input into the strategy and its actions to improve gender equality in NI's labour market.