

Practices for Preventing Pregnancy Discrimination and Parenting Leave Discrimination

Objective

To identify situations involving pregnancy and parenting leave discrimination and address them, to implement practices that prevent discrimination, and to promote equal and humane treatment in the workplace.

Why?

[The Act on Equality between Women and Men](#) prohibits discrimination based on pregnancy and parenting leave. However, according to the report *Pregnancy Discrimination in Finland*, one in four pregnant employees has experienced pregnancy discrimination, and nearly half of those in fixed-term employment have faced it. Such discrimination occurs across all levels of education, employer sectors, industries, types of employment contracts, and positions in the labor market.

According to the Ombudsman for Equality in Finland, around half of all discrimination-related contacts in working life in 2024 concerned pregnancy and parenting leave discrimination. Pregnancy and parenting leave discrimination is not always recognized in workplaces.

Recognize the Pregnancy and Parenting Leave Discrimination

According to the The Act on Equality between Women and Men:

- Direct gender-based discrimination includes, for example, placing someone at a disadvantage due to pregnancy or childbirth.
- Indirect gender-based discrimination includes, for example, placing someone at a disadvantage because of parenthood or family responsibilities.

Examples of discrimination related to pregnancy or parenting leave include situations where:

- A pregnant employee or someone planning parenting leave is not hired, even when equally qualified as the selected candidate.
- Career development or salary progression slows or stops due to pregnancy or parenting leave.
- A fixed-term employment contract is not renewed just before parenting leave begins, or its duration is limited to end when parenting leave starts – even though the employer still has a need for the employee’s work.
- An employment contract is terminated during the probationary period after the pregnancy becomes known, even though the employee has performed well.
- An employee returning from parenting leave finds that their job duties have changed, or more demanding tasks have been assigned to someone else without a justified reason.

Men who take parenting leave, as well as employees belonging to sexual or gender minorities, may also face discrimination. Childless employees and those hoping to have children – such as employees undergoing fertility treatments or adoption processes – may experience inappropriate comments or treatment. Individuals belonging to minority groups may face multiple or intersectional discrimination.

- Childless women of childbearing age may face inappropriate treatment in working life if it is assumed they will take parenting leave.
- Employees undergoing fertility treatments may involuntarily reveal their family-planning intentions through medical certificates or absence reasons – and may then experience inappropriate treatment.

- Fathers may experience parenting leave discrimination when taking longer leaves. Employers may assume they will not take leave, resulting in a lack of encouragement or even negative attitudes. There may also be a lack of role models for fathers taking longer parenting leaves. Fathers may, like mothers, miss out on career opportunities or important projects. Caregiving responsibilities of fathers may also be viewed as an exception rather than a normal part of parenthood.

Discrimination has consequences. It weakens commitment to the workplace, increases intentions to change jobs, and reduces motivation. In addition to professional consequences, discrimination can also have health impacts, such as stress and other mental strain.

Examples of Practices to Prevent Discrimination

Pregnancy and parenting leave discrimination can be prevented by increasing awareness and the ability to recognize discriminatory situations.

There are various solutions both for preventing discrimination and for addressing situations when they occur. Below you will find practices from which you can select those that best suit your workplace. These measures should also be recorded in the workplace gender equality plan.

Processes and Guidelines

- Develop clear workplace guidelines on processes related to parenting leave, such as applying for leave, returning to work, and arranging substitutes.
- Prepare recruitment guidelines and clearly list prohibited questions – such as questions about an applicant’s family situation or family plans.
- Review practices related to fixed-term contracts. Ensure that employment relationships are not ended in a discriminatory manner before parenting leave, and that decisions about extending fixed-term contracts or offering permanent employment are based on objective criteria, not on family situations.
- Ensure planned and structured return-to-work procedures from parenting leave: agree in advance on tasks, orientation, career development needs, and types of support.

Strengthening Supervisors’ Competence

- Provide training to strengthen supervisors’ understanding of the obligations of the Equality Act, how to identify discrimination and discriminatory situations, and how to support employees taking or on parenting leave.
- Encourage supervisors and the entire work community to discuss parenting leave and different family situations in a positive manner.

- Support both parents' ability and right to stay home to care for a sick child (temporary childcare leave).
- Highlight the benefits of equal parenthood and share information on how the accumulation of caregiving responsibilities and career interruptions negatively affect women's career progression, pay development, and pension accrual.

An Open, Trusting, and Family-Friendly Atmosphere

- Build an open and family-friendly discussion culture in the workplace. Encourage open dialogue about hopes of starting a family, parenting leave, and caregiving responsibilities.
- Challenge assumptions that only mothers take parenting leave and support shared caregiving responsibilities among all parents – including fathers and other non-birthing parents.
- Make it clear that negative comments, dismissive attitudes, or jokes related to pregnancy or parenting leave are unacceptable.
- Strengthen a work culture in which pregnancies and parenting leaves are seen as natural parts of life, not as exceptions or added burdens.

Strengthening and Monitoring the Structures

- Assess in staff equality or personnel surveys whether employees have experienced or observed pregnancy or parenting leave discrimination and, if so, in what situations.
- Address any identified cases of discrimination and develop solutions to prevent similar situations in the future.
- Encourage employees to seek advice from relevant authorities when needed.
- Include concrete practices and a clear model for preventing pregnancy and parenting leave discrimination in the workplace's gender equality plan.
- Monitor regularly and evaluate yearly the effectiveness of the practices through management or the workplace equality group. Update and develop the practices as needed.
- Ensure collaboration between occupational health services, employee representatives, and the occupational safety representative regarding the planning and monitoring of measures that prevent discrimination.

See the other method cards

- [Practices for Reconciling Work and Family](#)
- [Parenting Leave Practices](#)
- [Practices That Consider Different Family Forms and Situations](#)
- [Family-Friendliness as Part of the Workplace Gender Equality Plan](#)

Sources and further information

- [Act on Equality between Women and Men | 609/1986 | Lainsäädäntö | Finlex](#)
- [Discrimination due to pregnancy and family leave | Ombudsman for Equality](#)
- [Pregnancy discrimination in Finland Statistical survey 2024:20 | Ministry of Social Affairs and Health \(in Finnish\)](#)

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