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Theme: Gender equality



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Gender equality in the Nordic region – where are we?

We have been writing about gender equality for decades. Boring? Absolutely not, because it is as relevant as ever. This year, the Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer shows the road to a gender-equal Nordic region is long. But this is about more than statistics and barometers – it is about individuals' opportunities and choices.

EDITORIAL

26.02.2025

BY LINE SCHEISTRØEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"I want to become a sailor," said the girl. She was around 16 and a student on one of the few school ships sailing along the Norwegian coast.

Not that I, a lucky journalist onboard, could quite understand that dream there and then, because the Northern Norway evening was already dark, wet and cold.

The young girl did her night shift in the engine room. I went to sleep in my cabin. When we met again the morning after, she told me more. Life at sea had sounded scary at first, and being a sailor perhaps was not something for girls and at least not here?

But her mother had urged her on and repeatedly told her: Why should girls not become sailors and make good money?

"I enjoy the engine room. I had hardly done any mechanical stuff before, but I am learning," the girl told me.

She was one of very few girls onboard, but they were all well looked after on the school ship.

"We are treated as gold," she said.

When the Nordic Labour Journal started work on this gender equality issue, this story from nearly ten years ago popped in to my head.

Because it is interesting to look at education from a gender equality perspective. This time we pose more questions and get many good answers in stories from Sweden and Finland.

There are now considerably more female than male university graduates, especially in the districts. This is the case across the Nordics and many women have secured a better life with higher employment and wage levels as a result.

"Many countries have actively invested in women and encouraged them to 'make your mark' and 'get an education'. This has had results," says Lovisa Broström, a researcher at the University of Gothenburg.

The Finnish researcher Harry Lunabba believes gender equality efforts are still needed in Finnish schools. He calls for an ambitious gender equality programme.

I still wonder whether the girl I met on that school ship chose a career at sea. I never found out, but I did want to find out whether men are still dominating at sea. And yes, men still dominate that sector, confirms Lene Dyring at the Norwegian Seafarers Union.

In some marine occupations, there are close to no women at all. This does something to the workplace and the working environment.

The Nordic project REDO Lookout, initiated by the Swedish Maritime Administration, focuses on creating good working environments for both women and men.

The project is funded by the Nordic Gender Equality Fund, one of several tools used by Nordic Information on Gender (NIKK) in their work on gender equality issues on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Gender equality has been on the Nordic agenda for more than 50 years, but remains as relevant as ever.

The project "Equal pay for equal work in the Nordic region" is being finalised right now. It aims to reduce pay gaps between women and men in the Nordics by promoting dialogue between the countries and the social partners.

Because gender pay gaps remain despite having been a prioritised gender equality issue for a long time.

The Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer shows that the number of the 24 most important positions in the Nordic region held by women and men remains approximately the same as last year.

Iceland, which for the first time ever has a female prime minister and president, contributed strongly to that result.

But do women in a considerable number of positions of power – like right now in Iceland – automatically mean society as a whole is equal?

Absolutely not, say researchers in Iceland we spoke to.

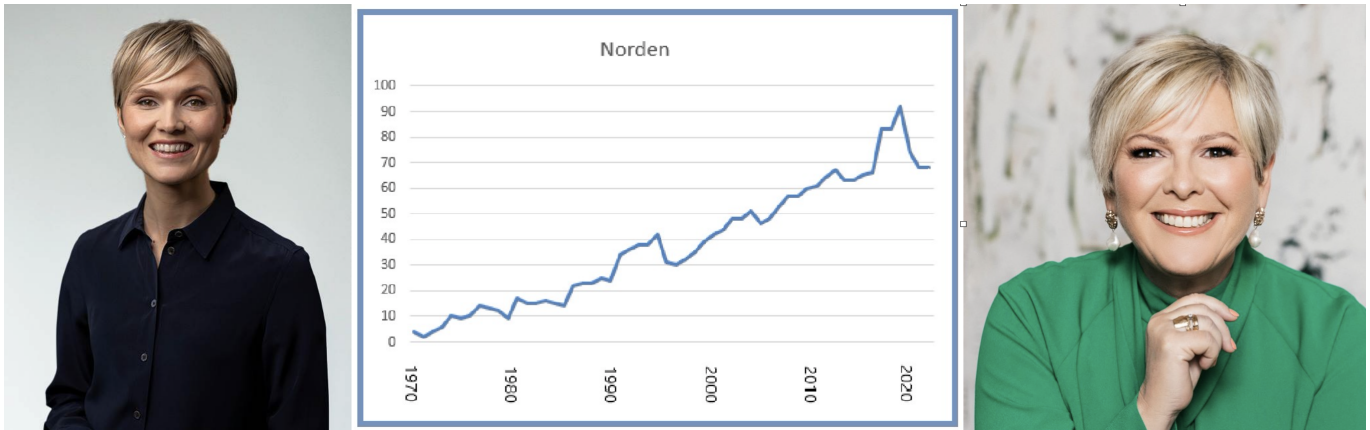
When basic rights are threatened, we in the Nordic region believe it is important to stand up for our values.

And that is precisely what women and men will do on 8 March this year. The main paroles for the march in Norway's capital Oslo have been decided on long ago.

They include well-known themes like equal pay and the fight against a gender-divided labour market, but there will also be calls for women's right to protective equipment adapted to the female body.

This tells me the Nordic Labour Journal around this time next year will still be writing about gender equality, and that it will remain an important topic.

Happy reading!



Gender equality barometer 2025

Gender equality in the top positions of power in the Nordic region in 2025 remains at a low level in NLJ's gender equality barometer. Women get 68 points – 100 points mean full equality. But it would be even worse if Iceland did not for the first time in history elect both a female prime minister and a female president.

THEME

26.02.2025

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

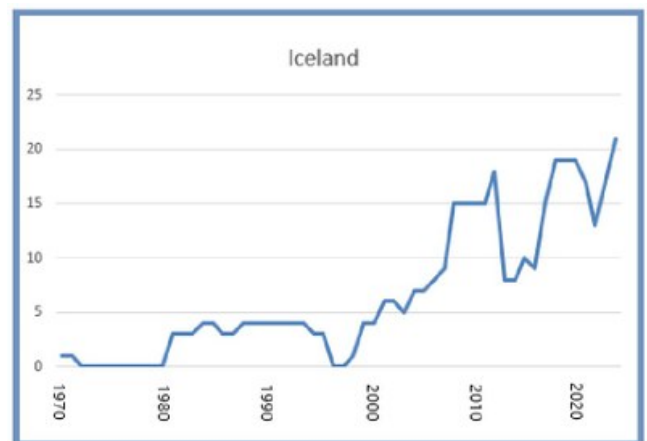
Every year, the barometer takes stock to see whether a woman or man holds 24 different positions of power. The point of measurement is 8 am on 8 March. There might be changes before that time.

Compared to 2022, when Nordic women scored 92 points, we are still in a deep slump. The four biggest countries have gone back slightly or stood still.

Denmark's Mette Frederiksen has strengthened her position as the face of the Nordics on the international stage, albeit not at the level of Olof Palme or Gro Harlem Brundtland.

But women do best in Iceland. Both the President and Prime Minister are, for the first time ever, a woman.

Only one of the Nordic trade union confederation presidents is a woman, while employer organisations are exclusively led by men.



Iceland

Since the last survey of 8 March 2024, there have been quite a few government reshuffles across the Nordics.

The biggest changes have taken place in Iceland after Katrín Jakobsdóttir decided to step down as Prime Minister and party leader on 9 April 2024 and announce fresh elections.

Before that, she ran for President on 1 June but lost to Halla Tómasdóttir who became the country's second female President.

Bjarni Benediktsson, who took over as Prime Minister when Katrín Jakobsdóttir stepped down, failed to keep together the coalition that had governed since 2017 and called a snap election.

It was held on 30 November 2024. The Social Democrats made big gains and Krístrún Frostadóttir was asked to form a government. It comprises seven women and four men from three different parties.

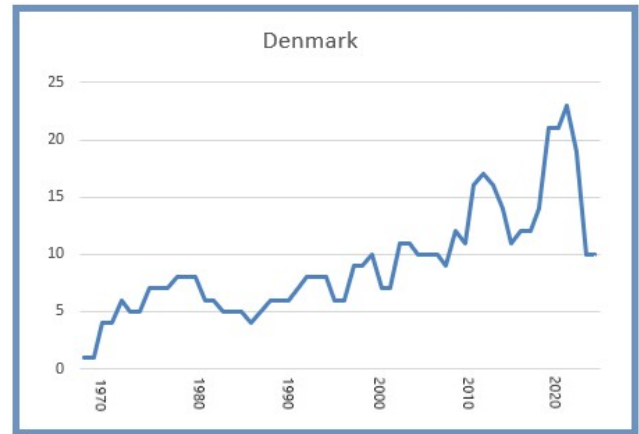
There have been no changes among the social partners. The Icelandic Federation of State and Municipal Employees is still led by Sonja Ýr Þorbergasdóttir, while the Confederation of University Graduates in Iceland is led by Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir.

Church elections were also held in 2024 in Iceland, where Guðrún Karls Helgudóttir was elected bishop. She followed Agnes M. Sigurðardóttir, who had held the position for 12 years and became the country's second female bishop.

Iceland also has a female national police commissioner, Sigríður Björk Guðjónsdóttir, which gives the country 21 points in total – one more than what is needed for full gender equality in the NLJ gender equality barometer.

The first Nordic country to gain more than 20 points was Norway when Erna Solberg became Prime Minister in 2017. With women in the positions of prime minister, finance minister and foreign minister, Norway scored over 20 points for six years in a row.

Denmark got more than 20 points for three years from 2020 to 2022. That was while Queen Margrethe was head of state, Mette Frederiksen was prime minister and Lizette Risaard LO president. Sweden got 20 points in 2022.



Denmark

Mette Frederiksen has been Denmark's Prime Minister for nearly six years now (five years and 253 days on 8 March). She has increasingly become the international face of the Nordics.

She represented the Nordic and Baltic regions during Emmanuel Macron's Paris crisis meeting on 17 February. It was convened after US President Donald Trump wanted to keep Europe outside negotiations with Russia about Ukraine.

Trump's desire to take over Greenland will also keep Frederiksen in the spotlight.

Female leaders are otherwise thin on the ground in Denmark, at least in the positions we include in our gender equality barometer.

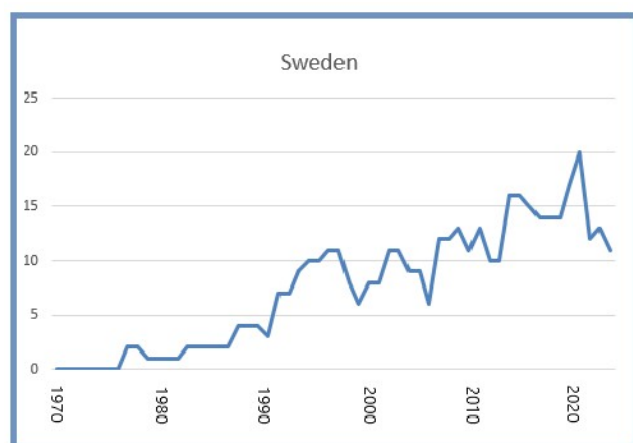
There was a government reshuffle on 29 August 2024, which also saw the number of government ministers increase from 23 to 25 – the highest ever. There are nine women, including the Prime Minister, but that only makes up 36 per cent.

The two new ministers' portfolios include civil preparedness and to execute the agreement on "the green tripartite cooperation". This was an agreement between the government, two employer organisations, two trade unions, the Danish Nature Agency and Municipalities of Denmark.

The aim is to reduce emissions from agriculture. 40 billion Danish kroner (€5.36m) have been allocated to plant 250,000 hectares of forest, among other things.

Sophie Hæstorp Andersen took over as Minister of Social Affairs from Astrid Krag. Christina Egelund took over as Minister of Education from Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil. These two changes between two women did not therefore change the number of points.

Denmark gets only ten points this year, the same as in 2024.



Sweden

Sweden saw a minor change in its government when Minister for Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström stepped down on 10 September 2024. He was replaced by Maria Malm Stenergard, who was previously the Minister for Migration.

This gives Sweden two more points in this year's barometer. However, on 18 May, Susanna Gideonsson stepped down as President of Swedish LO, a post worth four points in the barometer. She retired for personal reasons and was replaced by Johan Lindholm.

That means overall Sweden loses two points and ends up with 11.

It is debatable whether LO has so much power that the position of President should be awarded four points. In Denmark, LO and the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark merged into the Danish Trade Union Confederation and is therefore awarded six points in our barometer.

There is nothing in Sweden to indicate a similar merger is on the cards. There are three major central organisations. LO, which organises the workers, The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (Saco) which represents academics.

LO has lost members for many years, however, while the other organisations have seen an increase in their memberships. There are now only 160,000 fewer members in the LO than in the TCO. If TCO overtakes LO, should that result in more points?

Saco has also gained members lately. Their President of 14 years, Göran Arrius, will step down after this autumn's general assembly. The deadline for nominations just passed.

Chances are the new President will be a woman since the President of the Swedish Medical Association Sofia Rydgren Stale is considered to be a strong candidate.



Finland

There have not been any major changes in Finland. The current government is led by Petteri Orpo, who came to power on 20 June 2023 when Sanna Marin decided to step down after three years and 192 days as Finland's third female Prime Minister.

Orpo's coalition government comprises four parties and 19 ministers. 12 are women, which represents 63 per cent. Two of the most important posts – ministers of finance and foreign affairs – are held by women; Elina Valtonen and Riikka Purra respectively.

There have been seven changes of ministers since the government came to power – one because the Swedish People's Party of Finland changed their party leader.

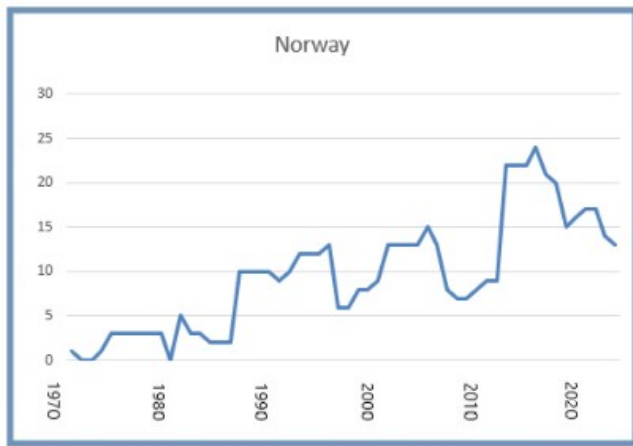
Anna-Maja Henriksson served as Minister of Justice for a long time in three different coalitions but became Minister for Education in Orpo's government. On 5 July, she left the post for the new party leader Anders Adlercreutz.

On 24 January, Sari Multala from the National Coalition Party became Minister of Climate and the Environment. She was previously the Minister of Science and Culture, a post taken over by Mari-Leena Talvitie from the same political party.

The government changes mean Finland lose one point and end up on 13, which is surprisingly low considering the number of women in government.

But Finland has no women in leadership positions among the social partners, except for Mari Löfgren who leads Akava, the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland.

There are no women in the symbolic positions of power either, which explains Finland's 13 points.



Norway

Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre has succeeded in turning around record-low support for his Labour Party in an unprecedented manner. A poll published by the VG newspaper on 11 February this year gives the party 28.7 per cent, up 8.5 per cent from the last poll.

There are two explanations. Jens Stoltenberg said yes to becoming the new Minister of Finance and the Centre Party left the coalition government on 4 February this year.

Støre began his period as head of government on 14 October 2021. It comprised 20 ministers including himself. Eight of these were from the Centre party and 12 from Labour.

Besides Jonas Gahr Støre, only Minister of Transport Jon-Ivar Nygård has held his position until today. Only Tonje Brenna, Jan Christian Vestre and Espen Barth Eide are part of the original team.

Today's Norwegian government is made up of ten women and ten men. None of the posts that score highest in our barometer are held by women, But Tonje Brenna is Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, which is said to manage one-third of the budget.

She is also one of the Labour Party's two deputy leaders.

Compared with 8 March 2024, Norway has gained one female minister, Cecilie Myrseth – the Minister of Trade and Industry. But since Marie Benedicte Bjørnland is no longer the national police commissioner, there is no difference in points.

Norway ends up with 14 points, the same as in 2024.

In recent months, there has been a power struggle primarily between LO on one side and the employers' organisation NHO on the other. The dispute has centred around the agreement on an inclusive working life, the so-called IA agreement, which was first introduced in 2001.

The goal was to reduce sick leave and increase employment among older workers and people with disabilities—without Norway implementing unpaid sick leave days.

LO's leader, Peggy Følsvik, issued an ultimatum: she refused to sign the IA agreement if the rules for sick leave were changed. And she got her way.



Iceland: Equality must be fought in every sector

In Iceland, women are now in a majority in the government coalition, and all three government party leaders are women. Many women also hold major public positions. In general, Iceland is considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. Yet despite the good progress, experts say that in many areas, Iceland is a long way from reaching equality.

THEME

26.02.2025

TEXT: HALLGRÍMUR INDRÍÐASON

For a long time, Iceland has considered itself to be a world leader in gender equality. And when you look at big public leadership positions, women can be quite pleased with their share.

The Chief Police Commissioner, the Reykjavik Police Commissioner, the Bishop of Iceland and the Director of Health are all women, to name but a few.

More recently, there have been some major political changes. In May, a woman was elected President for the first time in 30 years. After the parliamentary elections, a woman took over as Prime Minister.



Halla Tómasdóttir won the Presidential election in Iceland last year. This is the second time in history a woman holds the post. (Photo: Halla Tomasdottir's public website)

And she was not alone. The new government coalition comprises three parties, all led by women. Seven of eleven cabinet ministers are women.

To add to that, it is very likely that the next leader of the conservative Independence Party will be a woman after its annual congress later this month. This would be a first for the party that has been Iceland's largest for most of the time since its formation in 1929.

Borgerður Jennýjardóttir Einarsdóttir, Professor of gender studies at the University of Iceland, says this is a clear example of how things are going in the right direction when it comes to gender equality in Iceland.

"What I find interesting is that women's political activity increased much slower in Iceland than in other Nordic countries. In 1983, the women's share among parliament members increased from 5 per cent to 15 per cent.

"That was mainly because of the success of a new party, The Women's Alliance, and the effect it had on other parties that had more women running.

"There was another big jump in 1999 when the women's share increased from 25 per cent to 35 per cent in parliament, and then another in 2009 after the financial crisis, when the share rose to 43 per cent."



Borgerður Jennýjardóttir Einarsdóttir is Professor of gender studies at the University of Iceland. (Photo: Islands universitet)

Einarsdóttir says other Nordic countries were way ahead of Iceland, for example by arriving at more than 30 per cent female representation in parliament.

"We were almost a decade behind in reaching that goal. But since then, women's share in parliament has grown rapidly in Iceland. This is certainly an indication that things are going in the right direction, but that doesn't mean we have equality in all areas in Iceland."

Slow change for court judges

The trend has been the same in the public sector in general, as previously mentioned. But not everywhere.

"When we look at directors of public institutions, the women's share is good, there are still a bit more men than women in these positions. That share is, however, much better than among court judges, especially on the Supreme Court.

"This seems to change very slowly. And even though there is a lot of focus on the women who lead these public institutions – they almost become a token – the majority of the directors are still men.

"So these are only gradual steps towards equality. Women are not taking over the country at all as some people seem to think," Einarsdóttir says.

When asked where the biggest equality challenges lie, Einarsdóttir names the economy as an example.

"Men control nearly everything there, for example, companies' boards. Recently, a law introduced a 40 per cent gender quota for boards of companies with more than 50 employees.

"Those companies have gone in the right direction but not the companies the law doesn't apply to. Also, this has not affected the women's share in senior management.

"That was the main purpose of introducing such quotas, which has also been stated by the EU. This has not happened. So it looks like we have to focus on reform in each sector."

Einarsdóttir adds that even though there is a quota on board members, it does not apply to chairpeople of the boards. So both chairpeople and managers are still men by and large.

The first woman was not hired as a senior manager in a registered company until 2022, but previously, women have been directors at the time of a company being registered.

Just 21 per cent female managing directors

Ásta Dís Óladóttir, a professor at the Business Faculty at The University of Iceland, has been monitoring the share of women in business for years.

"The World Economic Forum has listed Iceland as having the smallest gender gap for the last 15 years. But when it comes to women's economic participation, we are in 7th place and in terms of management positions and decision-making we are in 44th place."



Ásta Dís Óladóttir is a professor at the Business Faculty at The University of Iceland. (Photo: Islands universitet)

She lists more examples of how the current situation.

“Women make up 66 per cent of university graduates but only 21 per cent of managing directors. Around 30 per cent of managing directors of listed companies are women.

“Our researchers have shown that gender bias in recruitment processes hinders equal opportunities among top managers. Women invest less and start fewer companies than men.

“We have also found out that men on the boards of listed companies believe that gender ratios in management positions will level out on their own. Women just need to be patient for another 10-15 years.”

Einarsdóttir points out that many people believe power is moving from politics to the market.

“This may sound like a conspiracy theory, but the assumption is it becomes easier to increase the women’s share in the public sector when you don’t have as many things under its control.

“An example of this is the financial deregulation that took place before the financial crisis, which brought a lot of power to the market. This is just a thought, I have no real sources to back this up.”

Gender-divided labour market needs addressing

Einarsdóttir says there is no one way to increase equality in the sectors where it is needed. In some sectors, for example culture, it is easier to make these changes. Much has been achieved, but there is a lot of work ahead.

“One of the things that we have managed to do is decrease salary differences between the genders. But that only applies to the difference within each line of work. The big issue here is that we have a gender-divided labour market.

“A good example is teachers who are currently on strike, demanding their salaries be equal to other experts in the public sector. The majority of them are women. So we are not comparing the jobs’ value and paying salaries accordingly. This needs to be solved somehow.”

Einarsdóttir also says unpaid work needs addressing.

“By that I mean, for example, what the shortage of daycare actually costs in terms of unpaid work for the relatives – parents, grandparents and so on. This is a very invisible problem which must be taken into consideration because this also costs money.”

Another thing that also still needs to be fought is gender-oriented violence.

“That is considered the most extreme form of gender inequality. Iceland has been criticised by the Gender and Inequalities Research Group GRETA, set up by the Council of Europe, for not doing enough to fight human trafficking, for example.

“It also looks like only 10 to 13 per cent of gender violence cases face charges, and even fewer reach the courts and get a sentence. So in that aspect, we really have a long way to go.”

Controversial quotas

When asked about how to increase women’s share in management, Ásta Dís Óladóttir says one measure is gender quotas for boards of directors, similar to what was done with the company boards.

That legislation was controversial.

“Managers generally believe that the business community itself should ensure that gender ratios on boards and in senior management positions are good enough, without government intervention.

“Despite this, gender quota laws for boards of companies with 50 or more employees were fully implemented in Iceland in 2013, intended to equalise the proportion of women and men on the boards of Icelandic companies.”

Óladóttir says many hoped that the law would have a spillover effect into senior management positions.

“This appears to be the case only to a limited extent. Globally, tough measures such as company board gender quotas have been much more effective in equalising gender ratios on boards.

“Softer measures and penalties for non-compliance, as we have in Iceland, have been more effective than where there are no penalties.

“Previous research has suggested that company board gender quotas could be one of the ways to reduce the gender gap that exists in management positions in this country.”

Þorgerður Jennýjardóttir Einarsdóttir believes Iceland is generally heading in the right direction, equality-wise.

“But we still have this tough gender system in certain areas that we find very difficult to break. It looks like normal social

changes are not enough. It is necessary to take the fight to each sector.

“Good things in the public sector do not seem to affect the private sector and good things in larger companies do not affect other private companies.

“Also, women today are sometimes adapting to the existing system rather than changing it as previous women’s rights leaders did.

“In order to change something, they have to subscribe to a feminist ideology, which they don’t all do. So the increased share of women does not automatically mean a changed system.”



12 recommendations to get more Nordic youths into work

The need to increase labour market participation among vulnerable groups in the Nordics has long been high on the Nordic Council of Ministers' agenda. A new report points to flexibility, individually tailored support and cooperation with employers as the key to success. NAV employees in Trondheim are already on the ball.

NEWS

26.02.2025

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN

All the Nordic countries struggle to a certain extent to include youths, seniors, immigrants, people with disabilities and people with mental health issues.

The need to increase labour market participation among vulnerable groups in the Nordics has been high on the agenda for a long time and was therefore one of several initiatives on the Nordic Council of Ministers' cross-sectoral action plan for 2021 – 2024.

VIVE and HBS Economics in Denmark have looked at the issues from different angles in a major research project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

This is now culminating in the report "Increasing employment among vulnerable groups. Summary of insights and recommendations for the Nordic countries".

The recommendations

The report was presented during a webinar on 25 February and contains 12 recommendations summed up in these policy tracks:

- A more flexible and individual system
- Create flexible programmes for complex challenges
- Create results through good relations, confidence and motivation

- Getting companies on board

“The Nordic countries are already working hard to get more people into the labour market, and many things are going in the right direction. Yet we still see a potential for improvement.



“We hope these recommendations can help get more of the vulnerable groups into education and work in the Nordic countries,” Andreas Højbjerg and Rasmus Lang Thomsen at HBS Economics tell the Nordic Labour Journal.

“One of the most important aspects of our recommendations is the emphasis on individual and flexible approaches. It is also crucial to have a long-term perspective – the results will not be immediate but will emerge over time,” says Andreas Højbjerg.

Freedom for caseworkers

They see a clear tendency where the Nordic countries choose solutions that are too general. The measures are often too standardised as if one solution would fit all.

“That’s why we recommend more freedom for caseworkers and a greater scope to tailor solutions to the individual. There is no definitive solution or one single measure that fits all.

“Caseworkers must be given flexibility to develop individual solutions that are adapted to the individual’s needs. This is about giving them room to act, reduce rigid demands and open up for more flexible adaptations,” says Andreas Højbjerg.

People in vulnerable groups often face many and very different obstacles to getting into the labour market. So it is very challenging to create general solutions that work for everyone.

“It is crucial to give caseworkers the freedom to do what they feel is best for the citizen. The systems must be rigged to be able to answer the question: How do you give caseworkers more flexibility?”

Does this demand more resources?

“Not necessarily. A more flexible system doesn’t have to be more expensive but it places higher demands on those who create the measures. Caseworkers must get even better at seeing the individual and adapting the measures.”

Some countries might have to change legislation to create more space for flexibility, but in the long run, this will pay.

Having many people outside of the labour market is expensive for society. Getting them into work will save serious money over time, says Andreas Højbjerg.

Learning from each other

In addition to thoroughly reviewing the background for the recommendations, the report delves into three topics:

- Youth exclusion in the Nordic countries
- Inclusion of immigrant women
- The employment gap for people with disabilities

The report provides examples of existing measures or measures that are about to be launched in the Nordic countries.

We include one example from Norway, that says something about what is being done precisely to make measures more flexible and individually adapted.

Norwegian employment service (NAV) leaders in Trondheim have spent the past few years working with the project “A simpler NAV”.

It takes time to get up and running, but they are very confident of good results once they start being felt.

The project was initiated by NAV offices in Trondheim, the County Governor, Trondheim Municipality and NAV Trøndelag, in close cooperation with the Directorate of Labour and Welfare and the Ministry of Labour and Inclusion. They hope to get going in early 2026, but since the project depends on exemptions from existing legislation things take time.

In the first instance, a pilot is planned to run in Trondheim, where the municipality will be a pilot municipality. If this produces good results, the project might eventually be rolled out nationally.

Head of division Unni Valla Skevik at NAV Falkenberg and head of division Sølvi Margrethe Dahlen at NAV Lerkendal are among those developing a new youth benefit for people under 30 who are not in education or work.

The new benefit will be linked to specific conditions and activity requirements.

The aim: Simpler to navigate the NAV system

The NAV leaders feel it is necessary to streamline NAV's many benefits to make the system more transparent and user-friendly.



Head of division Sølvi Margrethe Dahlen (left) at NAV Lerkendal and head of division Unni Valla Skevik at NAV Falkenberg in Trondheim are putting in place a new youth benefit.

The idea behind the youth benefit is to replace the “patch-work” of benefits that many young people have to relate to today – like work assessment allowance, social assistance, activity benefits, qualification support, and several others.

“We believe it will be easier for caseworkers and young people when they no longer have to navigate between so many different benefit solutions,” say Skevik and Dahlen.

Less medication, more focus on opportunities

The background for the initiative is a desire to think innovatively about how to prevent youth exclusion. In recent years, several reports have pointed out that the strong connection between diagnosis and the right to public income security in Norway can be problematic.

Research shows that many young people go through long assessment periods to get a diagnosis which grants them the right to financial support.

“We want to move the focus away from illness and medication and use time on how to get young people back into education and work. Today we often begin by asking “Where are you ill?”. We should rather be asking “What is your potential and which opportunities do you have?”, says Skevik.

By giving young people economic safety through one predictable benefit, the NAV leaders hope to shift the focus onto the youths’ dreams and future opportunities.

“When the caseworkers no longer have to spend time finding which benefits the young person is entitled to, they can spend their energy on follow-up and guidance,” says Dahlen.

Closer follow-up, fewer youths per caseworker

One important part of the project is to redistribute the resources from administering benefits to a closer follow-up of the youths. The aim is that each caseworker should work with fewer youths and be more present in their lives.

“We wish to reduce exclusion and increase the transit to education and work. When the young people have stable economic support, we believe it will become easier for them to focus on taking the necessary steps toward education or work,” the two leaders say.

The hope is that the new youth benefit will mean less bureaucracy, quicker casework and a shorter wait before the youths receive their payments.

“The goal is for more young people to succeed through closer follow-up by the NAV advisor. When the fight to secure money in the account is no longer the main focus, it frees up both the young person and the NAV advisor.

“We want to spend time on follow-up and active participation – not on financial worries,” conclude Skevik and Dahlen.

The employer’s crucial role

Back to the report, which underlines the importance of such close cooperation between the individual, the caseworker and the employer. Experience shows that measures including a real connection to a workplace often produce the best results.

The closer the link to a proper workplace, the better the effect.

There are many ways of engaging employers, but none of the Nordic countries have found a lasting solution for how to do this in the best possible way, believe the report authors.

They also think it is important that the employer see this as more than social responsibility – it is also good for business.

“We see employers who are willing to take social responsibility but we believe they can get even better at identifying which tasks that could easily be solved by this group. This could benefit the citizen, the working environment and the bottom line,” say Andreas Højbjerg and Rasmus Lang Thomsen at HBS Economics.

Big potential

The report’s recommendations clearly show that much can still be done to create the best possible labour market, believes Petar Cavala, Director of the Department for Knowledge and Welfare at the Nordic Council of Ministers.



“Over the years, we have read previous reports with great interest, and it is very good that we now have a final report with clear recommendations,” Cavala tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

He hopes the Nordic countries will use the results and recommendations when shaping the labour market policy of today and the future.

“In order to have enough labour in the Nordics and handle the green and digital transitions, we have to include everyone. There is great potential among people in vulnerable groups which we must get better at promoting and using,” says Cavala.



Boyhood researcher: "We need to exercise our reading muscle"

There is still work to be done to make Finnish schools more gender equal. An ambitious gender equality programme is needed, believes the Finnish boyhood researcher Harry Lunabba. Both boys and girls would benefit from it. Falling PISA literacy scores can have long-term consequences for pupils.

THEME

26.02.2025

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

Everyone has the right to feel safe and well in Finland, according to the government's gender equality programme, which aligns with Nordic goals. 50 measures are proposed for education, the labour market and families. There is also a focus on violence against women.

The Orpo government wants more focus on the gender equality challenges affecting boys and men, especially to prevent the marginalisation of young men.

Falling knowledge

It is worrying that the so-called PISA tests show falling school results from many countries after the Corona pandemic. The

tests have led to debate and demands for changes to teaching in Finland, especially to support boys who are doing badly.

15-year-olds sit identical tests in literacy, science and mathematics to measure their progress and that of the schools themselves. Performing worse in reading, maths and writing is bad while they are in school, but it also affects the pupil's future in the labour market and as citizens.

As society, technology and politics change, children face growing challenges. The Finnish Minister of Education Anders Adlercreutz pointed out the problem in an opinion piece when the latest PISA results were published.

"When we look at the PISA results, we see a growing gap between the genders. Girls are doing as well as they did before. But boys' learning outcomes have fallen considerably. Meanwhile, boys are doing better mentally than girls, who often struggle with anxiety and mental health issues," wrote Adlercreutz.

No need for a PISA panic

Finnish boyhood researcher Harry Lunabba wants to avoid rough generalisations about boys' poor progress or the idea that schools are badly suited for boys. He talks about a "PISA panic" where results are exaggerated.

But it is true that gender equality has not been fully realised in schools, says Harry Lunabba, who is a researcher specialising in social work at the University of Helsinki.

This development makes him sad and frustrated. Boys are labelled as problematic and disruptive in class.

"While we have not completely failed all boys, statistics show there are fewer boys at the top and more boys at the bottom. The large majority are still doing well in Finnish schools," says Harry Lunabba.

There is a problem with groups of boys who do fall behind, and it is being explained away with a "boys will be boys" mentality. But this could be linked to typical boy behaviour not being accepted in school.

"Boys develop a bit slower than girls, as has been proven many times, and the girls' results can partly be explained through different maturity levels.

"It looks like schools would like to compete only for the students with the best grades. They don't want to risk accepting weaker students and helping them reach their full potential," says Lunabba.



"We know quite a few boys do well later on, also academically," says Harry Lunabba who counts himself in that group.

One problem could be the prevalence of individual student-centred work in classless upper secondary schools, where many boys do less well without adult guidance.

"Students are expected to make decisions they might not be mature enough to make. Perhaps education should change to allow performance and practice to take place collectively and in the classrooms, under the guidance of adults, ideally all the way through upper secondary school."

The debate about homework and parents' role in students' futures is hotter in Sweden than in Finland, notes Lunabba. Homework has been turned into a question of class, where students with parents who can help with homework benefit.

Lunabba nevertheless believes that having individual assignments helps, as learning to do homework is part of the maturation process. But the majority of schoolwork should take place in school.

Boys may need more support, and this cannot be outsourced to their homes, according to Lunabba.

"There is a lack of ambition to do something about the problem, as well as a lack of concrete ideas. We need an ambitious political programme on gender equality aimed at flattening the curves. It is not enough to present populist ideas like boys should start school at a later age."

Lunabba believes schools can benefit from a culture of development where new teaching methods and new ideas are really promoted. This can later be combined with solid studies to truly assess their effect.

Insensitive about "failed" men in rural areas

Lunabba is puzzled about the declining initiatives for vocational training in Finland.

"There is this ambition to be an equal society, but our upper secondary schools and universities are very white while vocational schools are more culturally diverse.

"In that context, it is very strange that vocational schools have become a target for budget cuts. It is extremely puzzling, considering the important role these play in society," says Lunabba.

Lunabba does not believe today's school is the result of a conscious gender agenda specifically designed with girls in mind.

Instead, he sees a lack of gender-specific and gender-sensitive initiatives. He wants to include boys in gender equality efforts and points out that this benefits everyone.

"It is, above all, a sign of failure that we have not been able to convince people that the gender equality movement is for everyone, based on solidarity."

Lunabba sees a great deal of insensitivity in Finnish society around many issues that men in particular struggle with. Men in rural areas are sometimes seen as pathetic – as if they should simply 'pull themselves together and do something.'

However, they have lived through a structural transformation in which rural areas have been depleted and downgraded in many essential aspects.

Knowledge needed for future labour market

Harry Lunabba worries about students who are struggling more at school and with reading than earlier.

"I think schools in future must learn how to handle new media like podcasts and video. That is what students and adults are consuming more and more of."

However, the universities' autonomous responsibility is to ensure that students become competent and learn the skills that are relevant to working life.

"We cannot transform the world into a playground; instead, the world needs knowledge," argues Lunabba.

The risk is a polarisation between those who excel in reading and AI and those who struggle with fundamental issues. The ones who know something are going to be those who succeed in the future labour market.

Wants to make reading "great again"

Right now, Lunabba is doing research but will return to teaching one year from now. When he does, he will also take on the challenges around reading.

"It is very worrying to work at a university where students say they cannot even finish reading one book. The answer is not that we stop reading books," says Lunabba. He wants to exercise what he calls "the reading muscle" through collective reading sessions.

In the "reading gym" the students can exercise reading and take their time just like they would do in a sports gym.

"These are the things we used to take for granted that 20-year-olds could do. Perhaps we have to teach them again in a new way."

Harry Lunabba wants to make reading "great again" as some might say in the USA, the country where boys' social exclusion is already said to have led to discontent and political power shifts.

"There are no rowdy boys here, not many boys at all for that matter"

Sonja Sajavaara and Viggo Kalman are sitting in front of their screens, working on a group task about images. They are students at the Swedish School of Social Science, part of the University of Helsinki. Both have noticed the surplus of female students and a reduced interest in reading.

Boys being more rowdy or doing less well is not an issue at the Swedish School of Social Science, but it is also hard to gain access there. The "rowdy boys" disappear and choose other paths, like vocational education.



Viggo Kalman and Sonja Sajavaara study at the Swedish School of Social Science and read a lot of text as part of their studies.

Viggo Kalman also says he was a bit of a "tinkerer", one of these young lads who likes tinkering with motorbikes, mopeds and computers in their spare time. But it did not turn into an occupation for him. He is now in his fourth year studying political science in Helsinki.

He is from Åland, while Sonja Sajavaara, who is studying journalism, is from Helsinki.

Escapism rather than reading

She finds it shocking that so many young people do not read at all. Netflix has taken over. But Sonja and Viggo point out that most of the university students do read a lot of text for their studies.

"So it is quite logical that you are tired and don't want to read even more when you come home."

But it becomes a habit and many are not in the habit of reading, says Sonja Sajavaara. She believes in promoting reading habits from an early age. It becomes a habit that you keep when you grow older.

Viggo Kalman also thinks it is important to learn to read books when you are young. He read a lot as a child, now he reads far less.

"Still, I have never had any problem with reading comprehension. It's more that... I just get a bit too distracted by mobile phones and films. And I do watch a lot of films, which take time from reading."

Although it is a tiresome cliché, Sonja and Viggo want to highlight the negative impact of screens.

"It is just getting worse when you look at people our age – and others too. The increase in screentime... at the same time this is escapism from studying."

But sitting in front of the computer screen can also be exhausting. It is not really relaxing to scroll through short videos for hours on end. Reading lets you relax much more than being constantly stimulated, says Sonja.

The Helsinki University seems a bit more old-fashioned than for instance Uppsala, which Viggo has experienced. The University of Helsinki has much more focus on essays and the ability to write well.

You have to write a lot when studying here, especially if you want to succeed. At the same time, Sonja points out that she had to write even longer essays when she studied in Utrecht for a while.

Yet that is not the only way to compare the quality of the education or its ability to provide the foundation for success.



Sweden: Gender gap widens in education, economically and politically

Women are significantly more represented in higher education, especially in rural areas - a trend that is repeated in all Nordic countries. It has given many women a better life with higher employment levels and wages. However, the development also shows that men are falling behind.

THEME

26.02.2025

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“Society has never been as women-friendly as it is now,” says Lovisa Broström, who has a PhD in economic history and is a senior lecturer at the University of Gothenburg.



She recently read an article in the Financial Times about how young British women earn more than their male counterparts and also have a higher level of employment. This made her think – “this is a historic shift, which would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago”.

She calls the development groundbreaking, not least in Sweden and the other Nordic countries, which she considers to be the best in the world when it comes to gender equality.

“We see the same trend across the Western world and also in countries elsewhere where women are not being held back. Women are seizing opportunities and are increasingly moving into male arenas.

“Many countries have actively invested in women and encouraged them to ‘make your mark’ and ‘get an education’. This has had results,” says Lovisa Broström.

In the 1980s and 90s, the number of universities and higher educational institutions grew, and student loans had already made it economically easier to study. But social developments have benefited women in other ways too.

Political decisions around issues such as parental leave and preschools have made it easier for women to combine family and work. There is also a large labour market in healthcare, education and social care that recruits women.

More women-dominated occupations, like medical doctors and nurses, have also seen a bigger wage increase lately.

“Women have gained quite a lot, but if you look at the proportion of top leaders in listed companies, for instance, there is still a glass ceiling. Sweden also still has one of the most gender-segregated labour markets in the world.

“So even though women have taken great strides in several areas in the past decades, they are in a majority among those on sick leave, they do most of the homework and are still victims of sexualised violence and abuse,” she says.

A masculinisation of poverty

Lovisa Broström’s research centres on welfare, poverty and class. She has conducted research on recipients of social assistance and found that the most common household type receiving social assistance in recent years was native-born men.

In a different report, she and her colleague Birgitta Jansson studied the group of people who work but remain poor, often called the “in-work poor”, between 1987 and 2016. This group changed over those 30 years.

In 1987, it was made up mainly of single Swedish-born women. In 2015 the majority were unmarried foreign-born men.

“There has been a masculinisation of poverty and men are lagging behind. Men earn more on average but experience a loss in status despite of this. And women are getting ever closer to what has so far been male privileges.

“This can create fear among many men, a “fear of falling”, even if they are doing well. Or they romanticise about a by-gone era,” says Lovisa Broström.

Education gap widens

One of the explanations why women have made greater economic and employment progress than men in recent decades is young girls’ strong academic performance.

For a long time, men had better access to education and higher studies, but now the trend has reversed in large parts of the world. Women achieve better grades than men and are more likely to pursue university and higher education.

This has been the case for a long time, but the gap is widening. Across Sweden, there are generally 14 per cent more women with post-higher secondary education, and the differences are particularly pronounced in rural municipalities. This is creating a growing education gap between men and women, which impacts society as a whole.

“More women get an education and advance in the labour market, and this impacts both girls and boys.

“Men and women often choose different higher educations, and this is of economic benefit to society – especially when the labour market is structured with a capital-strong production and with a large public sector.



“Yet the size of the labour market becomes smaller for people with lower levels of education,” says Martin Nordin, associate professor at the Department of Economics and Lund University.

The widening gap is caused by a range of different factors.

“There has been an expansion in education for all, but girls seem to be more motivated. There is also a larger group of boys who fail to meet educational goals early on and leave primary school without grades, which may be due to boys maturing later.

“Another factor contributing to the differences is that women continue to pursue education even after the age of 30,” says Martin Nordin.

Old norms being challenged

In a recently published report, he examined the consequences of what is known as the reversed education gap. Previously, the gap favoured men, but now it favours women.

What does this mean for partnerships, family formation, and employment opportunities? And what impact does the education gap have on voting behaviour?

The education gap basically challenges traditional norms. Men are no longer the family’s obvious main provider and men who lag behind struggle more to find a partner, have children less often and access a narrower labour market.

There is a risk of growing resentment among those who explain the development by claiming that feminism has taken opportunities away from men, based on the idea that there is a fixed pie to be divided.

“When the differences in education grow, you get problems in many areas, including ideologically – how people view the world and how they vote.

“When women have a higher education, their interest in the rightwing populist Sweden Democrats falls. Men with lower education go in the opposite direction and there is clear evidence that the education gap leads to more men voting SD,” says Martin Nordin.

Through his research, he wants to highlight the fact that an education gap exists, that it is growing and that it impacts different social aspects.

“First and foremost it impacts family formation, which in the longer run impacts demography and labour shortages. I don’t yet see a backlash against gender equality although it is sometimes expressed.

“But if the education gap grows much bigger I would be worried. That’s why it is important to invest in schools early on so that boys keep up from the start.”

Everyone should feel belonging

Lovisa Broström also believes narrowing the gap starts with education. Boys have not benefited from the dominating idea of self-directed learning.

“It would also be good to invest in vocational training and make sure this gains a higher status. It is important to invest in rural areas in general – making sure there is a post office and pharmacy in the smaller towns too.

“I would never say that feminism has gone too far, but everyone – men and women – should have the opportunity to feel social belonging,” says Lovisa Broström.



Greenland's labour market partners defend the Nordic model

Employees and employers in Greenland are presenting a united front in defence of the Nordic model at home but assess the threat from the USA differently.

NEWS

26.02.2025

TEXT AND PHOTO: MARIE PREISLER

Greenland's largest trade union, SIK, sees the USA as such a serious threat to Greenland and the country's labour market that the union's long-serving President, Jess G. Bertelsen, a few weeks before the parliamentary elections in March 2025, has decided to run for a seat in Greenland's parliament Inatsisartut.



Jess G. Bertelsen is the President of Greenland's largest trade union, SIK.

“Greenland is suddenly in a very strange and dangerous situation, and all good forces are really needed to defend our country and labour market,” Bertelsen told the Nordic Labour Journal.

The interview took place half an hour after Jess Bertelsen had launched his candidature for the Siumut party for the parliamentary elections on 11 March 2025. He has been the SIK President and a key person in Greenland's labour market for more than three decades and has seen a lot.

Yet he is shocked that US President Donald Trump has mentioned using force against Greenland as an option.

“It is deeply concerning that Trump will not rule out using force to gain more power over Greenland. In just one and a half months, the political situation has turned very serious, and we have to adapt to it.”

A good Nordic model

As a politician, Jess G. Bertelsen wants to pursue the governing party Siumut's policies, and he is very much in favour of securing close and equal cooperation with Denmark and the EU in particular, he explains.

He is a strong proponent of independence but urges constraint in the current political situation. Greenland's relationship with the Kingdom of Denmark traditionally takes up a lot of the political debate before an election in Greenland, and parts of the Greenlandic population are very much in favour of full independence from Denmark.

This issue plays a significant role in the Greenlandic election campaign and has also gained international attention after Donald Trump's statements about Greenland.

That is why Jess Bertelsen sees it as an important job to make Greenland's population understand that they should not hope to become employees in an American labour market and that American interference in Greenlandic affairs could disrupt the way the Greenlandic labour market functions today.

“We know how members of US trade unions are being treated and how the US treats people who have economic challenges. We do not wish this. We have a really good Nordic model in our labour market and we need to defend this now.”

Fight for raw materials

The SIK President observes that certain Greenlandic politicians, in their fight for independence from Denmark, have communicated in the US public sphere in ways that might give the US President and administration the impression that Greenland would be willing to subordinate itself to the USA.

“A few politicians in Greenland are courting the USA in a way that mistakenly appears as an official Greenlandic standpoint. That is dangerous,” says Jess Bertelsen.

He sees no good alternatives to the economic and security guarantees that Greenland receives as part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

“If Greenland gains self-governance, we must be able to finance our way of life. Greenland cannot be both independent and deeply dependent on others. And in the world that is now emerging, Greenland must cooperate closely with like-minded people, including Denmark.”

Jess Bertelsen also worries about what would happen to Greenland's raw materials if Trump's desires in Greenland were fulfilled.

“Trump's signals towards Ukraine show just how important access to raw materials is to the USA. The same goes for Greenland's subterranean resources. Our raw materials are our own, and we decide over how they are managed.”

Calm employers

Greenland's largest business and employer organisation, the Greenland Business Association (GE) agrees with the SIK President that Greenland is best served by having a Nordic labour market model but has a slightly different perspective on the signals from the US.

“One of our jobs is to promote Greenland as a country worth investing in, and in that respect, the Nordic labour market model with strong, autonomous partners is an enormous advantage.



Christian Keldsen is the Director of the Greenland Business Association (GE).

“We also see no imminent threat against this, and we stay completely calm,” Christian Keldsen, Director of GE, tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

He points out that there is no formal decision for what the US wants in Greenland.

“The US is presumably focused on security and raw materials, not on annexing Greenland and turning the Greenlandic labour market into a part of the American one,” he says.

The Greenland Business Association is working to get Greenland's government to create frameworks that enable both Greenlandic and foreign companies to extract natural resources in the country.

"This should happen with respect for our labour market and environment, but if the government doesn't exploit the opportunities or demand while they exist, Greenland risks that the resource extraction adventure is cancelled altogether."

Christian Keldsen points out that Greenland is competing with other countries and new technologies, and could see its underground resources become less attractive.

"Right now, Greenland's underground resources are in demand, but market prices and demand for our raw materials are crucial for whether they remain attractive. Timing is important," he says.

The Greenland Business Association takes no position on the politically sensitive issue of independence.

"We work to give Greenland greater economic autonomy through a strong business sector, which again needs a well-functioning labour market based on the Nordic model," says Christian Keldsen.



Nordic maritime sector sets sail towards greater gender equality

Men still dominate the maritime industry. In certain onboard professions, women are almost absent. Creating a secure working environment for everyone, regardless of gender, is crucial to make the industry more equal, argue the initiators of the Nordic REDO Lookout project.

THEME

26.02.2025

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN

“Yes, it is still an extremely male-dominated industry,” confirms Lene Dyring from the Norwegian Seafarers Union (NSF), Norway’s largest trade union for seafarers and ocean fishers.



The union's membership number has been stable at above 13,000 for the past 10 years. Around 20 per cent are women. There are active efforts to recruit more women to the maritime industry and to engage more women in the trade union.

"But this takes time," says Dyring.

Tradition and culture

Male dominance in the maritime sector has long, historic roots. There are still strong traditional and cultural ideas of who is suited to seafaring and fishing. Competencies like technical skills, leadership abilities and navigation are still to a great extent associated with men and masculinity.

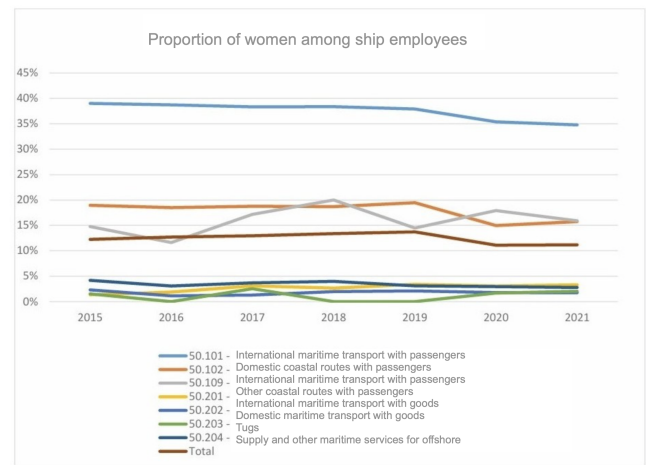
It is, after all, not long since the expression "women bring bad luck at sea" was still in use.

In 2023, the Norwegian government launched a gender equality strategy for the maritime sector.

Leading up to this, the Eastern Norway Research Institute at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences conducted a survey for the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries.

The resulting report – "Gender equality and diversity in the maritime industry and education – a survey" – concluded that jobs at sea and along the coast *are* male-dominated and that a rough culture and high threshold for speaking up could help explain the low female representation in the maritime sector.

"Women in the industry, both at sea and onshore, experience not being heard and not being taken seriously. More than their male colleagues, they have to demonstrate that they have solid competencies," Lisa Knatterud Wold, one of the report's authors told the Kilden magazine.



Some of the conclusions from the report on female representation included:

- Female representation in the maritime sector is low in general. The proportion of women working on ships is 11 per cent while in the broader maritime sector (suppliers, shipping transport, services and shipyards) it is 21 per cent.
- Women in general earn less than men in the maritime sector, even when controlling for education, job title and age. The differences are largest in shipping and transport. Differences are considerably lower in the shipyard segment.
- The proportion of women among students is relatively stable at 20 per cent in the university and higher education sector. In higher vocational education, the trend is mainly increasing with a growing number of female applicants.

"Nothing to be had in the maritime industry"

Being one woman among many men can be challenging, according to women interviewed for the report.

One ferry company employee says:

"Language has perhaps become a bit rougher among seafarers than elsewhere in society. But most are prepared for this. Since the language is what it is, it is also easy to take it up, to say: you need to shut up, you pig, or something like that, a completely legitimate comment you can make whenever. But, of course, those who are not used to being at sea, there are probably many who think the language goes far beyond acceptable limits."

A woman high up in the leadership of a shipping company describes a sector where it is difficult to climb even for someone who is ambitious:

“It is hard getting to the top. That’s one of the reasons I changed from the job I used to have. Because there are only men on the board and in the top leadership, except for one... I think perhaps now, if I spoke to some women, some who had just graduated, I would recommend that they choose a different industry if they have ambitions. There is nothing to be had in the maritime industry.”

Many points to a generational shift in the industry that will lead to a cultural change where women to a greater extent become equal to men at sea:

“I think this culture will die out because the younger generation doesn’t have the same background. They are used to seeing women in all kinds of positions.”

Thinking outside the box

Lena Dyring at the Norwegian Seafarers Union points out that recruiting women to the maritime sector is an ongoing challenge, especially to operative positions like deckhands and machinists. Meanwhile, there are some positive developments in parts of the industry.

However, retaining women who are in the stage of life where they wish to start a family is a challenge, especially women at sea.

“We need to create conditions that make it possible to retain people. We must think outside the box, like facilitating shorter shift periods, and we must work with flexible solutions that allow women to keep their certifications even if they spend some time onshore,” says Dyring.

A declaration of cooperation is coming

Last year, the Norwegian government began work on a declaration of cooperation for increased gender equality in the maritime sector together with the employees’ and employers’ organisations.



It is especially challenging to recruit women for occupations such as deckhand and marine engineer. (Photo: The Swedish Maritime Association)

In order to meet future skills needs, it is important to recruit from the entire population, both men and women, underlined the then Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Policy, now the Minister for Trade and Industry, Cecilie Myrseth at the time.

The declaration of cooperation will address four focus areas: recruitment and role models, an inclusive work environment, a workplace free from harassment, and an adapted work environment.

The plan is for the declaration of cooperation to be signed by the parties before International Women’s Day on 8 March this year.

Bullying and harassment

Last year, the Norwegian Maritime Directorate highlighted the psychosocial work environment onboard Norwegian ships. Together with the Norwegian Maritime Competence Foundation, they funded a research project to examine the connections between work environment, inclusion, and safety.

The research institute SINTEF has led the work, in collaboration with the Equality Center KUN.”

The results are gathered in the new report “Safety for all – Measures for a safer and more inclusive workplace at sea”.

The report unveils serious issues linked to safety, harassment and work environments, especially for minority groups onboard.

Some of the most important findings included:

- 27 per cent of seafarers say they have experienced one or more forms of bullying or harassment.
- Language barriers and an excluding culture weaken safety.
- Women and other minorities face extra challenges that impact their safety and well-being.

“This is not only about safety, it is also about well-being, security and common decency,” said Hans Sande, CEO of the Norwegian Maritime Officers’ Association when the report was launched in December last year.

“The results were not a surprise, but definitely not pleasant reading. There is more focus on this now and also more space to talk about it, but yes – it does take time to change a culture,” says Lena Dyring at the Norwegian Seafarers Union.

A Nordic project

Gender equality in the maritime industry is an international topic, especially within the UN’s International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

The Norwegian Seafarers Union participates in the Nordic REDO Lookout project, which was launched by the Swedish Maritime Association. The project is funded by the Nordic

Gender Equality Fund and includes partners in Norway, Sweden and Åland.

Cajsa Fransson and Jill Jarnsäter at the Swedish Maritime Association are working with the project.

Sweden is a far smaller seafaring nation than Norway. Stena Line is the biggest employer, followed by smaller ferry operations. This means more women are working in the sector, especially in service positions.

Women make up around 20 per cent of employees, but the proportion of women working in operative positions like deck and machine is far lower at around 4 to 5 per cent. Few women want to stay long-term.

It is about working environments

Fransson and Jarnsäter explain that REDO Lookout is part of REDO, a larger project they have been running for some years.



Cajsa Fransson and Jill Jarnsäter at the Swedish Maritime Association work with the Redo project. (Photo: Privat)

The first REDO project started in 2020 as a consequence of the campaigns #metoo, #lättaankar and vågrätt (the Swedish maritime industry's response to address sexual harassment and discrimination within the sector, and Sweden's #MeToo movement within the media and culture sector).

Its aim was to improve the social working environment at sea from a gender equality perspective.

Today the project focuses on creating a safe working environment for all. Safety is a priority because – a secure crew means a safe ship!

The aim is to create a more diverse and gender-balanced industry.

“We want fewer stereotyped seafarers. But we are not working to get more women into the industry. We work to create a working environment that makes more women *and* men want to work and stay in the maritime sector,” says Cajsa Fransson.

She underlines that if the debate only focuses on gender equality, it could easily become polarising, pitting men against women rather than working towards a better working environment.

“We are each other's working environment and we must create a culture where everyone thrives,” says Fransson.

Seminars and podcast series

Two seminars are being planned – one this year and another next year – plus a podcast series. This year's seminar is part of the international conference “Advancing the blue economy through gender equality” at the World Maritime University in Malmö from 19 to 2 May. The university is a partner in the project.

“Cooperation between different groups and between the Nordic countries is important to find best practice and to share experiences,” they say.



Nordic police cooperation – from policy to reality

Criminal networks operate where there is money, across borders. A new police station on the actual border between Norway and Sweden will soon be inaugurated, and in Malmö, there is an operations centre staffed by both Danish and Swedish police.

NEWS

26.02.2025

TEXT AND PHOTO: FAYME ALM

Cooperation between police in the Nordic countries is nothing new. It has been going on for a long time. What is new is the ever closer cooperation between four of the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden – aimed at improving coordination.

“We have different pieces of the jigsaw. Now, we can put these together and become more efficient when fighting cross-border crime,” Jonas Wendel tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

He is a police superintendent and head of the Swedish local police district of Arvika, comprising four municipalities including Eda which borders on Norway in the west.

“The house is there. Built exactly on the border between Norway and Sweden so that half of it is in Eidskog municipality

in Norway and the other half is in Eda municipality. This will be a unique police station and I don’t think there is anything like it anywhere else in the world,” he says.

Crime worth billions

But before we move on, let us take a look at one example of how many billions of kronor are being created through crime. In its report “The Criminal Economy” published in September 2024, Swedish police write:

“The criminal economy in Sweden is estimated to be generating between 100 and 150 billion kronor (€8.9bn to €13.3bn) annually. This is nearly four times the police authority’s entire budget for 2024.”

Common ground and challenges

Back to the new police station and its positioning. It deviates from current regulations. Building a house on a national border is not allowed. There must also be a certain buffer zone to the border, explains Jonas Wendel.

“In this instance, an exception was made through a border agreement between both countries to make this police station a reality.”



There were also a range of regulations to consider before construction could start. Like the fact that Swedish soil must not leave Swedish territory and the same applies to Norwegian soil.

“So it was important that any soil that was dug up to be removed ended up in the right country,” says Jonas Wendel.

Other issues to be solved included which construction norms would be applied to the building – was it possible to follow different ones and meet in the middle? Would there be a shared sewage system, who would be responsible for waste disposal and could Norwegian cleaners work on the Swedish side and vice versa?

“The solution was that a Norwegian company built the house and the Swedish government signed a 25-year lease agreement,” says the police superintendent.

The inauguration will take place in May this year, and according to Jonas Wendel, things are on schedule. The alarm system has been installed, and work is now underway to implement the access control system and the like, he explains. The floors and ceilings will be clearly marked to show where the national border runs.

“You need that in order to know exactly which country you are in. The reason is that Swedish police can only operate on Swedish territory and the same goes for Norwegian police.”

A cooperation hub

The new police station will house police officers from both countries. They will patrol and carry out intelligence operations.

Sweden already has a number of community police officers in place who work with Norwegian police. They are ready to move into the new police station. The community police officers primarily work in external operational service.

“Norway has had a police station on the Norwegian border for some time. We have worked with them to develop shared tactics and a legal framework allowing us to become well-coordinated.

“When we move into the same building, we have already made significant progress,” says Jonas Wendel, whose ambition is to strengthen the team with additional police officers this year.

The station will also cooperate closely with the Norwegian and Swedish customs authorities. The police work largely in the same area as customs, like cross-border crime, explains Jonas Wendel. He sees clear benefits from co-location.

“It is important to sit together in the same building and be able to talk to each other even if it will be fairly complicated because of all the regulations,” he says.

Preventing legal border obstacles

Even though a lot of legislation governing police work is shared in the Nordic countries, there are areas where they differ. These are the areas that can create problems for cross-border regional police cooperation.

Nordic justice ministers focused on this challenge when they met in September 2024 to agree on a new cooperation programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers’ justice sector 2024 – 2030 with focus on:

- promoting Nordic legal unity
- the rule of law in the Nordic region
- prevention and combatting crime and terrorism

The programme lists two sub-priorities when it comes to promoting Nordic legal unity:

1. Contribute to preventing and combating cross-border obstacles in the Nordic region that arise due to legislative conditions.
2. Ensure that the Nordic countries, when preparing legislation, share and gather information about existing legislation in the other countries.

Armed or not armed

One issue which has had a lot of attention in this context is that Norwegian police are unarmed while Swedish police are always armed.

“This is a very difficult issue and a considerable spanner in the works. That’s why the Norwegian and Swedish ministries of justice are now working on a bilateral agreement that I hope will grant us expanded powers on each other’s territory,” says Jonas Wendel.

He has contributed to the agreement and wants to see Swedish police patrols being able to respond to alarms in Norway, as well as joint patrolling with both Norwegian and Swedish officers in the same vehicle.

Since 2008, EU member states have been able to improve cross-border cooperation in accordance with the so-called Prüm decision. This was used when Malmö hosted the Eurovision Song Contest, which was manned by both Danish and Norwegian police, and when Norway heightened its terror threat level and got help from Swedish police.

Decisions on operations based on the Prüm decision must always be made in advance, which complicates daily cross-border police cooperation.

“The border should not be a legal obstacle. We in the Swedish police should be able to travel into Norway as part of our daily work without needing prior approval for Prüm operations. This is not practical when urgent action is required,” he says and adds that Norway has just got a new Minister of Justice and that the changes he hopes for are a delicate matter which could take time.

Danish police in Swedish operations centre

Another example of Nordic police cooperation can be found in Malmö in Southern Sweden. This is Sweden’s only regional operations centre – of which there are seven – that is manned by police from two countries.



Stefan Sintéus, a chief of police with long international experience, leads the work. He tells the Nordic Labour Journal:

“The Nordic police cooperation has two levels. One is the legal level, where police submit a request for legal assistance to a prosecutor to initiate an investigation. The other is a practical level where cooperation takes place across the border.

“In our case, at the operations centre, we handle intelligence from both Sweden and Denmark that does not require legal assistance.”

The latter type of cooperation is about information sharing and is based on a cooperation agreement between the two Nordic countries.

“Our cooperation works well and there are no language issues since we make an effort to speak clearly. If something happens that requires action, we have rules for how this should happen.

“If we travel to Denmark, we first contact their information centre so that Danish and Swedish police can work together and the other way around.”

Earlier, Danish and Swedish police had so-called joint patrolling, which meant they could be in the same police vehicle on patrol.

“This could only happen in areas near the bridgeheads on the Danish and Swedish sides and as a result it was quite limited.

“Today, we have technological solutions that were not available back then, like speed cameras, stops at the Öresund Bridge toll station and the customs’ automatic numberplate recognition,” says Stefan Sintéus.

The Malmö operations centre was set up when the need for more cooperation became evident after the many shootings in the city in 2019. Malmö police were given extra resources when the police authorities declared a “National special event against serious violence in the country”.

The project was named Rimfrost and was led by Stefan Sintéus. Its main objective was to reduce the number of shootings and explosions in criminal environments.

“Rimfrost taught us that we have to coordinate information and work together much more and not be isolated in silos. So we set up a regional operations centre in Region Syd to be able to coordinate and streamline information,” he says.

There is now also a national operations centre in Stockholm, at the police headquarters in Kungsholmen, where police from Denmark, Finland and Norway share office space with at least one other Nordic country.

Increased information exchange is one of the points that Petra Lundh, Sweden’s national police commissioner, highlights in the new operational management model which she presented in December 2024:

“We will improve efficiency by replacing the current process management with a new leadership model, where the policing problem takes centre stage and information is shared to a greater extent.”

This is welcomed by Stefan Sintéus.

No more stations on a national border

According to Swedish police, there are currently no further plans for building another police station near or on the Finnish-Swedish border. However, Sweden did enter into a bilateral agreement with Finland to strengthen police cooperation in Tornedalen on 1 February 2025. The agreement

will be implemented at a later stage, the police wrote to the Nordic Labour Journal.

In the case of Denmark and Sweden, geography presents challenges. The countries are divided by water and there are no buildings on the Öresund bridge.

Danish-Swedish research project

The academic community is also showing interest in Nordic police cooperation. Researchers from Sweden and Denmark are working together in a project called "Policing and crime prevention cooperation in border areas".

The aim is "to describe and analyse everyday police work and crime prevention cooperation in border areas on structural and everyday levels, based on quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods."



Peter Lindström, professor of criminology at the Linnæus University, heads the project.

"Cooperation on paper is not the same as cooperation in real life. This sometimes stops on a policy level and does not reach all the way down to operational activities. That is something we want to examine."

The research group comprise criminologist Johan Rosquist from the Linnæus University; May-Britt Rinaldo Ronnebro, a former police officer with a degree in criminology from the University of Cambridge and a former expert from the Linnæus University; Ulf Sempert, former police commissioner and now a consultant; as well as Henrik Stevnsborg, historian and professor emeritus at the Faculty of Law at the University of Copenhagen, who previously has studied the cooperation between Nordic government ministers and police commissioners.

"We have a good group of researchers and our work is interdisciplinary. In the group we have expertise in law, sociology, political science and policing, in addition to criminology," says Peter Lindström.

The research group will examine the differences and similarities in Nordic police work to identify what can be learned from each other. A preliminary study has been done and the project is expected to be completed by 2028.



Equality under pressure – how the Nordics are fighting back

More than 50 years after the cooperation on gender equality began, the Nordics are doubling down on the promise to ensure that the region will continue to lead the way in the fight for equality and inclusion.

THEME

21.02.2025

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN

The Nordic Information on Gender, NIKK, is a Nordic cooperation body under the Nordic Council of Ministers, with offices at the University of Gothenburg. Much has happened in terms of gender equality in the past 50 years, yet there are still challenges, confirms Elin Engström, manager of NIKK.

The Nordic Council of Ministers launched a new cooperation programme on gender equality and LGBTI in 2024, identifying new goals for 2025 to 2030.

It reads: "It is important to protect the common Nordic values that we build our societies on. When some question equality and equal rights for LGBTI people across the world, we in the Nordic region defend equality, fairness and

the equal worth of all people. These human rights cannot be taken for granted; we must continue to defend the progress we have made in the Nordic region."



“We have come far in many areas in the Nordics, but at the same time, there are considerable inequalities in the Nordic societies,” says Elin Engström.

Ending major project on pay

The cooperation programme on gender equality and LGBTI forms the basis for what NIKK will work with in the coming years.

But right now, a project that has been running since March 2023 is entering its final stages. It has focused on pay; the project “Towards pay equity” aims to help reduce the pay gap between women and men in the Nordics through dialogue between the countries and the social partners. It builds on existing measures, experiences and knowledge to find efficient solutions.



Increased resistance is a key issue for the cooperation.

“It’s important to remember that this is not only a global phenomenon but something that is also happening in the Nordics. NIKK plays an important role in keeping these issues high on the agenda and in making sure debates and discussions are based on facts and not opinions,” says Engström.

Status in the Nordic region

She feels it is difficult to say anything in general about the status of gender equality in the Nordics. But the region still stands out in a positive way internationally, for instance when it comes to parental leave and women’s participation in the labour market. Yet there are challenges.

“There are still wage differences between women and men despite this having been priorities in our work with gender equality for a long time. There is still clear gender segregation both in educational choices and in the labour market,” she says.

Women also take on most of the caregiving responsibilities, which often mean economic disadvantages. There are also significant differences within groups of women and men depending on factors like age, social class and education.

The Confederation of Unions for Professionals Unio marks "Equal Pay Day" on 18 November every year. Equal pay is about equal pay for equal work and about equal pay for work of equal value, the organisation underlines in their campaigns. (Illustration: Unio)

One key question has been whether the focus should be extended from “equal pay for equal work” to equal pay for work of equal value”, taking into account different occupations with similar skill requirements, responsibility and effort.

Three reports

The first report was published in October last year and mapped national initiatives and ongoing work on pay gaps.

The two final reports are ready and will soon be published, says Jimmy Sand at NIKK.

Report number 2 looks at how public statistics can be used to measure wage differences between women and men in equivalent jobs in the Nordic region. The pilot study focuses in particular on Finland, Norway and Sweden and highlights challenges related to different vocational qualifications and the definition of wages in the different countries.

Traditional conflicts of interest

Jimmy Sand is the author of the third and final report: “Paths to equal pay for equal work: Explanations to the undervalua-

tion of women's work in the Nordic Region". It looks at why women's work is often undervalued and maps the reasons why through a survey of authorities, employers, trade unions and researchers.

Many point to the fact that there is gender segregation in the labour market:

- Women and men often work in different trades and sectors.
- Female-dominated occupations, especially in the care and education sectors, are systematically paid less than male-dominated occupations with equivalent requirements.
- Wage differences are evident both between the public and private sectors and within the public sector.

Other factors that impact wages are also identified:

- Women take more responsibility for unpaid care work, which impacts career development and pay.
- Women's starting salaries are often lower and traditional wage negotiation systems can amplify existing inequalities.



As expected, the responses to the survey show clear conflicts of interest between different occupations and trades, as well

as contradictions between employers and trade unions, points out Jimmy Sand.

"The most common explanation – especially among employers – is that more women should choose male-dominated occupations, like technical jobs with higher wage levels.

"The trade unions, however, are more critical to this solution, because it only changes the statistics without solving the underlying problem: continued low wages in the care and health sector," says Sand.

The answers show – and this is not surprising – that there are different views and conflicts of interest on the issues which are difficult to agree on, and this might explain why more is not happening in this area, he says.

Activities in 2025

The results from the salary project will now be distributed and discussed. It is not yet clear which fora will be used for this.

Trans people's working conditions are also high on the agenda in the Nordic cooperation. A seminar on this will be held in Copenhagen on 23 May. Four Nordic research groups are also currently cooperating on a research project on resilience within welfare systems in the face of future crises in the Nordic region.

Finland's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers has also prioritised men and masculinity as a theme, with three webinars planned for this spring in cooperation with the Finnish Council for Gender Equality, TANE.

A fund for common use

NIKK administers the Nordic Gender Equality Fund and the Nordic LGBTI Fund on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Each year, around three million and one million Danish kroner respectively are allocated to joint Nordic projects (€402,000 and €134,000).

"These funds represent an important resource for us – they create knowledge, networks, and methods that we can build on in our work. It is also essential to communicate the results and facilitate synergy effects, which is an important part of the Nordic cooperation," says Elin Engström.

The Nordic Gender Equality Fund was announced for the first time in 2013, while the LGBTI fund was set up in 2021. Successful applicants receive between 50,000 and 500,000 Danish kroner (€6,700 and €67,000).

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