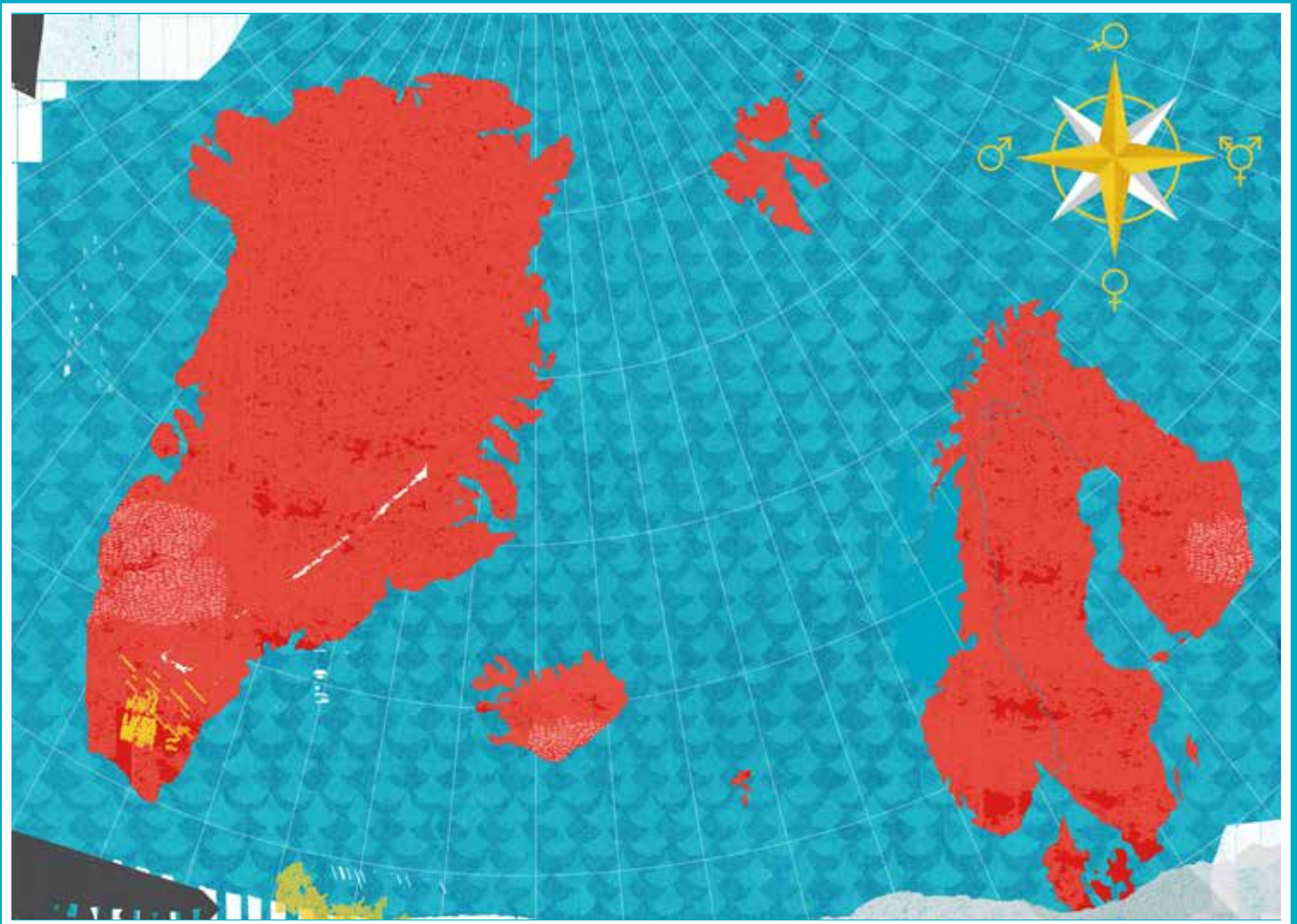




Part time culture and full time norm

Paths to gender-equal working time in the Nordic countries

Fact sheet from the project Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region 2013-2014



Part time culture and full time norm

Paths to gender-equal working time in the Nordic countries

Women work part time to a much greater extent than men, and this pattern can be found in all Nordic countries. The project Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region took a close look at the vast gender inequalities in relation to part-time employment. This fact sheet discusses the results and some challenges for the future.

Gender equality in the labour market is important in the Nordic countries and the unequally distributed part-time employment has become a key issue. The fact that women work part time to a greater extent than men affects women's economic independence. The differences in working time are an expression of the different conditions for women and men in the labour market and in society at large.

Nordic Information on Gender (NIKK) has reviewed and analysed part-time employment in the Nordic region at the request of the Nordic Council of Ministers. NIKK has had a coordinating role in bringing various actors, such as politicians, researchers and employer and union representatives, together. Two external research teams have been engaged in the project and the work has been supported by reference groups.

Review of part-time employment

Statistics on part-time work in the Nordic countries were compiled within the framework of the project. In Norway, 36 per cent of all employed women aged 25–64 worked part time in 2012. This figure is higher than in any other Nordic country. In Sweden the share was 31 per cent, in Denmark 29 per cent, in Iceland 26 per cent and in Finland 15 per cent.

For men, the differences were much smaller, as all countries showed shares in the rather low 6–10 per cent range.

Why part time?

The reasons more women than men work part time were also explored. Several explanatory factors were identified. The pattern reflects for example unequal domestic responsibilities. In addition, part-time employment is often involuntary. In some sectors, and in particularly female-dominated ones, opportunities for full-time work are limited. It is not uncommon that a 'part time culture' emerges in these sectors, where women who have children are expected to reduce their working hours. Part-time employment can also be a consequence of health problems or difficult working conditions.

Strategies for change

The project Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region has analysed and made room for discussion on the effects of part-time work. At the final conference in Reykjavik, titled From Part Time to Full Time – for Gender Equality in the Nordic Region, experts gathered to identify important issues for the future. The conference was held in Reykjavik 12 november 2014. It was designed to enable all participants to contribute to both the formulation of problems and suggestions for change, according to their respective areas of expertise.

Conference participants pointed out that increased opportunities for women to work full time will require increased investments in child and elder care. They also emphasised that the issue of women's part-time work is closely linked with the fact that men do not work part time to the same extent. Focusing solely on women's part-time work will not solve the core problem. Instead it is the distribution of part-time work and domestic responsibility that should be given attention. The conference programme also included discussions on possible legislation and regulations that could help increase gender equality



in the household and eventually also in part-time employment – for example shared parental insurance.

Important to broaden the perspective

The experts at the conference also stressed the need to broaden the perspective in the discussions around part-time work. When part-time employment is analysed in a gender equality perspective, it is important that for example the class and ethnicity perspective receives sufficient attention. Part-time work does not have the same effects for all groups of women. And not all women are in the traditional heterosexual relationships that the discussions often take for granted. Moreover, the discussion on part-time work differs entirely for example when it comes to people who have not been able to enter the regular labour market.

Why full time?

So there is a need to broaden the perspective in the discussions surrounding part-time work. However, there is also a need to look at the issue in an entirely new way. When part-time work is described as a problem, full-time employment is automatically assumed to be a superior alternative. Several conference participants emphasised the need to question the full time norm. Instead of focusing on women's part-time work as something innately bad, could it be that it is the part-time workers, and not the full-timers, who are in fact doing it right?

The part-time work issue – more than just part-time work

Participants at the conference *From Part Time to Full Time – for Gender Equality in the Nordic Region* listed important issues that the work in relation to part-time employment should focus on.

Time ▶

- What type of society do we want in terms of productivity, sustainability and the work-leisure balance?
- What's the true optimal number of working hours per week?

Labour market ▶

- How can we change the labour market to make gender differences and gender segregation disappear?
- How can we present the problem and challenges to the political system in a way that leads to labour market reforms?
- How do we best transition from analysis to action?

Household ▶

- How do we create a social infrastructure that enables everybody to work full time or that makes households share the part-time work more equally?
- How do we encourage men to take a greater responsibility for unpaid domestic duties?

Time to question the full time norm

Involuntary part-time employment is a big problem and the right to full-time work is an important demand, said the experts at the conference From Part Time to Full Time – for Gender Equality in the Nordic Region. However, the need to discuss and question the full time norm was also emphasised.

Full-time employment remains the default option in most political initiatives and social reforms, and this is a hindrance to discussions about what should be considered a reasonable number of weekly working hours. Such discussions are important, not least since part-time employment in many cases is a consequence of difficult working conditions.

‘If you work shifts or have a physically strenuous job, it might not be possible to work more than 80 per cent of regular full time. In these cases we need to redefine what full-time employment means. This is particularly true in some female-dominated sectors,’ said Drífa Snædal, general secretary of the Federation of General and Special workers in Iceland, at the conference in Reykjavik.

Other participants stressed the lack of flexibility in many female-dominated occupations as a factor affecting the need to work part time. Ingólfur V. Gíslason,



assistant professor in sociology at University of Iceland, talked about the need for a general work time reduction.

‘It would benefit gender equality, children’s wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of the population at large. Maybe we should try to accomplish a reduction down to what’s currently considered part time; 35-36 hours a week,’ he said.

Also researcher Cathrine Egeland emphasised the need to nuance the discussions surrounding part-time work.

‘The biggest problem is that we have such different expectations regarding what constitutes a normal and good life for women and for men.’

Read more in the project reports

Two reports have been presented within the project. *Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region* contains statistics on full- and part-time employment and compares the effects of part-time work on pensions in the Nordic countries. The second report, *Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region II*, gives

a research review laying down the reasons women work part time. It also describes important political and labour market interventions that have affected the work to reduce part-time employment among women in particular.

Summaries of the reports are available in the fact sheets titled *Part-Time Work – Different Economic Effects for Women and Men in the Nordic Region* and *Full-time or part-time work? – Different possibilities for women and men in the Nordic Region*.

NIKK

NORDIC INFORMATION ON GENDER

In autumn 2012, the Nordic Council of Ministers asked NIKK, Nordic Information on Gender, to coordinate the project Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region. The ambition has been to contribute analyses and increase the knowledge about part-time employment.

Two reports have been presented within the framework of the project, and these

have been followed up with conferences. In 2013, a conference with the same name as the project was arranged in Stockholm. In 2014, the conference From Part Time to Full Time – for Gender Equality in the Nordic Region was held in Reykjavik.

The conference in Reykjavik gathered participants from all parts of the Nordic region. Experts, researchers, politicians and

representatives from employers and trade unions met to discuss the future challenges in the Nordic part-time labour market. In this fact sheet you can read more about the results from the conference and the challenges concerning part-time work in the Nordic region.