

# Who Wants to Live in the Nordic Peripheral Areas?

Factsheet on the mapping "Place, (In)equality and Gender

– a mapping of best practices and challenges", 2015

# Gender, education and migration patterns in the Nordic region

## A mapping of challenges and best practice

**The Nordic countries are facing numerous challenges, some of which are specific to the more peripheral areas. Examples include changed living conditions in the wake of global changes, economic regression, loss of employment opportunities, in particular in traditionally male-dominated occupations, and depopulation, as young people, and especially women, are moving away to more urbanised areas to study or find a job. Many of the challenges affect men and women differently, and men and women also have different strategies to handle them. This is found in a mapping by EDGE, Center for Equality, Diversity and Gender, at Aalborg University.**

Some people adapt to the new conditions. For example, some women find new jobs in the care and service sector. Others are left behind, such as men with limited education, whose skills are no longer in demand in a transformed labour market. Men seem to be struck particularly hard by the transitions – which have been reinforced by the recent financial crisis. A large proportion of the male inhabitants of these regions risk being left behind without education, a job or a life partner.

The peripheral areas in the Nordic region display many differences, partly as a result of geography and distances, and these differences contribute to reinforcing some of the challenges. Overall, however, the areas share many key features, making it possible to compare gender-related trends across the entire Nordic region.

### Education

Young people's educational choices generally reflect the structures of the local labour markets. Young women are over-represented in post-secondary education, whereas men are more likely to either pursue basic vocational training or enter the labour market immediately after ninth grade. Males are less likely to see formal education as necessary in order to get a job. Instead, many young men who see a potential for employment in the local labour market are drawn to starting their adult life with an adult income as early as possible, and education is often not prioritised in that perspective.

The educational opportunities are limited in the peripheral areas, forcing many young people to commute long distances or even move away from their home areas.

However, women in particular are prone to moving to the larger cities or abroad. Many of those who move away never return after finishing their education, implying a net loss of inhabitants, lower birth rates, and therefore a reduced need for schools and preschools and a loss of job opportunities.

### Place attachment and everyday life

The place where a person grows up has a large effect on his or her identity and educational and occupational choices. The more young people identify with their local communities, the higher the likelihood they will stay there. The opportunities for leisure activities also affect young people's choices. Hunting and the outdoor lifestyle are factors found to strengthen men's attachment to their home communities.



Illustration: Emma Hanquist

## Did you know that...?

- ▶ In Pajala in northern Sweden, there are 68 women per 100 men.
- ▶ Finnish Lapland is destined to lose one-third of its inhabitants due to depopulation.
- ▶ In 2012, women in Iceland comprised 60 % of all university students and 67 % of all longdistance students.
- ▶ In 2014, Greenland had 12 % more men than women. In 2013, Greenlandic women made up 68 % of all university graduates.
- ▶ In the Faroe Islands, the number of women of fertile age has dropped by 19 % since 1990.

However, women who share these interests can find the macho culture in these domains discouraging, and a number of women report that their reason for moving away was that the leisure activities available in their home areas were mostly targeted to boys and men.

Social background has to be taken into account when attempting to understand why some young men feel a particularly strong bond to their home areas. Young people from the working class are more likely to stay, as they put a high value on their social networks and also see opportunities to find employment locally. In addition, young men in this group tend to have closer bonds with their fathers' life patterns, and therefore see it as natural to follow the occupational footsteps of their fathers – in trades that often are historically connected to the region. The strong social bonds commonly found in traditional occupations in the countryside are another reason young men choose to stay.

### The labour market

Gender-segregated educational and occupational choices, where men work in the private sector and women in the public – often on a part-time basis – are observed in all Nordic peripheral areas. Another shared feature is the decreasing number of employers and job opportunities, in particular in traditional, male-dominated trades such as fishery, mining and forestry. This development has resulted in significant unemployment, in particular among men. When job opportunities are lost, men and women tend not to respond in the same way. Men respond by choosing seasonal work or temporary jobs. They may also

choose to commute to a new job – often long distances and in shifts of two weeks on the job and two weeks off. By contrast, women transition to new sectors or move away to urban areas to find work. But the more differentiated the local labour market is, the higher the likelihood that also women will stay.

### Gender norms and working life

Peripheral areas have a tendency to push women away due to their more traditional gender roles. Consequently, when women choose to move away, it isn't always just a strategic career move – it can also be due to a wish to enjoy equal opportunities and a higher degree of freedom.

Young people with a traditional gender identity are more strongly connected to their local communities, while their counterparts with a more 'modern' gender identity have a weaker connection. Yet, class plays a role here, too, since preconceptions about gender vary along this dimension.

As in the rest of the Nordic region, the gender norms are changing in the peripheral areas. This can partly be attributed to the introduction of paternal leave, as it has generated an expectation that men should also be actively involved in family life and the raising of children.

Women's migration away from peripheral areas, coupled with high unemployment among men, is affecting the gender-segregated labour market. Men are increasingly entering occupational sectors traditionally reserved for women, even though they generally still consider these jobs to be associated with female jobs. In essence, they see the opportunity to stay in their home communities

- ▶ as more important than exactly what they do for a living. This choice does not change their view of male vs. female jobs, however; rather, they see their transition as a necessary consequence of the disappearance of more male-oriented jobs. Thus, they don't base their identities on their jobs to the same extent their fathers did.

The media often describe the young people in these areas as uneducated, unwilling to go back to school or learn a new trade, and unable to provide for themselves. The fact that many of the young men have indeed made conscious decisions about where they live, their education and their occupations is largely ignored in the debate.

Such a one-dimensional description may in fact magnify the gender challenges rather than solve them, according to Helene Pristed Nielsen, associate professor at Aalborg University. Danish research confirms this view.

'There's no doubt that it affect young people's perceptions. Studies among upper secondary students in Denmark show that the image conveyed in the media affects their migration plans. Swedish researcher Susanne Stenbacka believes it would be better to actively support the men's choice to stay as a way to breathe new life into those areas,' says Pristed Nielsen. ▲

## Best Practice

The report includes examples of best practice projects from across the Nordic region, practices that may help solve some of the gender-related challenges that the peripheral areas are facing, explains Pristed Nielsen, one of the report's three authors.

'We point to a broad spectrum of methods that can be both transferred to other national contexts and undertaken in cooperation. One example is distance education, which can enable people to pursue an education without having to move away from the home community. Some of the distance education programmes are also offered across national boundaries. Many peripheral areas are

sparsely populated, and carefully planned collaboration can help ensure that enough people apply for a course or a programme. One example of this is the North Atlantic Law Programme, which is offered in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Denmark, and also the West Nordic Master offered in Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and northern Norway. We also present cases addressing the changing labour market and retraining of men to make them qualified for work in new sectors. One example is a successful project in the Norwegian health sector, in which there is a steady increase of employment opportunities,' says Pristed Nielsen.



Commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Danish Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs, the Center for Equality, Diversity and Gender, EDGE, at Aalborg University, has conducted a mapping of challenges and best practice related to gender, education and migration patterns. The report, titled *Place, (In)equality and Gender - a mapping of challenges and best practices in relation to gender, education and mobility in Nordic peripheral areas* (2015), is authored by Stine Thidemann Faber, associate professor, Helene Pristed Nielsen, associate professor, and Kathrine Bjerg Bennike, research assistant, and covers Sweden, Norway, Finland, Åland, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Denmark.



NIKK is a knowledge and resource centre in the field of gender equality, commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers. By disseminating comparative information in the Nordic region, NIKK works in line with its mission statement: 'Sharing knowledge makes a difference. We are convinced that Nordic gender equality work improves when we learn from each other. That's what NIKK is for.' [www.nikk.no](http://www.nikk.no)