

Co-operation for gender equality in working life

Results from five projects funded by the Nordic
Gender Equality Fund



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Working life is a strategic area of intervention in the Nordic co-operation programme for gender equality. Gender segregation, labour market participation, and pay gaps are identified as important issues. In order to meet the challenges identified in the programme together, the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality have established the Nordic Gender Equality Fund. The Fund finances projects in which at least three organisations from at least three of the Nordic countries co-operate to promote gender equality. The Fund develops knowledge and spreads that knowledge across borders.

Over the years, many projects financed by the Fund have focused on issues related to gender equality in the workplace. Furthermore, in 2017, this theme had a special priority in the call for proposals on the initiative of the Norwegian presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

This summary presents results from co-operation projects financed by the Fund that have contributed to gender equality in the workplace. The purpose of this summary is to share knowledge and experience from these projects in order to increase their impact so that they will benefit more people, and to inspire others to participate in Nordic co-operation projects.

The summary has been prepared by Nordic Information on Gender (NIKK), which is a co-operation body under the Nordic Council of Ministers. NIKK has the task of managing the Nordic Gender Equality Fund.

ABOUT THE NORDIC GENDER EQUALITY FUND

Since its establishment in 2013, more than 60 projects have been granted funding for co-operation projects. These projects have involved more than 170 unique actors from all the Nordic countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Aaland Islands, as well as the three Baltic States. Together they have conducted studies, established networks and arranged conferences on, for example, parenting, preschool education, and sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment in the workplace the health sector

Efforts to prevent and deal with sexual harassment are key in improving gender equality in the workplace. Sexual harassment is common in the health sector.

Through co-operation between three municipalities in three Nordic countries and the University of Agder in Norway, an experience-based network has been established for method development, and to boost skills and develop awareness of ways to prevent and manage sexual harassment in the health sector. In addition, a brochure of ideas about how to work to prevent sexual harassment has been prepared based on a survey of how these three municipalities are working with this issue.

The study shows that many who work in health care have been subjected to sexual harassment, mostly by users of services and patients, or by their relatives. Young women are most often the victims. It is also noted that staff in these occupations have a high tolerance for being subjected to unwanted sexual attention and that they see it as 'part of the job'. As a result, few instances of sexual harassment are reported. Working alone was seen by the interviewed employees as a major risk factor.

In all three of the municipalities surveyed, there were general procedures in place for how sexual harassment between colleagues is to be managed when it is reported. Specific guidelines for managing sexual harassment in the health sector were not found in any of the municipalities, however. There was also a lack of guidelines on what applied if an employee was subjected to sexual harassment by a patient or a relative of a patient,

even though this is the most common form of sexual harassment.

The survey shows that more preventive efforts are needed, where they already exist, they need to be improved. More knowledge, greater awareness of the problem, and greater openness about the subject were seen as key aspects.

Based on the survey and a review of the legislation, regulations, procedures, and action plans at the national, municipal and unit levels, a set of guidelines was developed. This document will be made available at the workplaces the municipalities.

A synergistic effect of the project is that a course on sexual harassment in the health sector was developed. This course has been given in Iceland and Norway to more than 800 participants.

Read more about the results in the report *Let's talk about sexual harassment*.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Partners:

Centre for Gender and Equality at the University of Agder (NO) Arendal Municipality (NO)

Municipality of Akureyri (IS) Eskilstuna Municipality (SE)

Project period: 2018–2020

Under-representation of men in health and social care

To promote gender equality in working life requires action to counter gender segregation in the labour market. Gender segregation leads to women and men having different working conditions, pay, and different career and development opportunities. In the Nordic countries, men are under-represented in health care occupations, especially among nurses. In 2019, men made up about 10-15 per cent of all nurses in the region, and in Denmark (including the Faroe Islands) and in Iceland the proportion of men in this occupation was only 2-5 per cent.

In this project, actors from different sectors in Norway, Denmark and Iceland gathered material on how health care study programmes recruit students and teaching is done, and how male students experience the teaching. Bachelor's programmes at six universities, two in each country, were studied.

The study shows that in their communications about nursing education the educational institutions do not contradict the stereotypical gender norms that are traditionally used when care settings are illustrated, and in those cases where they did do so, it was only to a limited extent. A homogeneous picture is also communicated in relation to ethnic and religious diversity. Even in the teaching materials, women and men, as well as people with different ethnic backgrounds, are portrayed in an unbalanced way.

The study also shows that the management and staff of the studied educational institutions have little knowledge about the research and initiatives for increasing the proportion of men among the students in their nursing programmes.

Based on the results, the project has put together a number of recommendations targeting educational institutions about recruiting and retaining men in health care study programmes. The recommendations highlight the importance of management's responsibility and commitment to balancing the gender distribution in health care study programmes. Management also need to clarify what the goal is, why, who is responsible, and what resources have been allocated to this work. In addition, teachers and students need to be involved in the process of change. The recommendations also emphasise that unions and professional associations are important in promoting greater diversity and gender equality in the nursing profession, and targets ought to be set and measures adopted at the national policy level to promote a better gender balance.

Read more about the results in the report *Men in Nursing Education – Mapping Educational Practices and Student Experiences in Iceland, Denmark, and Norway* (2019)

Read the recommendations from the report in the brochure *Making nursing a study for men – Recommendations from a Nordic project on men in nursing education* (2019)

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Partners:

Reform – resource center for men (NO) Háskólinn á Akureyri (University of Akureyri) (IS)

Jafnréttisstofa (Iceland's Directorate of Equality) (IS)

Roskilde University (DK)

Project period: 2017–2019



Participation of immigrant women in the workforce

Many women of immigrant background are marginalised in the Nordic countries, especially in the labour market. Research shows that participation in the workforce is lower among immigrant women, and that unemployment is more common in this group. This has a negative impact on these women's income and participation in the community. Many women also occupy positions that are not commensurate with their level of education. In the project, the partners conducted a study of initiatives to increase labour market participation among immigrant women in Arctic cities in the Nordic countries. Initiatives taken in Icelandic Akureyri, Swedish Luleå and Finnish Rovaniemi were studied and in-depth interviews were conducted with immigrant women in these cities. The study aimed to highlight women's experiences in the labour market in Nordic Arctic cities, as well as to explore how policies and practices can improve integration in these cities.

The report entitled *Enhanced Labour Market Opportunities for Immigrant Women – Arctic case studies (2018)* shows that knowledge of the language of the country is an important factor in all the cases investigated. Knowing the language is an important aspect of integration into the labour market, as well as into social life in general and for greater participation in the community. The obstacles to learning the local language were similar in the three cities, including lack of access to the right language teaching, few opportunities to practise speaking the new language, lack of motivation and self-confidence, and limited time to learn the language. Besides the language issue, contact networks are an important factor. Most

immigrants do not have the same kinds of social networks as someone who was born in the country. Social networks are often used to land a job, something that is especially common in smaller cities. In order to balance out such differences, practical placements, local mentors and other initiatives to bring immigrants and local employers together can act as gate openers and expand social networks.

The report concludes that language courses for women and groups with similar educational backgrounds can have a positive impact on the language learning process, as well as improve integration into the labour market and participation in the community. Language courses and workshops should also aim to increase women's self-confidence and motivate them to participate in the labour market. The report shows that opportunities for learning the language in a workplace, for example through practical placements, have a positive impact on language learning, contact networks, and further participation in the labour market.

The report also emphasises that language teaching should be combined with information about the local labour market and how it works.

Read more about the results in the report *Enhanced Labour Market Opportunities for Immigrant Women – Arctic case studies (2018)*

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Partners:

Nordregio (SE)

Lapin yliopisto (University of Lapland) (FI) Háskólinn á Akureyri (University of Akureyri) (IS)

Project period: 2017–2018

Comparison of parental insurance schemes

Paid parental leave and publicly funded childcare have laid the foundations for the Nordic welfare model because they mean that both women and men can combine work and family life. A high employment rate among women leads to higher growth and balances the economic power of women and men and their ability to shape their own lives. However, despite high ambitions, no Nordic country has completely succeeded in breaking the pattern of women taking the greatest responsibility for children, while men can invest more in their working lives. In order to confront the problems that remain, three national women's rights organisations have surveyed and compared the parental insurance schemes in all the Nordic countries, and examined how they affect women working and men taking out parental leave.

The report *Föräldraledig? Mer än en köksbordsfråga* (2019) (Parental leave? More than just a kitchen table issue) shows that men taking parental leave is dependent on the number of months earmarked for them. When the earmarked months increase, men taking parental leave increases, and conversely when they decrease, men taking parental leave decreases. Other attempts to influence men to take parental leave, such as the gender equality bonus in Sweden, have not had any demonstrable effect. The report also shows that women are largely on leave with low or no parental benefits being paid to them. This could be due for example to their parental leave entitlement having ended before the child gets a place in childcare such as in Iceland; that the childcare allowance largely replaces childcare such as in Finland and Norway; or that it is possible to stretch

out parental leave over a long period by mixing days with and without parental benefits as in Sweden.

Based on the results, the report presents recommendations on how parental leave schemes should be designed to best promote gender equality. Among the recommendations are that parental leave should be taken when the child is young. Parental benefits should be concentrated to the time just before birth and the first months of the child's life. This would help strengthen in particular those groups of women who are far from being able to access the labour market, help to improve the establishment of recently arrived immigrant women on the labour market, and help to increase gender equality in taking parental leave. The recommendations also highlight the importance of some flexibility in the schemes, but that a high degree of flexibility has a negative impact on gender equality. Leave longer than one year may be detrimental to women's future standing in the labour market and to their incomes and pensions. This is because women, in particular, stretch out their paid parental leave with unpaid days.

Read more about the results in the report *Föräldraledig? Mer än en köksbordsfråga* (2019) (Parental leave? More than a kitchen table issue) and read a summary in English [here](#).

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Partners:
Swedish Women's Lobby (SE), Norwegian Women's Lobby (NO) Icelandic Women's Rights Association (IS)
Project period: 2017–2019

Sexual harassment in the hotel and restaurant industry

Sexual harassment is a widespread problem in working life, and a particularly hard-hit industry is the hotel and restaurant industry. Yet how such problems are handled by management is a question about which relatively little is known. The partners in this project used the report *Sexual harassment in the Scandinavian hotel industry. Experiences from three hotels in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (2018)* to investigate what was standing in the way of effective handling of sexual harassment in the hotel and restaurant industry. The report gives an account of interviews with managers, health and safety representatives and union representatives at three hotels in Denmark, Norway and Sweden about their understanding and handling of sexual harassment.

Some of the results of the study are that cases of sexual harassment that occur between employees, as well as between employees and managers, are the most difficult to deal with. It is easier to deal with cases where guests are harassing co-workers. A harassing guest can be turned away from the hotel, but managers find it more difficult to find solutions in situations where the harassment occurs between work colleagues. It is also apparent that different workplace cultures, even between different departments in the same hotel, present different challenges that require different kinds of solutions.

The results also show that the policies and procedures of hotel chains are important in

preventing and following up cases of sexual harassment, and that the health and safety representatives and union representatives are rarely involved in dealing with cases of sexual harassment at the hotels studied. The report also shows that few of the differences between the hotels studied can be attributed to differences in national legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace.

As part of the project, the partners also compiled a list of guidelines from Sweden, Norway and Denmark on how sexual harassment in the workplace can be prevented and stopped. The publication describes these guidelines and what they focus on.

Read more about the results in the report *Sexual harassment in the Scandinavian hotel industry. Experiences from three hotels in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (2018)* (summary in English)

Read the *Utvalgte veiledninger om trakassering i arbeidslivet (2018)* (Selected guidelines on harassment in the workplace, only available in Norwegian)

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Partners:
Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (NO) the
Danish Institute for Human Rights (DK) the Equality
Ombudsman (SE)
Project period: 2017–2019

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