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Gender Equality
– the Nordic Way



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ANP 2010:701

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ISBN 978-92-893-1988-1

Layout: Jette Koefoed

Photos: Cover; p.3, 5: Johannes Jansson; p.4: ImageSelect
p.7: Les Kaner; p.9: Lehtikuva Oy; p.11: Magnus Fröderberg;
p.13: Berit Roald Scanpix; p.15: Pawel Flato

Copies: 1,000

Print: Scanprint as

Printed on environmentally friendly paper, which fulfils the requirements of the Nordic Swan eco-label.

This publication can be ordered from www.norden.org/order and downloaded from norden2010.dk. Other publications are available at www.norden.org/publikationer.

Printed in Denmark



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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and three autonomous territories: the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and promotes a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Co-operation seeks to promote Nordic and regional interests and values in a globalised world. Common values strengthen the position of the Nordic Region and make it one of the most innovative and competitive regions in the world.



Nordic Co-operation on Gender Equality

Nordic co-operation has been striving to improve gender equality for more than 30 years. The aim is to make policies on gender equality in the Region the best in the world and a model for other countries.

The Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and the autonomous territories Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands – have made great progress on gender equality, but the Region still faces major challenges, such as human trafficking and a labour market divided on gender lines.

The focus of the Nordic co-operation is currently on three main areas:

Gender and Power

The research project *Gender and Power* identified and analysed women's and men's representation in the Nordic countries and autonomous territories. The purpose was to generate knowledge to support the political decision-making process and to emphasise gender-equality measures that influence the mechanisms behind structural power. The research project *Gender and Power* showed that it is now possible for women to reach top positions in the Nordic countries, more so in parliamentary politics than in other spheres of society.



Gender and Youth

Young people's gender identities are changing. In order to avoid gender stereotyping, which may lead to, amongst other things, a gender-segregated labour market, steps have been taken to integrate the gender perspective into Nordic co-operation on higher education, schools, children, and youth and culture.

Gender and Climate Change

In 2008, the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality decided to focus on gender equality and climate change, because a gender perspective should be integrated into policies and programs on climate change. One of the goals was to include the gender perspective in the UN climate negotiations (COP15). During COP15, the Nordic countries pushed to have a gender perspective included in the agreement. Although the agreement was a disappointment to many, as it was not legally binding, it was a victory for the Nordic countries that several references to gender were included.

Other Regional Co-operation:

The Nordic Region does not just co-operate internally on gender equality, but also with, for example, the three Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Russia and Kaliningrad.

The following presentations from the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality, written especially for the commemoration of Beijing + 15 in 2010, highlight the policy priorities for each minister and each country.



Denmark

Denmark is at the forefront when it comes to gender equality. We know that you cannot talk about freedom and democracy without also talking about equal rights for all women. This year, we are united in marking the 15th anniversary of the World Conference on Women in Beijing. Since 1995, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action have provided the framework for ensuring gender equality. In Denmark, we have also come a long way after many years of targeted work on gender equality. Danish women have the freedom to choose how they want to live and the right to decide over their own body.

Both the female employment rate and the fertility rate of women are among the highest in the European Union. This is clearly reflected in the coverage rate for childcare services for children below the age of 3, which is the highest in the European Union. Furthermore, women and men have the opportunity to arrange their family lives in the way they want by, for example, taking advantage of the flexible maternity and paternity leave.

We have really come a long way in terms of the goals we committed to in Beijing in 1995. There are, however, still challenges remaining – and more can still be done to ensure that all women and men in Denmark feel that they have equal opportunities.

First and foremost, immigrant women who are subject to social control from husbands or families, must be offered a helping hand. Many of these women need to know their rights and learn how to make use of them.

We are also working to get more women in management positions. More women in management is first of all a good business strategy. This work must be intensified so that the individual enterprises utilise the talents and qualifications of female employees in their own best interest.

Another challenge in Denmark is to reduce the pay-gap. We therefore work to the gender-divided labour market, which is the single most significant cause of the inequalities in pay between women and men.

Denmark also places special focus on combating domestic violence. Violence against women has no place in a free and equal society. With two national action plans since 2002 Denmark has succeeded in breaking the silence about domestic violence. And the efforts have paid off! The number of women who are the victims of domestic violence fell from around 42,000 women annually to 28,000 women annually.

Since 2000, Denmark has made a comprehensive and targeted effort to combat trafficking in women. It is crucial that the efforts aimed at combating the trafficking of women receive higher priority globally.

Denmark is also at the forefront internationally in the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2008, Denmark launched the global MDG3 Call to Action campaign to ensure MDG3 a high place on the international agenda and mobilise additional financial resources for the empowerment of women.

The response of the world has been impressive. More than 145 representatives from governments, international organisations, the private sector and civil society and prominent individuals have received a torch and committed to "do something extra for gender equality and women's empowerment". The Minister for Development Cooperation will follow up on the initiative and host an international high-level conference in Copenhagen later this month on women's empowerment and employment to feed into the MDG stocktaking meeting in September in New York. Denmark sees MDG3 as a goal in itself and as a means to achieve all the other MDGs, and the proof is to be found internationally as well as nationally.

Women's health is also a core priority in the international work. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights for women in the poorest parts of the world remains high on the agenda and Denmark is fundamentally a strong advocate for universal access to reproductive health care.

Inger Støjberg,
Minister of Gender Equality



Finland

Finland is among the leading countries in the world when it comes to women's involvement in political decision-making. The majority of the present Government ministers, 60 per cent, is women, for the first time in our history. Women's proportion of the Members of Parliament is 42 per cent. We also have a female president. This favourable development should continue. At the local level women's proportion of the elected decision-makers is not quite as high as at the national level. In municipal councils women's share is a little under 40 per cent. These are challenges we must meet.

An equal number of representatives of both genders among the decision-makers do not solve all the problems. We have in recent years also focused on gender mainstreaming in the Ministries' work. The aim is to assess the impact of decisions on women and men at the stage when decisions are being prepared. We have trained civil servants to assess gender impacts in their own work. Particular attention has been paid to the preparation of the government budget and legislation and the most important projects and programmes of the Government.

The Act on Equality between Women and Men was tightened in 1995, introducing a provision on quotas of at least 40 per cent. Accordingly, state and municipal working groups and other comparable drafting and decision-making bodies must have at least 40 per cent of both women and men. This provision does not apply to municipal councils, whose members are elected by local elections. The quotas have diversified women's skills and competence, and thereby opened new routes for women's advancement to the role of political decision-makers.

In Finland a higher proportion of employees is working under female managers than in any other EU member state. In 2008, 32 per cent of those holding managerial posts were women, while the corresponding percentage in 1984 was only 14 per cent. The change is based on the fast improvement of the level of education among Finnish women: our women are the best educated in Europe when looking at higher-level education. Women's career opportunities have been purposefully promoted in particular in the public sector, among other things by means of mentoring. However, the highest managerial positions and managerial positions in the private sector are still mostly held by men.

In the private sector the proportion of women in management positions is lower than in the state and municipal sectors. But there has been progress in this field too, and attention has been focused on this subject and it has been noticed that enterprises led by women are more successful than average. When looking at all the listed companies in Finland, we can note that 14 per

cent of their board members are women (2009). There has been progress in this respect, too, since this proportion was 12 per cent in the previous year.

To ensure that women can take part in working life on an equal footing with men there must be opportunities for reconciliation of work and family life. We have purposefully made efforts to organise a high-level, affordable day care provision for families with children. All children under school age are entitled to day care. This provides both fathers and mothers with an opportunity to continue in working life when their children are young. In the course of years the family leave system has also been developed to the effect that having children does not involve leaving one's job. Both fathers and mothers can take family leave and return thereafter to the same job.

We have for years encouraged fathers to take family leave. There has been some progress, but not enough. At present fathers are entitled to take, besides a paternity leave of three weeks, a so called bonus leave of one month. Furthermore, the parents can share the parental leave as they wish. Family leave is, however, taken almost only by mothers. We have noted that fathers in general only use their entitlement to the family leaves that are earmarked for them. In order to ensure that fathers will spend more time with their small children, we should earmark more of the family leave for them.

Stefan Wallin
Minister of Gender Equality Affairs



Iceland

Iceland is now at the top of The World Economic Forum's Global 2009 Gender Gap Index. Last year a major change took place in Icelandic politics. For the first time in Icelandic history a woman took the seat of Prime Minister and the number of women and men became equal in the Government. The participation of women in the Icelandic Parliament rose from 33% to 43%.

One of the most important challenges ahead is bridging the gender pay gap. Since 1961 Iceland has had an Act on equal pay for equal work. In spite of the law, the gender pay gap is approximately 16% according to research from 2008. The gender pay gap is deeply rooted in the gender architecture. The elimination of this old but unacceptable values demands great efforts. The recession may have the effect of narrowing the pay gap, since sectors where men have been dominating, are so far harder hit by the crisis. Unemployment is higher among men than women in Iceland.

The participation of women in the labour market in Iceland is one of the highest among the OECD countries. More and more women have a full time job and the level of education is high. Women are now 2/3 of university students. At the same time the labour market is highly gender segregated. Women represent a large majority of those working in the public sector, while more men work in the private sector. Creating jobs for both women and men is an important challenge and demands equal opportunities for education and training. In creating new jobs it is important to emphasise the need of breaking down stereotypes in order to help both women and men using their talent and by thus developing a more progressive and creative labour market.

One of the main reasons for the gender pay gap is the fact that most businesses are still run by men who tend to evaluate women's work differently from men's work. One of the important challenges ahead is increasing the number of women on boards and as directors of all kinds of businesses. Research shows that businesses where both women and men are in charge are better run, more equal, more profitable and have a better image. The Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) is now encouraging their members to increase the number of women on boards considerably for the next three years. If that does not happen the only way is to follow Norway's footsteps and introduce a quota system.

One of the most significant steps towards gender equality in Iceland is the maternity/paternity leave system from the year 2000. It gives fathers three months paid paternity leave, mothers three months paid maternity leave and the parents can also share three months. The three months for the mother or the father are not transferable. So far, over 90% of fathers have taken their leave. Research shows that fathers are building up closer relationships with their children and women and men are more equal in the workplace, but the maternity/paternity leave has not made the gender pay gap smaller. The

challenge during the recession is to protect the structure of the maternity/ paternity leave system and encourage fathers to continue using their rights. The Government has been forced to lower the payments because of cut-downs and that may affect parent's possibilities of using their maternity/ paternity leave, especially the fathers, since they more often have higher wages.

An action plan against gender based violence has been in force since 2007 and is to be revised for the period 2011–2015. Research from 2009 shows that 22% of Icelandic women have experienced gender based violence in close relationships. 5% of these women were pregnant when the violence took place. People working in the social system, primary schools, health care, police and churches are now being interviewed in order to map their experience and find out what needs to be stressed in the next plan of action. Since 2006 a project called Men for Responsibility has been running concentrating on the perpetrators. In 2009 the Icelandic Parliament passed a law criminalizing the buying of sex. Iceland has thereby joined Sweden and Norway in defining prostitution as one form of violence against women that must be eliminated.

Árni Páll Árnason
Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security



Norway

A robust economy is essential to any nation in order to develop a sustainable welfare society. Modern societies need to utilize all human resources, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, age and sexual orientation.

International research and statistics show and confirm the importance of increasing gender balance in labour-force participation and education to ensure sustainable economic growth and development. The cost of gender inequality for national economies is not only a betrayal to the girls and women of the world – it is also bad socio-economic politics. Gender equality is a matter of human rights.

Norway is today one of the front runners as regards female employment and birth rates in the world. Around 80 per cent of the female population is working and combined with this we have one of the highest birthrates in Western Europe – 1,9.

Societal change does not merely come by itself. Change has to be led by political will and decisions, mirroring values and norms in the population. Our experience is that targeted and affirmative action and legislation in the field of gender equality is needed and lead to change.

In 2003 the large enterprises noted on the stock exchange market (Public Limited Companies), recruited only 7 per cent women to their boardrooms. Competent women were not seen – not recruited. Today women have taken more than 40 per cent of these boardroom positions. The Norwegian

Parliament required this by law in 2003. The quota caused a big discussion when it was introduced. Today, the critics are silenced and the women have taken their righteous seats at the board room tables.

In 1993 the first father quota in the world was introduced in the parental leave scheme by law, with four weeks reserved for the father. In 2009 the law reserves 10 weeks. This obligatory paid leave can not be transferred to the mother. Today 90 per cent of the fathers are taking their obligatory 10 weeks, and the Cabinet intends to expand the father quota to 14 weeks.

The key of gender equality is redistribution of power, care and work.

Norway has come a long way, however there are still challenges ahead such as gender segregation in education and work-life, unequal pay for work of equal value as well as gender based violence.

Norway is playing an active role internationally in fighting for the empowerment of women and girls. The challenges in the North and the South are indeed different. But the answer is the same. Gender equality pays off – for each and every woman and girl child, boys and men, families, companies and the society at large. Countries which don't empower women will not stand to prosper.

Audun Bjørlo Lysbakken
Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion



Sweden

The aim of the Swedish Government's gender equality policy is, on the one hand, to combat and change systems that preserve the gender based distribution of power and resources at societal level, and on the other, to create the conditions for women and men to enjoy the same power and opportunities to influence their own lives. Sweden considers it necessary to have women and men sharing power and influence in all aspects of community life. This is a prerequisite for a democratic society. The Government also recognizes that gender equality contributes to economic growth by promoting all people's skills and creativity.

The over-arching strategy is gender mainstreaming. It's not a single policy area that should shoulder the full responsibility for implementing gender equality – all policy areas need to fully commit to working towards a society in which women and men have equal rights and opportunities.

The Swedish Government has identified a number of key areas for raising the level of gender equality. We have made a tenfold increase of resources for gender equality measures – to around SEK 400 million (approx. 40 million Euro) annually during this term of office, 2007–2010.

Despite the progress made so far gender inequality continues to exist which is expressed in for example the gender pay gap, unequal career opportunities, an unequal division of parental insurance and an under-representation of women in executive positions in local and regional decision-making bodies. Furthermore there is a high degree of segregation in the labour market and in upper secondary education.

One of the most obvious examples of inequality is violence against women and girls. Therefore the government has assigned an action plan to combat men's violence against women, violence in the name of honour and violence in same-sex relations. Altogether SEK 1 billion (100 million Euro) is being invested in 56 different measures with the aim to ensure greater safety and security, to improve preventive efforts, to make legislation more forceful and agency work more effective. In July 2008, an action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes was adopted. A total of SEK 213 million (21 million Euro) is being invested in 36 measures up to the end of 2010.

Another important area is creating equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market and the business sector. A long-term strategy has been adopted, which includes an in depth analysis as well as outlines more than 60 measures designed to eliminate gender inequalities, to increase the employment rate and to reduce exclusion.

In 2008 Sweden introduced a gender equality bonus system in order to promote the equal sharing of parental leave between parents. The bonus is a tax relief that is paid to parents who share their paid parental leave equally.

Promoting gender equality is one of the key targets in Swedish development co-operation. Three priority areas are gender mainstreaming, health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender related violence. Sweden is deeply concerned with the lack of fulfilment of the UN Millennium Development Goals and particularly the goal to reduce maternal mortality. Sweden has therefore launched a special effort to improve maternal health within a broad sexual and reproductive health agenda.

Gender equality is not a dream – it is possible to achieve. 15 years after the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing with the ongoing development of a new gender architecture in the UN there is reason to be optimistic.

Nyamko Sabuni
Minister of Gender Equality





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ANP 2010:701
ISBN 978-92-893-1988-1

