

Chapter:

The Nordic Gender Equality Model / Mari Teigen, Hege Skjeie

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## Chapter 5

### The Nordic Gender Equality Model

#### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The exploration of Nordic models in comparative welfare state research often includes gender equality as an important dimension (c.f. Kautto 2010). International indexes that map degrees of gender equality regularly rank the Nordic countries at the top of either global or regional surveys, as seen in for instance the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap and the European Union's (EU) Gender Equality Index. Feminist scholarship on gender regimes (Walby 2009) groups the Nordic countries as more equal than others. Some have claimed that the Nordic countries embody a state form that makes it possible to transform them into "truly woman-friendly societies" (Hernes 1987). In some instances, Nordic model thinking has become so value-laden as to portray Nordic countries as nearly "nirvanas" of equality (cf. Lister 2009).

As these examples show, the basis for modeling Nordic gender equality varies. Indexes mainly depict gender gaps in performance on various equality indicators. Regime theory, in contrast, ties public institutions and public policies directly to what are then seen as outcome variables, assuming and/or testing causal links between policies and performance or practice. However, as noted by Kautto (2010), views of the Nordic model often suffer from a lack of consensus on the precise specifications that define the model. Traditionally, Kautto claims, the notion of a Nordic model simply and somewhat vaguely refers to an active state, a large public sector, and a broadly conceived public responsibility for the social welfare of citizens all within the framework of a market economy (Kautto 2010: 587). In welfare state research, the treatment of gender equality as an important dimension is often related to a strong performance on various employment indicators. Economists who investigate Nordic model

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Marie Andersen Hulthin for her highly competent and conscientious research assistance throughout the process of writing this chapter.

institutions establish conceptual ties between mainly increasing female labor participation since the 1960s, and welfare state expansion through public care for children and the elderly.<sup>2</sup> The institutional framework of Nordic welfare state policies is then seen as generally beneficial to the inclusion of women in paid work, and the specific orientation of family policies as either helpful in furthering, or partly designed to promote, such inclusion (Ellingsæter & Leira 2006, Leira 2012, Ellingsæter 2014).

International gender equality indexes commonly apply gender gap measures to employment rates and monthly earnings, but also to levels of education, forms of political participation and representation, and/or health and life expectancy. Such indexes are outcome-oriented in the sense that they address forms of social progress and the equalization of such over time among the citizens of specific countries, for instance, EU member states. However, they are often (at the same time) meant to provide general guidelines for relevant policy making in the sense that observed discrepancies in the outcomes between men and women could prompt political measures to reduce gender gaps.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, we investigate the descriptive premises involved in portrayals of a Nordic model of gender equality. Mainly, however, we focus on the equality dimensions that form the baseline in comparative welfare state research and research on political participation. We outline these dimensions as norms for *economic equity* and *democratic parity*. Broadly speaking, an equality norm for economic equity would include equal educational opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value, gender balance in family life, and gender-balanced participation in labor markets. An equality norm for democratic parity would, of course, presuppose equal rights to vote, assemble, and hold office but, more importantly in this context, stress inclusive opportunity structures for civil society and gender balance in political decision making.

First, we examine whether and how descriptive statistics that assess these two dimensions currently rank Nordic countries compared with other European countries among the member states of the European Union. For this, we utilize the EU's Gender Equality Index.<sup>4</sup> We then search for comparable statistics on outcome and performance that include the Nordic non-EU

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<sup>2</sup> ESOP project description <http://www.sv.uio.no/esop/english/about/reports/plans-reports/The%20CoE%20Application>

<sup>3</sup> One example is the stated purpose of the EU's Gender Equality Index to "provide decision makers with support when assessing how far a given Member State is from reaching gender equality" (C.F. Holst forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/gender-equality-index>

members Norway and Iceland to explore similarities and differences within the Nordic region, as well as see how these countries compare to the Nordic EU members: Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Finally, we approach the question of policy models, discussing whether it is possible to identify a distinctive policy profile common to the Nordic countries for how to promote economic equity and democratic parity. We conclude this investigation with a set of what we regard as informed speculations regarding how policy might matter to gender equality in the Nordic countries today.

### **Economic equity and democratic parity**

Much model-oriented welfare state research departs from Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1999) influential typology of three forms of welfare state regimes. A historically distinct Northern European model of gender equality policy is depicted as embedded in the dominant welfare state arrangements of the (ideal type) social democratic regime, in contrast to the liberal and conservative corporatist regimes. Briefly outlined, the liberal model is characterized by limited state involvement and market-based services. Welfare state services are typically means-tested assistance, and modest universal transfers are directed toward those most in need. The conservative-corporatist regime model is strongly committed to traditional family values, where social insurance excludes non-working wives and family benefits are directed toward supporting motherhood. The social democratic regime type builds on a welfare system where all benefit, all are dependent, and thus the willingness to pay for the system includes the many (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27-28).

As summed up by Kautto (2010: 592), the Nordic welfare states have developed into dual-earner societies in contrast to Continental and Southern European countries where female labor market participation is significantly lower, and the male-breadwinner family is still relatively prevalent. Along the "social democratic public service route" (Walby 2004) that characterizes the Nordic countries, public services (in particular publicly financed childcare and parental leave) were developed to provide women with the capacity to increase their paid employment. Feminist scholarship on the Nordic model is often tied to a broader notion of gender-inclusive citizenship. The citizenship framework incorporates aspects of gender equality across paid work, care work, and income, as well as across areas of participation in political life and decision-making (Bergquist 1999, Siim & Borchorst 2002, 2016, Lister 2009). More recently, aspects related to violence against women and intersectional forms of

discrimination<sup>5</sup> have been increasingly addressed in model terms (Lister 2009, Borchorst et al. 2012, Siim & Borchorst 2016). If we apply the universal UN-based framework of the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as a baseline for what gender equality is all about, we see that norms and policies for legal equality, bodily integrity, and democratic parity are as important as norms and policies for economic equity.

For democratic parity, Lister (2009) cites the mid-1990s work by Karvonen and Selle (1995) on women's political representation in the Nordic countries as a development that "transformed the face of politics." Central to Hernes' (1987) work on Nordic state feminism is the combination of "mobilization from below" through movement politics and "integration from above" through party politics. Comparative politics scholarship has, nevertheless, taken care to underline the incremental approach to parity in political participation that has characterized Nordic polities: a gradual increase in political representation across all parties since the early 1970s and a common unwillingness to apply legal measures, for instance, in the form of electoral quotas, to determine the composition of parliaments (Freidenvall, Dahlerup & Skjeie 2006).

In line with most Nordic model debates, research on gender equality now asks about the impact of different ties among Nordic countries to the European Union. Although Sweden and Finland joined Denmark as EU members in 1995, Norway and Iceland chose to remain outside, building new EU ties through the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement. Gender equality policies vary considerably among the EU member states. However, there has also been substantive hard law harmonization as a result of EU regulations and court decisions (Kantola 2010, cf. Skjeie, Holst & Teigen 2016, also Krizsan, Skjeie & Squires 2012). Various studies of general trends in welfare policy development through the 1990s and 2000s tend to leave a question mark. Seen from afar, the Nordic welfare states still look similar. A closer examination of reforms and institutional developments, however, suggests that Nordic distinctiveness is not as self-evident as it was two decades ago (Kautto 2010: 600, Engelstad & Hagelund 2015).

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<sup>5</sup> Intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies, and the outcome of these interactions in terms of power (Davies 2008: 68; Krizsan, Skjeie & Squires 2012: 18). The key issue of an intersectional analysis is how oppression, subordination, and privilege cut across systems of differentiation (Borchorst & Teigen 2010: 19).

In the early 2000s, Siim and Borchorst formulated a minimalist conception of the Nordic gender equality model as one combining (policies to promote) high levels of participation in political life and in paid work (2002: 92). Based on the Nordic model research presented in this introduction, we agree with this conception. These two dimensions have been particularly relevant to the academic debate on the Nordic model of gender equality. As outlined in the introduction, we discuss these dimensions as the equality norms for economic equity and democratic parity.

### **European patterns: Economic equity and democratic parity**

In this section, we describe a core set of statistics that measure gender gaps on the two dimensions that are particularly relevant to the Nordic gender equality model. We apply the Gender Equality Index (GEI) monitored by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The Gender Equality Index is constructed to map country variation within the EU in gender equality outcomes on a spectrum of variables. We first present an overview of European variations in the index as such.<sup>6</sup> This overview is followed by a more detailed analysis of the differences between the three Nordic EU countries limited to economic equity and democratic parity measures. Third, the average Nordic scores are compared to the EU average for these same dimensions. Finally, we compare different groupings of EU member states in line with Esping-Andersen's classic typology of welfare state models, which was limited to clusters of Western European states. The question we pose is simply whether it is possible at present, based on core gender equality statistics (from 2012), to identify a common Nordic pattern, one that at the same time distinguishes Nordic EU member countries from other EU member countries.

The Gender Equality Index is built around six core domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health) and two satellite domains (violence against women and intersecting inequalities).<sup>7</sup> The index provides an overview of total scores, where all three Nordic member countries have an average score of about 70 points (the maximum is 100): Sweden is followed by Finland and then Denmark. No other European country scores above 70. Only the Netherlands is in proximity to the Nordic group of countries, with an overall score just below

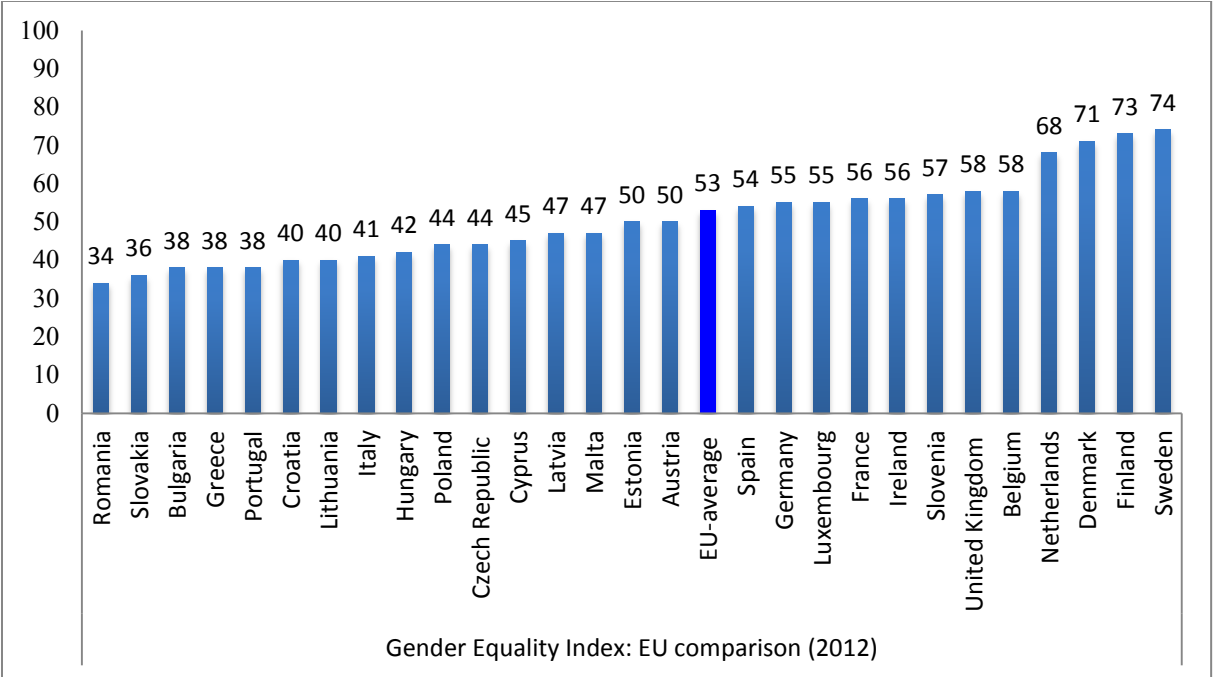
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<sup>6</sup> Note that the Gender Equality Index does not include Norway and Iceland, as they are not EU member countries.

<sup>7</sup> The core domains of the EIGE index provide a common measure of gender equality, but it is possible to analyze the scores for each domain separately. The index scores vary between 1 = total inequality and 100 = full gender equality. In this overview of Nordic similarities and differences in gender equality outcomes, we focus on five of the domains measured by the index: work, economy/money, knowledge, use of time, and power, which we view as being at the core of the Nordic gender equality model.

70. Belgium and the United Kingdom (UK) follow more than 10 points below the Netherlands. A mixed group of countries from continental Europe, the UK, and Ireland score around the EU average on the Gender Equality Index. The lowest-scoring countries are Eastern and Southern European countries, such as Romania, Slovakia, Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria, and Croatia. Slovenia is the only country in the Eastern European region that scores above the EU average (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The EIGE Gender Equality Index, EU comparison 2012, average country scores.**



Our analysis singles out two core dimensions in the Nordic gender equality model. In this analysis, *economic equity* includes the two domains on the GEI: work and money. *Democratic parity* includes the only relevant domain, power. The work domain measures participation,<sup>8</sup> segregation,<sup>9</sup> and quality of work.<sup>10</sup> The money domain measures gender gaps in the distribution of financial resources and economic situation. The power domain measures the

<sup>8</sup> Full-time equivalent employment (%)  
<sup>9</sup> Sectoral segregation (%)  
<sup>10</sup> Flexible personal/family arrangements (%)



representation of women and men in decision-making positions and includes political<sup>11</sup> and economic power,<sup>12</sup> which is in line with formalized EU gender equality strategies.<sup>13</sup>

Sweden scores the highest on economic equity, Finland the highest on democratic parity. Although the differences between the Nordic EU member countries are small for economic equity, and particularly small for the money domain, the differences between the Nordic countries are more pronounced for democratic parity than for economic equity (see Table 1). Denmark scores significantly lower than Finland and Sweden. Sweden is doing the best if we understand democratic parity in a limited sense, as gender balance in political decision-making positions. When we include economic decision making, Finland scores the highest.

**Table 1: Scores of the Nordic EU countries on the Gender Equality Index (three domains: work, money, and power).**

|                           | Economic Equity |       | Democratic Parity |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------|
|                           | Work            | Money | Power             |
| Denmark                   | 76.8            | 76.4  | 55.7              |
| Finland                   | 72.6            | 79.9  | 75.7              |
| Sweden                    | 81.0            | 80.6  | 71.7              |
| Diff.: Lowest vs. highest | 8.4             | 4.2   | 20.0              |

Thus, internal Nordic variation is most clearly shown in the comparatively low scores of Denmark for democratic parity. However, the Danish score is still well above the EU average.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 2: Average scores of the Nordic EU countries and average EU scores on the Gender Equality Index (three domains: work, money, and power).**

|                    | Economic Equity |       | Democratic Parity |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------|
|                    | Work            | Money | Power             |
| Nordic average     | 76.8            | 78.9  | 67.5              |
| EU average         | 61.9            | 67.8  | 39.7              |
| Diff.: Nordic – EU | 14.9            | 11.1  | 27.8              |

<sup>11</sup> Ministerial representation (%), parliamentary representation (5), regional assemblies' representation (%)

<sup>12</sup> Members of boards (%) and members of Central Bank (%)

<sup>13</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/>

<sup>14</sup> In the economic equity dimension, the work domain shows more variation in the segregation measure than the participation measure. The country differences in the money domain are relatively small on the measurement of economic situation, while the variation in scores is large for financial resources, varying from Romania with the lowest score (21.1) to Luxembourg with the highest score (96.4), followed by Ireland (75.8). On this measurement, the Nordic countries do well, but several other countries do just as well.

These gender gap and gender equality measures clearly show that on the two dimensions most central to common Nordic model examination, i.e. (economic equity and democratic parity) the Nordic EU member countries fare particularly well. On the democratic parity dimension, several countries do relatively well on the political power measure, but Sweden and Finland, with exceptionally high scores, clearly belong in a group of their own. Also on the economic power measure, Sweden and Finland, with Slovenia, score the highest. Nordic exceptionalism is thus most clearly pronounced in indicators that assess democratic parity. While the indicators of economic equity cover large population strata, the indicators of democratic parity cover only small, select groups of decision makers. Information on broader aspects of democratic parity, such as voter and civil society-based participation, is not included in the EU Gender Equality Index. This simply means that when the Nordic countries stand out in EU-based comparisons, they do so primarily because women participate on more equal terms among the countries' political and economic elites.

As outlined in the introduction, Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1999) classic typology highlights three forms of welfare state regimes. In such welfare state regime analysis, the Nordic EU member states are regularly classified as social democratic welfare states. Germany, France, and Italy are regularly grouped as conservative-corporatist welfare states, while the United Kingdom and Ireland are examples of countries that are grouped as liberal welfare states. When we apply this grouping to the Gender Equality Index scores for two specific dimensions (economic equity and democratic parity) on 2012 data, we see that the social democratic countries still score higher on gender equality than the liberal and conservative countries and that the distance is most clearly pronounced for democratic parity. In the economic equity dimension, the distance is highest between the social democratic and the conservative-corporatist countries;<sup>15</sup> on the democratic parity dimension, the conservative welfare states are closest to the scores of the social democratic welfare states.

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<sup>15</sup> This is most clearly shown in the work domain. The differences between the three types of welfare states are modest in the money domain, although they follow the pattern where the social democratic welfare state tops the list followed by the liberal welfare state and then the conservative welfare state.

**Table 3: The average scores on the Gender Equality Index (three domains: work, money, and power) for the three types of welfare states.**

|                           | Economic Equity |       | Democratic Parity |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------|
|                           | Work            | Money | Power             |
| Social democratic         | 76.8            | 78.9  | 67.5              |
| Liberal                   | 67.6            | 76.8  | 32.3              |
| Conservative              | 59.1            | 74.4  | 38.6              |
| Diff.: Lowest and highest | 17.7            | 4.5   | 35.2              |

However, in the money domain of the Gender Equality Index, the differences between the social democratic welfare state and the liberal and conservative welfare states are astonishingly small, given the overall picture of the variation between the regimes. Briefly, the money domain measures gender gaps in the distribution of financial resources and the economic situation, while the work domain measures labor market participation, labor market segregation, and quality of work. The index scores on money show that differences between women’s and men’s income and other financial resources persist in the social democratic welfare states and are almost as clearly pronounced here as within the other regime types.

### **Nordic variation: Economic equity and democratic parity**

In the previous section, we compared Nordic EU member countries to other EU member countries. In this section, we check for broader Nordic patterns and internal Nordic variations by including the Nordic non-EU members Norway and Iceland in the analysis. The Nordic Council of Ministers has developed a set of statistical indicators that shed light on the gender equality status in the Nordic region—and within the regional variations. The indicators are intended to monitor progress, address challenges, and inform policies. The collection of gender equality data has resulted in a joint statistical databank: Nordic Statistics.<sup>16</sup> The indicators include important issues, such as family and care, education, labor market, economy, and influence and power. Nordic Statistics was completed in 2014. The Nordic dataset also allows for comparison over time, although the statistics differ depending on the actual timeline. Some figures show developments since the early 1990s, others only the last 10-year period.

The analysis of data retrieved from Nordic Statistics is used to map variations in economic equity, including the following four indicators: men’s and women’s participation in the labor market, gender segregation in the labor market, the gender pay gap, and part-time work.

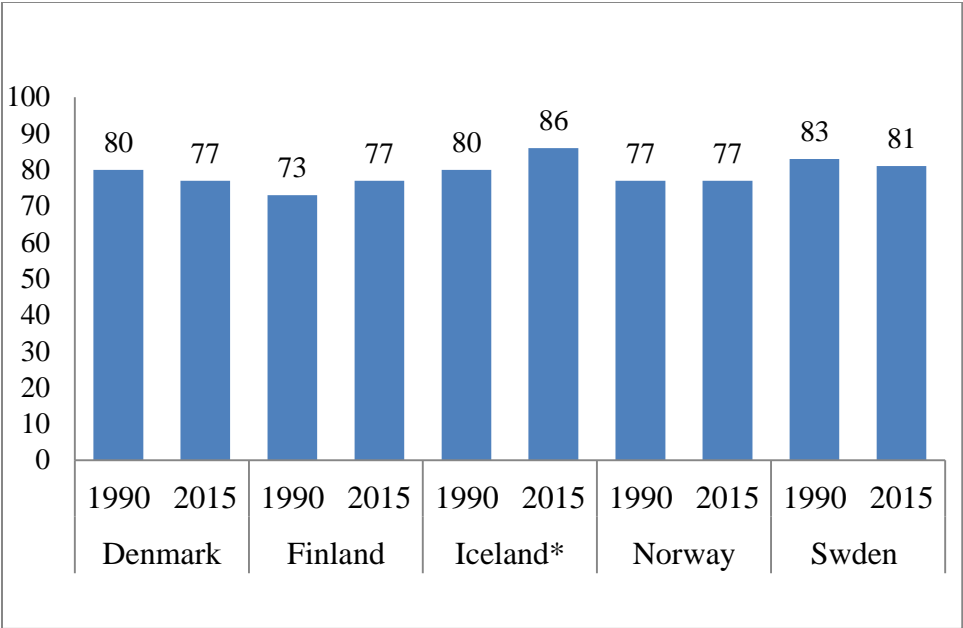
<sup>16</sup> <http://www.norden.org/en/fakta-om-norden-1/numbers-and-statistics>

Nordic variations in democratic parity include only two indicators: representation of women in the Nordic national assemblies and representation of men and women on listed company boards.

*Economic equity*

In the Nordic countries, women’s labor market participation has increased rapidly since the 1960s (Chafetz & Hagen 1996, Leira 2002). Nordic Statistics shows the employment rates for women and men from 1990 to 2015. The figures reveal relative stability and small cross-country variations. Country-specific changes follow, by and large, the same pattern for men and women.

**Figure 2: Labor market status: proportion of women (15 to 65 years) employed and unemployed for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, 1990 and 2015 (%).**<sup>17</sup>



\*Iceland 1990=1991. Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/work02>

Although the main picture is stability, some differences in employment rates (including unemployment) can be noted. In 1990, the employment rates for women were highest for

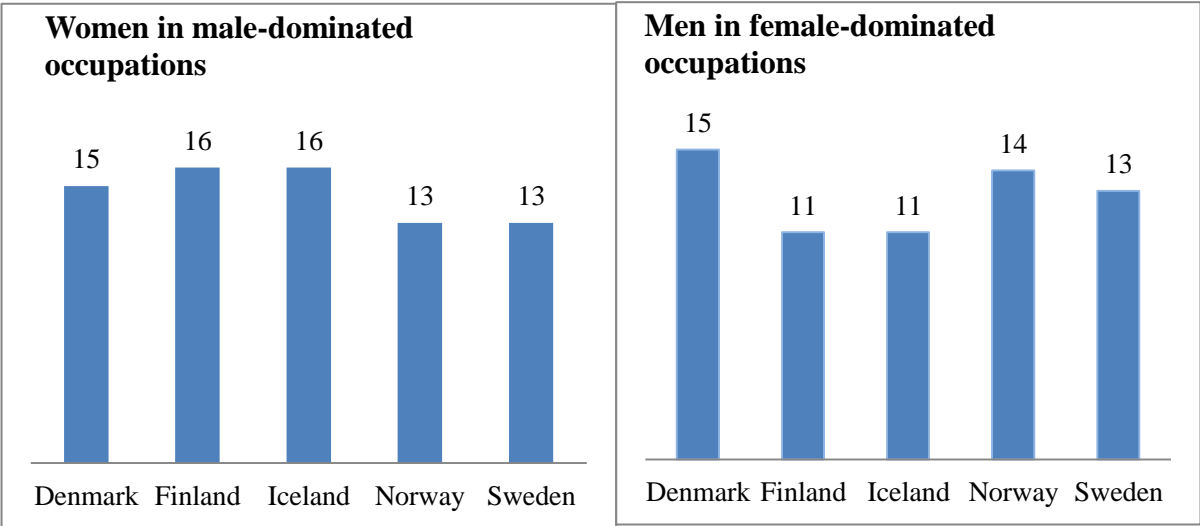
<sup>17</sup> The figures included the entire labor force, meaning employed and unemployed. The percentage of unemployed women per country in 1990 and 2015 is 9 % and 7 % for Denmark, 3 % and 7 % for Finland, 3 % and 4 % for Iceland, 3 % and 4 % for Norway, 2 % and 7 % for Sweden, respectively. <http://norden.statbank.dk/work02>

Sweden and lowest for Finland; in 2015, the employment rates for women were the highest for Iceland but the same for Denmark, Finland, and Norway (see Figure 2).

Regarding gender segregation in the labor market, a number of researchers have identified what they call a “welfare-state paradox” (Birkelund & Sandnes 2003, Mandel & Semyonov 2006), referring to the counterintuitive finding that equality-oriented welfare states, such as the Nordic countries, have more gender-segregated labor markets than more conservative welfare states, for instance in Southern Europe. Recent European comparative studies, however, now show that the Nordic countries are placed in the middle and not on the extreme of segregation statistics (Bettio & Verashchagina 2009). Researchers further claim that the main reason some countries’ labor markets seem to be less gender segregated is that a large share of the female (care) work is carried out outside the labor market (Bart, Hardoy, Schøne & Østbakken 2014). Nonetheless, the gender segregation within Nordic labor markets should mainly be characterized as stable and strong. Some occupations have become more gender balanced, in particular as a consequence of more women entering these occupations, but very few women work in some of the most common occupations for men, and very few men work in some of the most common occupations for women (Reisel & Teigen 2014).

Nordic Statistics presents data on the proportion of men and women in the most female- and male-dominated occupations. Data from 2015 show variations in the proportion of men in female-dominated occupations of between 10 % and 16 %. The cross-country differences are marginally smaller for women in male-dominated occupations, varying between 13 % and 16 % (Figure 3).

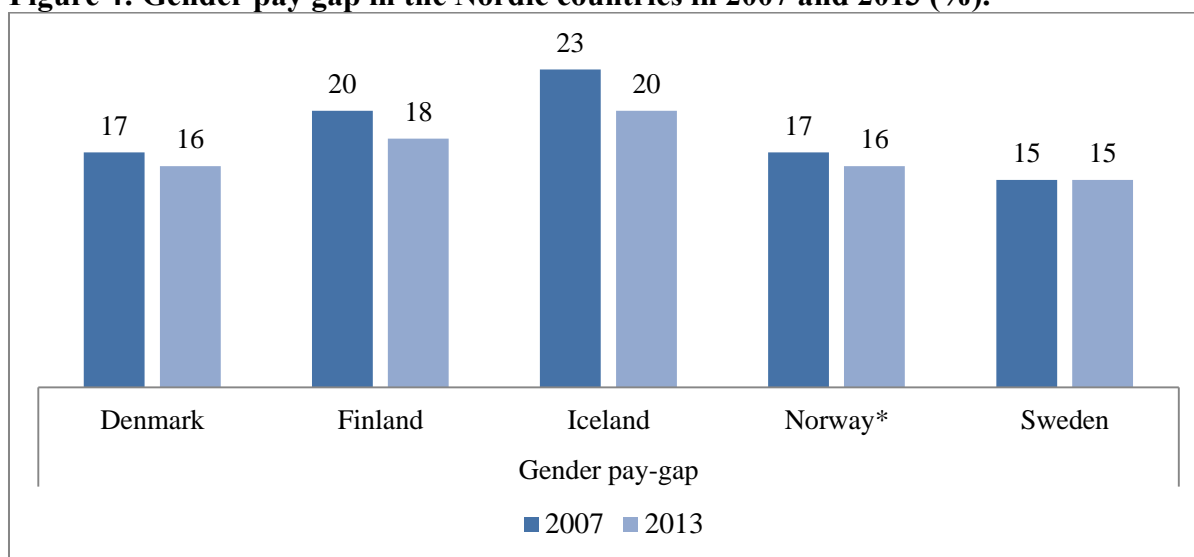
**Figure 3: Women in male-dominated occupations and men in female-dominated occupations in the Nordic countries 2015 (%).**



Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/lab006>

Gender segregation in the labor market is connected to the gender pay gap as many female-dominated occupations within the public sector are placed on a lower pay scale than male-dominated occupations within the private sector (Østbakken, Barth & Schøne 2014). The gender pay gap is remarkably stable in all the Nordic countries. A persistent pay gap between men and women exists in all the Nordic countries, varies between 15 % and 20 %, and decreases only modestly between 2007 and 2013.

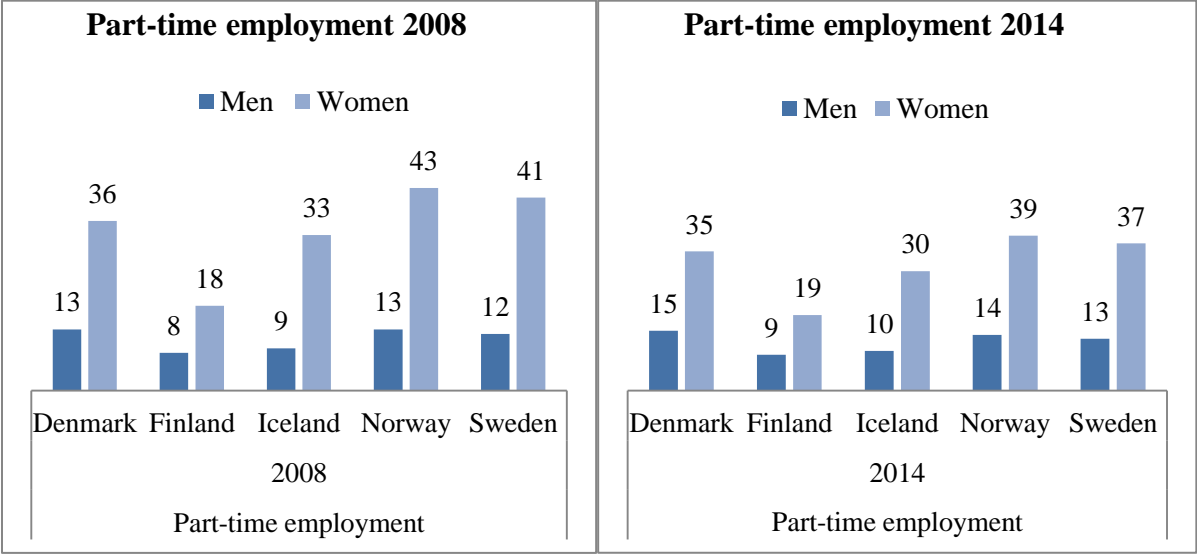
**Figure 4: Gender pay gap in the Nordic countries in 2007 and 2013 (%).**



\* Norway 2007= 2010. Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/inco05>

The Nordic labor markets are characterized by a significant number of employed women in part-time positions, with Finland the exception (see Figure 5). As shown in the figure, about one-third of employed women in the Nordic countries work part-time. In Finland, where the employment rates for women are somewhat lower, only one-fifth of women work part-time. Very few men in the Nordic countries work part-time (see Figure 5). On the one hand, access to part-time jobs may help to include women. On the other hand, a labor market that supplies and facilitates part-time jobs may be self-reinforcing and impede the supply of full-time positions.

**Figure 5: Men and women in part-time positions in the Nordic labor markets in 2008 and 2014 (%).**



Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/labo03>

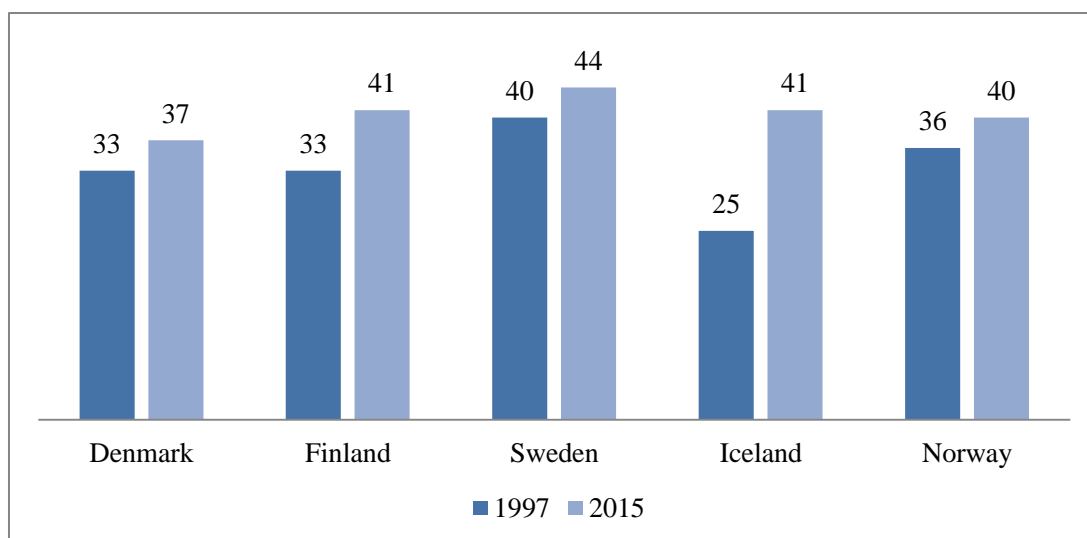
Different indicators of economic equity thus show relatively small country differences within the Nordic region, and a main pattern of stability over time. On these indicators, the Icelandic and Norwegian scores do not differ significantly from those of the Nordic EU member states.

*Democratic parity*

As shown in previous sections, Nordic exceptionalism is demonstrated primarily through the country’s high scores on the indicators of democratic parity, which reveal gender gaps in representation in political and economic elites. Traditionally, the Nordic countries are world-famous for their steady progress in women’s political representation (Karvonen & Selle 1995). At present, however, global surveys show that Rwanda, Bolivia, Cuba, and the Seychelles rank above Sweden in the representation of women in the lower and single houses of parliament. In the Inter-Parliamentary Union ranking (September 2016), Finland is 10th, Iceland 11<sup>th</sup>, Norway 14<sup>th</sup>, and Denmark 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 6: Women in national parliaments in the Nordic countries, 1997 and 2015 (%).**

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010916.htm>



Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU, (2016) *Women in National Parliaments – Archived Data*.  
<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm>

None of the Nordic countries achieved full gender parity in national assemblies in 2015. Overall, women constitute about 40 % of the Nordic parliamentarians. The Swedish parliament is the most gender balanced and the Danish parliament the least. The period shown here (1997–2015) shows only small changes, with the exception of Iceland, where the proportion of women increased dramatically from one-fourth to more than 40 % (Figure 6). However, in Iceland’s parliamentary election in late October 2016, women constituted 47 % of the national assembly.

**Table 4: Gradual development of women’s representation in national parliaments in the Nordic countries.**

|  | Denmark           | Finland           | Iceland           | Norway            | Sweden            |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1st election                           | 1918              | 1907              | 1922              | 1921              | 1921              |
| 1st election more than 10 %            | 1966              | 1907              | 1983              | 1972              | 1953              |
| 1st election more than 20 %            | 1979              | 1970              | 1987              | 1977              | 1973              |
| 1st election more than 30 %            | 1988              | 1983              | 1999              | 1985              | 1986              |
| 1st election more than 40 %            | Never             | 2007              | 2009              | 2009              | 1994              |
| Highest female representation          | 39%               | 42%               | 43%               | 40%               | 47%               |
| Female representation in last election | 37% <sup>19</sup> | 42% <sup>20</sup> | 40% <sup>21</sup> | 40% <sup>22</sup> | 44% <sup>23</sup> |

<sup>19</sup> June 18th 2015, IPU: [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2087\\_A.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2087_A.htm)

<sup>20</sup> April 19th 2015, IPU: [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2111\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2111_E.htm)

<sup>21</sup> April 27th 2013, IPU: [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2143\\_13.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2143_13.htm)

<sup>22</sup> September 9th 2013, IPU: [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2143\\_13.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2143_13.htm)

<sup>23</sup> September 14th 2014, IPU: [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2303\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2303_E.htm)



|                             |      |      |      |      |       |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| First female prime minister | 2011 | 2003 | 2009 | 1981 | Never |
| First female president      | N/A  | 2003 | 1980 | N/A  | N/A   |

N/A 0= not applicable.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016)

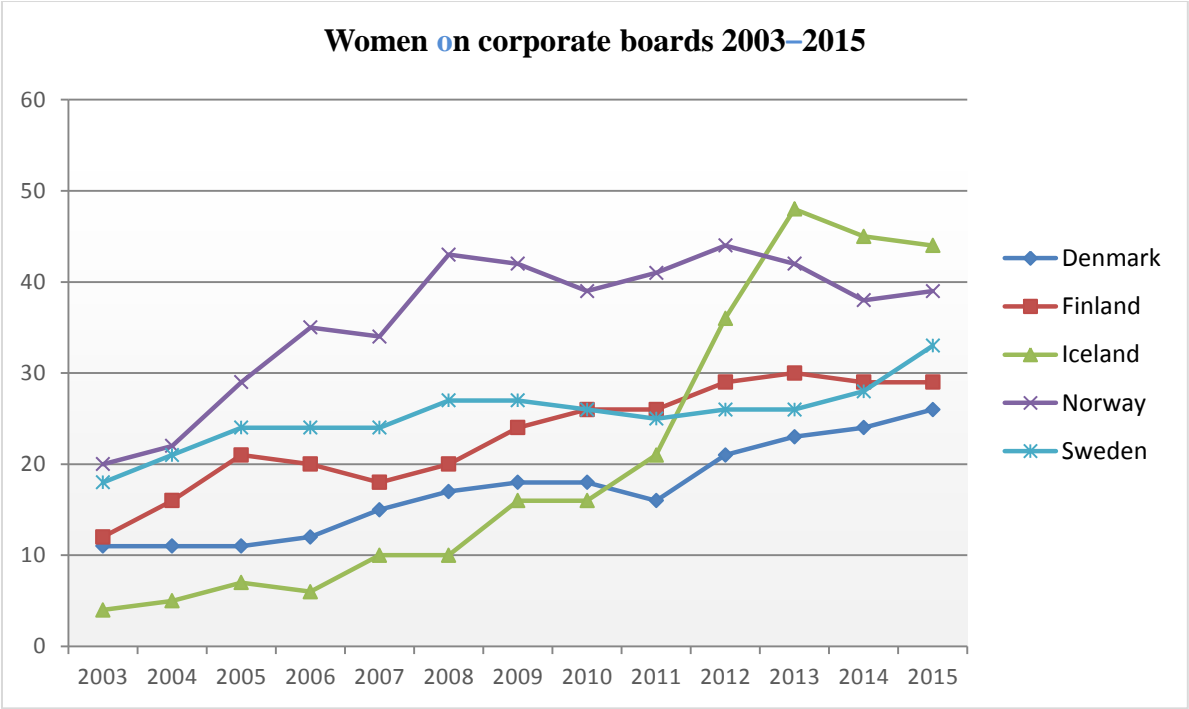
Source: Revision of Table 2 in Dahlerup (2011) *Women in Nordic Politics – A Continuing Success Story?*

As shown in Table 4, women were represented in the Finnish parliament at a historically early stage, much earlier than in the other Nordic parliaments. The differences decrease over time, and as of today, Sweden and Iceland stand out with the closest to gender-balanced national parliaments. The picture of Nordic exceptionalism is still mainly due to earlier progress in women's presence in political assemblies, particularly during the 1980s, when more than 30 % representation was achieved in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway (see Table 4). More generally, Finland has been the frontrunner and Iceland the latecomer (see Table 4).

In contrast, no Nordic country can be depicted as a frontrunner in gender balance in economic decision-making compared with major countries in Europe or the US. The presence of women in senior executive positions in the economy has been modest, and the presence of women on corporate boards has progressed significantly only over the last decade (see Figure 7).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The Norwegian Gender Balance Scorecard, monitored by the Centre for Research on Gender Equality (CORE) at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo, reported relatively small differences in the marginal presence of women in senior executive positions in the economy in Norway, Europe, and the US (Figure 4.1). <http://likestillingsforskning.no/Topplederbarometer>

**Figure 7: Women on corporate boards in the Nordic countries, 2003–2015 (%).**<sup>25</sup>



Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/lab08>

Indicators of democratic parity thus show some internal Nordic regional differences, although the picture is not clear. Women’s political representation has been strong and stable in Finland and Sweden, and has increased sharply in Iceland in the last few years. Women’s representation on corporate boards has increased particularly rapidly in Norway and Iceland, where gender balance regulations have been introduced. More generally, these gender equality statistics show that differences between the Nordic countries are modest. Inclusion of non-EU members Norway and Iceland does not contribute to a significant change in the overall portrayal of a distinct Nordic profile for gender equality, where comparatively high scores for democratic parity indicators contribute the most. In other words, the inclusion of women among the political and economic elite today most clearly marks the Nordic countries as gender equality frontrunners.

**Policies to promote economic equity and democratic parity in the Nordic countries**

In the previous section, we applied data from Nordic Statistics to map economic equity on the following four indicators: participation in the labor market, gender segregation in the labor market, the gender pay gap, and part-time work. To map democratic parity, we used the only

<sup>25</sup> Corporate boards are specified by Nordic Statistics for the largest listed companies.

available indicators: representation of women in Nordic national assemblies and representation of men and women on listed company boards. A central question in the current research on gender equality concerns whether and how gender equality policies actually lead to greater gender equality. In this section we ask, first, whether it is possible to identify a distinctive policy profile common to the Nordic countries on how to promote economic equity and democratic parity, and second, whether differences in gender equality performance correspond with differences in gender equality policy profiles. However, at present, large-scale comparative implementation and effect studies on gender equality policies are few and far apart. Thus we are able to provide only a few—mainly speculative—comments about policy–performance links on gender equality issues.

### *Policies on economic equity*

All Nordic gender equality legislation combines protection against discrimination with active duties for public authorities and employers to promote equality. All Nordic gender equality legislation includes equal pay regulations. As of today, Nordic equality legislation, furthermore, has to conform to EU directives on gender equality. Although protection against discrimination is a right at the individual level, proactive work is a duty, or obligation, of enterprises and institutions. In creating this double aim for equality legislation (individual protection and collective duties), Nordic legislators have, nevertheless, generally speaking, demonstrated strong equality ambitions. Binding regulations on proactive duties can be seen as one way to try to ensure that equality work is integrated into the everyday business of enterprises and organizations. In EU terms, this is seen as mainstreaming gender equality (cf. Kantola 2010).

Apart from this traditionally strong double aim, it is not possible to identify a common Nordic legislative profile on gender equality (Borchorst et al. 2012). No mapping of Nordic equal pay policies or of mainstreaming policies is available. Thus, on most of the indicators used to identify levels of economic equity, at present we simply do not know how policies in the Nordic countries differ from or resemble each other, nor do we know what effects these policies might have on promoting gender equality. Thus, anti-discrimination laws, equal pay regulations, and labor market desegregation policies have not been sufficiently analyzed to make conclusions about the Nordic model possible.

When we turn to work–family balance policies, however, studies abound. The work–family balance includes the central gender equality policies named by welfare state theorists. These

policies commonly include two sets of related public policies: publicly subsidized or paid parental leave arrangements and publicly subsidized childcare arrangements (kindergartens). In contrast to equal pay or desegregation policies, work–family balance policies are distinctive life-phase policies aimed at assisting young parents, foremost mothers, in overcoming care-based barriers to equal participation in working life. When a father’s quota is part of the parental leave scheme, it aims to assist young fathers in gaining more equal participation in family life (cf. Skjeie & Teigen 2012, Halrynjo & Kitterød 2016).

Research on the work–family balance mainly regards such policies as crucial for the high labor market integration of women in the Nordic countries. The more recent development of weeks reserved for the father in parental leave is seen as a means of strengthening fathers’ relationships with their children and weakening the segmentation of gender roles in the family as a result of the long absences from employment among women in connection with childbirth (Halrynjo & Kitterød 2016). Still, it has been argued that Nordic family-friendly policies have contributed to a culture where “lagged careers” have been acceptable, although they lead to gender differences in career progress.

**Table 5: The parental leave systems in the Nordic countries.**

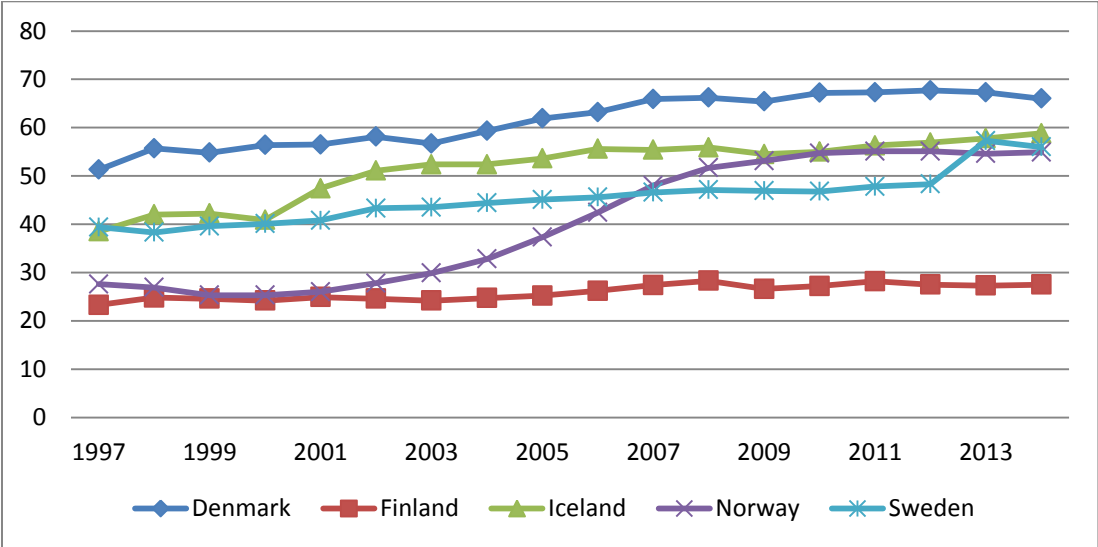
|  | Denmark   | Finland   | Iceland   | Norway    | Sweden    |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Year of introduction                   | 1984      | 1985      | 1981      | 1978      | 1974      |
| Number of weeks (year)                 | 52 (2002) | 48 (2013) | 39 (2000) | 49 (2014) | 69 (2002) |
| Year of introduction of father’s quota | 1998–2002 | 2013–     | 2000–     | 1993      | 1995      |
| Number of weeks reserved for fathers   | 0         | 6         | 13        | 10        | 8         |

Source: Halrynjo and Kitterød (2016), Fedrekvoten – norm for fedres permisjonsbruk i Norge og Norden. ISF-rapport 2016: 06.

As Table 5 shows, generous parental leave schemes exist in all the Nordic countries, although there are important differences between the countries in the specification of the parental leave arrangements. Sweden has the most flexible parental leave scheme, in which parental leave may be used until the child is 12 years old. The parental leave scheme in Iceland provides the fewest weeks, however, with most weeks reserved for the father. Denmark is the only country without weeks reserved for the father; a father’s quota in the parental leave scheme was introduced in 1998 and abolished in 2002.

Access to publicly financed childcare facilities as the child grows older is commonly seen as crucial to foster equitable sharing of domestic childcare between mothers and fathers and to make the work–life balance a reality (cf. Mahon 2009).<sup>26</sup> Denmark was an early developer of accessible childcare arrangements (Borchorst & Teigen 2015). For children between 3 and 5 years, the childcare coverage in the Nordic countries is close to 100 %; only in Finland is the coverage lower (see Figure 8). For children between 0 and 2 years, the coverage is about 50 %; again, Finland is the exception with less coverage (see Figure 7). The lower coverage for the youngest children in Sweden is probably affected by the generous parental leave arrangement. Norway and Iceland differ with a strong increase in childcare coverage for all pre-school children. This means that today, Norway and Iceland have reached the level of Denmark and Sweden in childcare coverage.

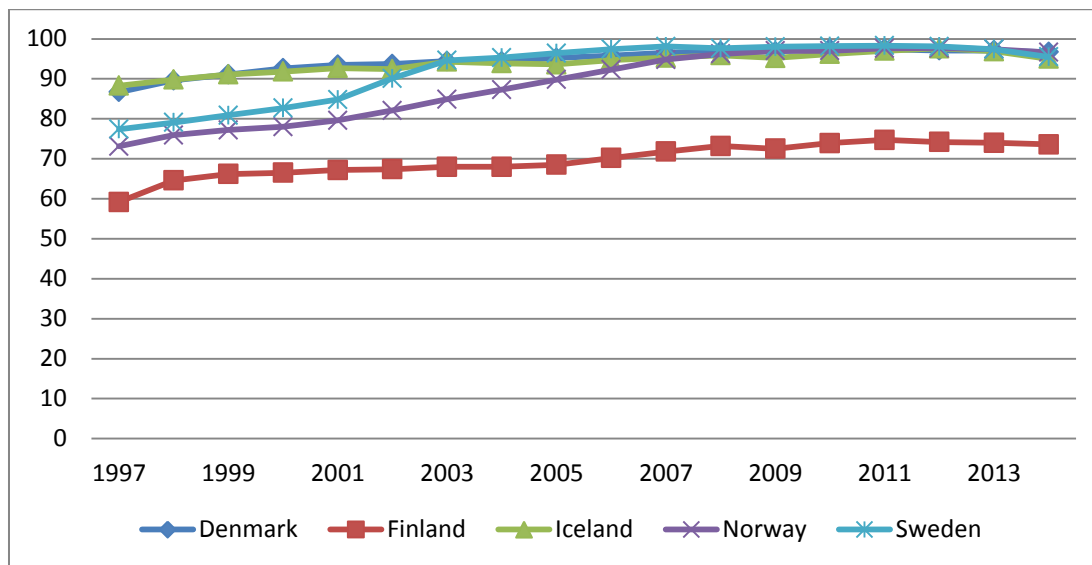
**Figure 8: Children in daycare (age 0–2) in the Nordic countries, 1997–2014.**



Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/chil03>

<sup>26</sup> Childcare coverage is used as an indicator of the development of childcare facilities.

**Figure 9: Children in daycare (age 3–5) in the Nordic countries, 1997–2014.**



Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/chil03>

Although publicly subsidized childcare services have been considered vital to support women’s employment (Ellingsæter 2015), cash-for-care schemes are commonly posed as a policy challenge to work–family balance policies, and as an example of a “neofamilialist” turn in childcare policies (cf. Mahon 2009). Finland was the first to institute cash-for-care benefits at the national level, in 1985. Denmark followed in 1992, then Norway in 1998—and finally Sweden in 2008. In Iceland, cash-for-care benefit schemes exist in only a small number of municipalities. The cash-for-care benefit schemes vary in terms of duration, age of the child, and the size of the benefit. The monthly allowance is highest in Norway, followed by Finland. The use of cash-for-care benefits is clearly the most popular in Finland, where 50 % of families with children between 9 months and 3 years receive cash-for-care benefits. Less than one-third use cash-for-care benefits in Norway, only 4 % in Sweden, and about 1000 children in Denmark (Østbakken 2016).

Work–family balance policies are generally considered a hallmark of Nordic model policies to promote gender equality. A recent survey does not indicate any fundamental changes in this policy model. On the contrary, we mainly see gradual increases in the public investment in such policies over time. Mahon (2002) named this policy profile “the egalitarian horizon,” where childcare policies incorporate parental leave arrangements that include the father, affordable non-parental care services, and the right to early childhood education (Mahon 2002: 346-350). Only Denmark has rejected the policy of father’s quotas in parental leave; only Finland relies extensively on a combination of cash-for-care and publicly subsidized

kindergartens. Work–family balance policies can best be characterized as an infrastructure to promote economic equity. Such policies are neither aimed at securing equal pay nor aimed at desegregating, or actually promoting the desegregation of, gendered Nordic labor markets. Mainly, these policies contribute to facilitate women’s inclusion within the Nordic labor markets.

#### *Policies to promote democratic parity*

Since the 1970s, various forms of parity policies have been established in all the Nordic countries to promote and regulate the gender composition of decision-making assemblies. Voluntary electoral quotas have been introduced by several political parties in all these countries, although most broadly in Norway (Freidenvall, Dahlerup & Skjeie 2006). Legal gender quotas for corporate boards exist in Norway, Finland, and Iceland; Denmark has a less specified gender balance law, while Sweden relies on voluntary measures (Niskanen 2011). In the Nordic context, Norway thus stands out with the strongest emphasis on the formulation and implementation of gender quota measures to promote democratic parity (Teigen 2011).

Voluntary political party quotas have been adopted in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, combining internal gender quotas (minimum and maximum of 40 % and 60 %, respectively) and a zipper principle on election lists, where one sex alternates with the other on election lists (see Table 6). In Norway, voluntary gender quotas have been adopted by five of the seven main parties and have been recognized as important to further women’s presence in the Norwegian electoral system. In Finland, however, there is a long tradition of gender balance in political decision-making without gender quotas. In Denmark, voluntary party quotas were first instituted in the late 1970s and early 1980s by some of the political parties but were later abolished.

**Table 6: Variation in Nordic political party quotas.**

|  | Denmark   | Finland              | Iceland   | Norway  | Sweden   |
|--|---|----------------------|---|---|--|
| Type of gender quota arrangement       | No quota legislation today  | No quota legislation | Voluntary political party quotas  | Voluntary political party quotas  | Voluntary political party quotas                                 |
| Scope                                  | –   | –                    | Social Democratic Alliance, Left-Green Movement, Center Party (Framsoknarflokkur) | Socialist Left Party, Norwegian Labor Party, Center Party, Christian People's Party | Social Democratic Party, Left Party, Green Party, Moderate Party |
| Year of introduction (and liquidation) | 1977–1996 <sup>27</sup><br>1983–1990 <sup>28</sup><br>1983–1996 <sup>29</sup> | –                    | 1999–<br>1999–<br>2005–   | 1970–<br>1983–<br>1989–<br>1993–  | 1978–<br>1978–<br>1981–<br>2009 <sup>30</sup> –                  |

Source: <http://www.quotaproject.org/>

Norway was the first country to propose (1999), adopt (2003), and implement (2008) gender quotas for corporate boards, and became an initiator of the later wave of corporate board quotas that has swept across Europe and other parts of the world (Fagan, Gonzalez Menendez, & Gomez Ansón 2012; Teigen 2012b; Armstrong & Walby 2012; Terjesen et al. 2015). However, consensus has not characterized the Nordic region regarding the introduction of gender quotas for corporate boards to further the gender balance in economic decision-making. Iceland followed Norway's example in 2010, after being seriously hit by the economic crisis (see Table 7). Sweden and Norway discussed the adoption of gender quotas for corporate boards in the early 2000s in tandem. Finally, Norway ended up adopting gender quotas for corporate boards, while Sweden ended up dismissing the quota proposal (Heidenreich 2012), although a new proposal is being prepared.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The Socialist People's Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti) was the first party to introduce a 40 % quota system in 1977 but abandoned it in 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Candidate quotas for the European Parliament (40 %) were adopted in 1983 and abandoned in 1990.

<sup>29</sup> The Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiet) adopted quotas of 40 % in 1983 and candidate quotas for local and regional elections in 1988, but the quotas were abandoned in 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Moderate Party, party quotas: two women and two men shall be placed in the top four positions on the party list for election to the European Parliament.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.regeringen.se/remisser/2016/09/remiss-av-ds-201632-jamn-konsfordelning-i-bolagsstyrelser/>



**Table 7: Variation in gender quotas for Nordic corporate boards.**

|                                | Denmark   | Finland             | Iceland                  | Norway              | Sweden  |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Arrangement                    | Codes for good governance that include board gender recommendations | Gender board quotas | Gender board quotas      | Gender board quotas | Codes for good governance that include board gender recommendations |
| Quota                          | –   | 40 %                | 40 %                     | 40 %                | –   |
| Publicly traded firms (PTFs)   | –   | No                  | Yes                      | Yes                 | –   |
| State-owned enterprises (SOEs) | –   | Yes                 | Yes                      | Yes                 | –   |
| Adoption year                  | 2010  | 2005                | 2010: PFTs<br>2007: SOEs | 2003                | 2010; 2007  |

Source: Terjesen, Aguilera & Lorenz 2015.

The proportion of women on corporate boards has increased considerably in all the Nordic countries, but is lowest in Denmark (see Figure 7). It seems reasonable to tie this development to the overall issue actualization of a gender balance on corporate boards, as well as a prevalent quota threat that gender quota regulations will be introduced if the businesses do not achieve progress in the gender balance on their own.

The introduction of a parity scheme for public limited company boards in Norway clearly had a wider aim of promoting gender parity in the economic sector (cf. Skjeie & Teigen 2012). The wider ripple effects of corporate board parity are limited, however. For instance, there are few signs of the spread of gender parity to company boards not affected by the scheme, and there exists little evidence that gender balance in corporate boards has led to gender balance in senior executive positions.<sup>32</sup>

While the traditional policies to promote women's inclusion among the political elite have been carried out mainly through the adoption of internal party regulations, newer policies to include women in economic elites have a more clear-cut legislative basis. Yet there is no discernable common Nordic policy model in such policy adoptions. Policy adoption is either

<sup>32</sup> <http://likestillingsforskning.no/Topplederbarometer/Topplederbarometeret>

decided by (diverging) party strategies in different Nordic countries or imposed through legislation in only some Nordic countries. However, the Nordic examples of legislative gender quotas for corporate boards have undoubtedly put male dominance in economic decision-making on the agenda globally and on the EU policy agenda, which includes the development of corporate governance codes in the Nordic countries, as well as in the EU corporate governance framework (which addresses rules and norms of gender balance).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we analyzed how the Nordic countries perform on two equality dimensions that are particularly relevant to the conceptualization of a Nordic model of gender equality. We treated these dimensions as norms for economic equity and democratic parity. The analysis utilized data retrieved from the Gender Equality Index and from Nordic Statistics. In addition, we collected mappings of relevant gender equality policies from different sources. We caution that the descriptive statistics and policy mappings we applied present only crude measures to address such a model.

First, we examined how descriptive statistics today rank Nordic countries compared with other European countries among the member states of the European Union. Utilizing the average scores on the EU's Gender Equality Index, we conclude that Nordic EU member countries still form a distinct group of high achievers, with only the Netherlands in close proximity. The average gap between Nordic EU countries and other EU member states is, generally speaking, large enough to conclude that the Nordic scores are exceptional. When we concentrated the analysis on indicators of economic equity and democratic parity and calculated the average Nordic scores compared to the average EU scores, we found the Nordic scores for democratic parity were more exceptional than those for economic equity. In this Europe-oriented comparison, we then checked how the social democratic regime of welfare state analysis fared compared with the conservative-corporatist and liberal regimes. Again, the differences were most pronounced for the indicators of democratic parity. Differences were less pronounced for the indicators that summarize working life equality. The differences are almost negligible for the indicators that show gender gaps in income and other financial resources.

So, yes, the Nordic EU countries still form a distinct group of high achievers, but their distinctiveness is more pronounced for democratic parity than for economic equity. Keeping in mind that only crude measures were applied here, it is particularly interesting to note that

on the central issue of gender gaps in income, traditional social democratic regime countries hardly perform better than traditional liberal regime countries.

However, although a Nordic cluster can be identified, we also found interesting variations within the Nordic region. On the economic equity dimension, Sweden stands out as clearly the most successful, followed by Denmark, while Finland's scores are the lowest within this Nordic club. The differences between the Nordic EU member countries are more pronounced on the democratic parity dimension than on the economic equity dimension. Here, Finland and Sweden stand out as high performers, while Denmark is clearly lagging behind.

We then utilized comparable statistics on outcome and performance that included the Nordic non-EU members of Norway and Iceland, to further explore similarities and differences within the Nordic region. For this purpose, we put together comparable data from the databank Nordic Statistics.

The main picture of the general similarities within the Nordic region is not disturbed by including Iceland and Norway. Norway is regularly placed in the middle for most parameters. To the extent that we have data showing changes over time, Iceland differs from the others in the economic equity and democratic parity dimensions, due to the rapid development in gender equality witnessed in Iceland in recent years.

Finally, we approached the question of policy models, discussing whether it is possible to identify a distinctive policy profile common to the Nordic countries on how to promote economic equity and democratic parity. In general, this discussion suffers from a lack of available broad cross-sector comparative research. This holds for central work–life policy issues, such as antidiscrimination efforts, equal pay efforts, and desegregation efforts. On the central gender equality theme of work–family balance, however, comparative studies abound. Well-developed policies to promote work–family balance characterize all the Nordic countries, in the form of extensive public subsidization of parental leave and childcare arrangements. We have characterized work–family balance policies as an infrastructure for the promotion of economic equity. Such policies are neither aimed at securing equal pay nor aimed at desegregating, or actually promoting the desegregation of, gendered Nordic labor markets. The policies mainly contribute to facilitate women's firm inclusion within the Nordic labor markets. These policies have been gradually expanded in all the Nordic countries. At present, only Denmark rejects the policy of father quotas in parental leave; only Finland relies extensively on a combination of cash-for-care and publicly subsidized kindergartens. At

present, childcare coverage is much weaker in Finland, and the cash-for-care benefit scheme appears to be more strongly institutionalized here than in other Nordic countries. In policies to promote work–family balance, Finland thus seems to have chosen a somewhat different track.

Various forms of parity policies have been established in all the Nordic countries to promote and regulate the gender composition of decision-making assemblies. Voluntary gender quotas have been adopted by some political parties in most countries, and most broadly in Norway. Legal gender quotas for corporate boards exist in Norway, Finland, and Iceland; Denmark has a less specified gender balance law, while Sweden still relies on voluntary measures.

Policies to further democratic parity clearly vary. On the specific issue of applying gender quotas to achieve parity, there is no Nordic consensus. Nor is it possible to discern any clear effect of quota policies on the gender composition of parliaments. Neither Danish nor Finnish political parties have adopted such arrangements. Yet the presence of women in the Danish and Finnish parliaments differs, and the Finnish score for the gender balance in Parliament is consistently very high.

When it comes to economic decision-making, however, gender quota arrangements obviously affect gender balance in corporate boards. Iceland and Norway are the only Nordic countries with legal regulation of the gender balance. The patterns of sharp increase in the presence of women on such boards clearly follow the development and adoption of such legal measures. Nonetheless, women are also relatively well represented on Swedish corporate boards, without a quota regulation. Presumably this can be tied to the consistent political attention paid to the issue and a continuous political threat to adopt quota measures if companies do not improve their own recruitment efforts.

Since the 1970s, Nordic governments have introduced and implemented a range of policies to implicitly and explicitly promote gender equality. Different Nordic countries have been forerunners in addressing political means to further democratic parity, such as zipper systems on party lists and quota regulations for company boards. However, there is no discernible common Nordic policy profile on such issues. In other words, policy measures to promote democratic parity show no common Nordic model. Work–family balance policies are, generally speaking, very advanced in the Nordic countries, yet here, as well, national policy profiles vary. The tendency to ignore variations and differences in equality performance and policies within the Nordic region has often been emphasized by gender equality scholars (for a comprehensive outline, see Bergquist et al. 1999). Our analysis mainly shows that in terms

of gender equality performance, yes, it still makes sense to talk about a Nordic model. Its core traits have not eroded. Its existence might, however, not be as dependent on a common set of policies as is often assumed.

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