

# Advancing Women's Representation in Top Academic Positions at Nordic Universities – What Works?



Nordic universities have introduced a variety of measures to address the under-representation of women in top academic positions over the past thirty years. The measures have included training and coaching of women, diversity training of staff, equality units, and various measures of preferential treatment. Do these measures actually work?

## Four Types of Gender Equality Measures

The implemented gender equality measures can be categorized into four types. These types distinguish between policies directed at individuals and policies directed at organizational structures. Further, a distinction is drawn between

policies of inclusion, meaning equal treatment in the organization as it exists today, and policies of transformation, which involve changing the organization to better accommodate the diversity of people within it.

### Dimensions of gender equality measures

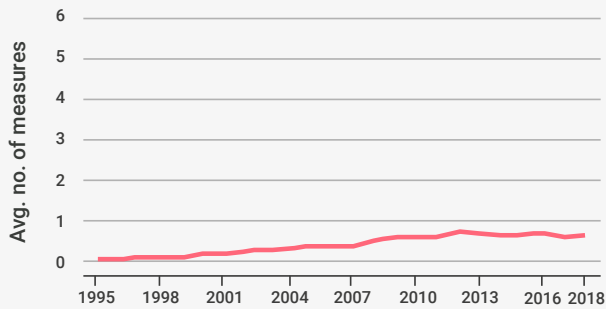
	Individual	Structural
Inclusion	Career-enhancing measures for women	Preferential treatment measures
Transformation	Awareness-raising measures	Organizational responsibility measures

## Increased Use of Measures Directed at Institutional Transformation

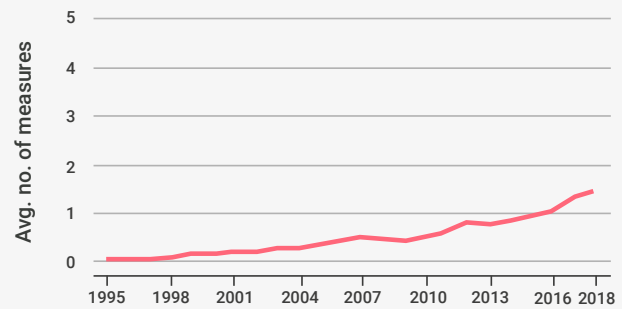
Based on information from 37 universities in Sweden, Finland and Norway, changes have increasingly been sought through organizational responsibility measures in the forms of committees, formal grievance procedures, and diversity offices or officers, as well as awareness-raising measures, such as equality and diversity training.

### Average number of measures implemented across all institutions

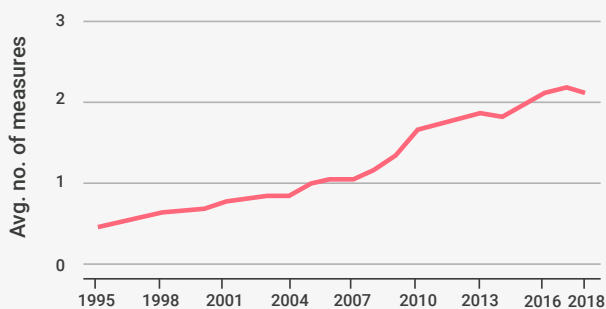
#### Career-enhancing measures



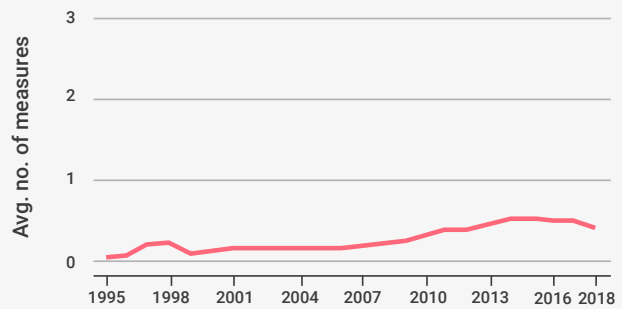
#### Awareness-raising measures



#### Organizational responsibility measures



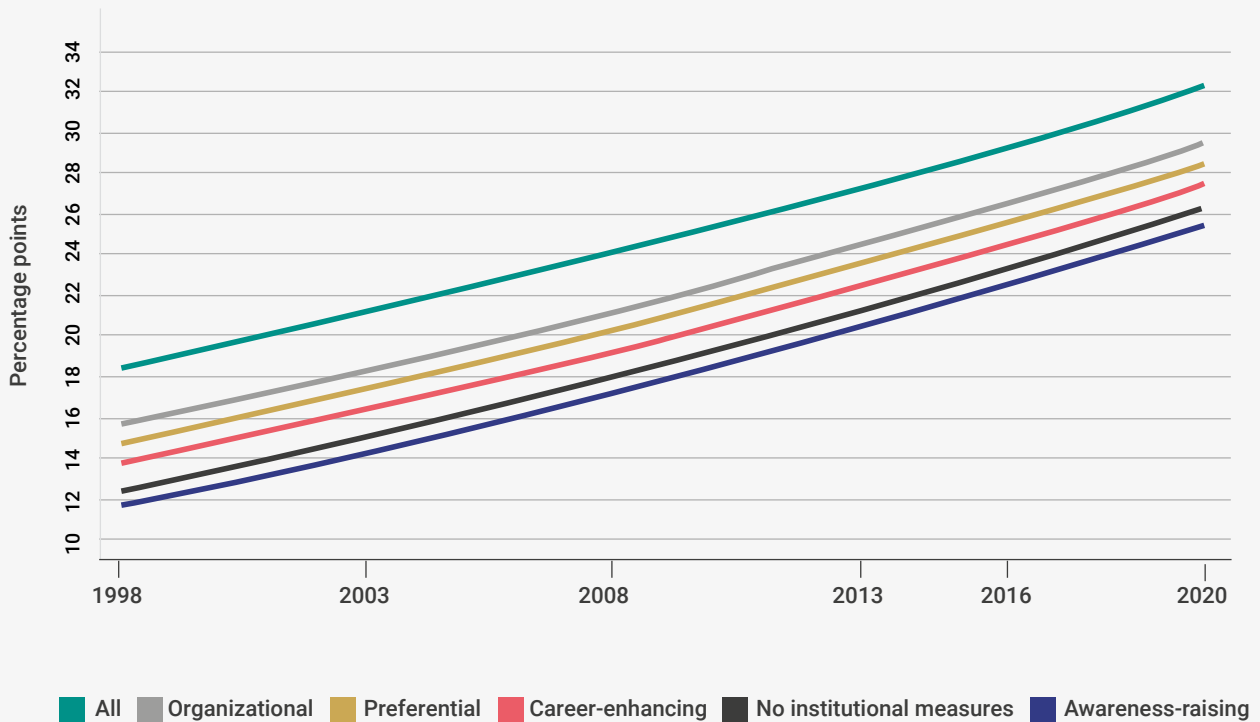
#### Preferential treatment measures



The effects of implemented measures were tested through a model that takes into consideration the general increase in women professors over time and differences between universities, in order to determine whether the universities saw an increase in their share of women professors three years after implementing a specific measure. This model showed that organizational responsibility measures seem to have had

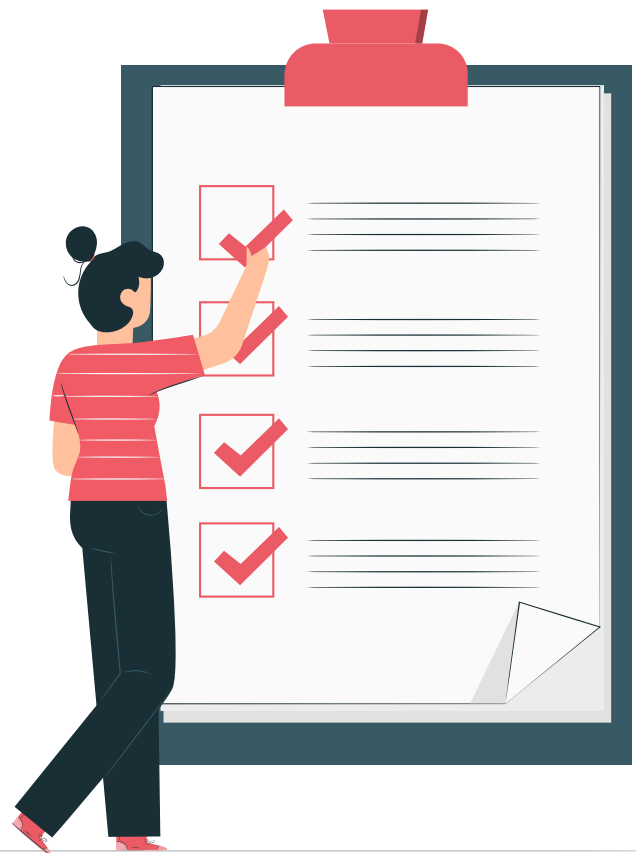
the strongest effect, while awareness-raising has the weakest effect on gender balance in top positions. According to this model, a joint implementation of career-enhancing measures, organizational responsibility measures, and preferential treatment measures, increases a university's share of women in professorships by 6.4 percentage points relative to doing nothing.

## Predicted increase in share of female professors



Two individual measures stood out as particularly effective: earmarking funds or positions for members of the underrepresented sex and having an equality officer or office within the institution.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the measures tested, having an equality officer or office seemed to have the greatest effect. This may indicate that having an equality officer or office in place strengthens the effects of other institutional efforts by establishing a structure of responsibility within the organization and dedicating resources to oversight and implementation.



1. Earmarking funds or positions for members of the underrepresented sex has largely been discontinued, in line with European regulation of preferential treatment.

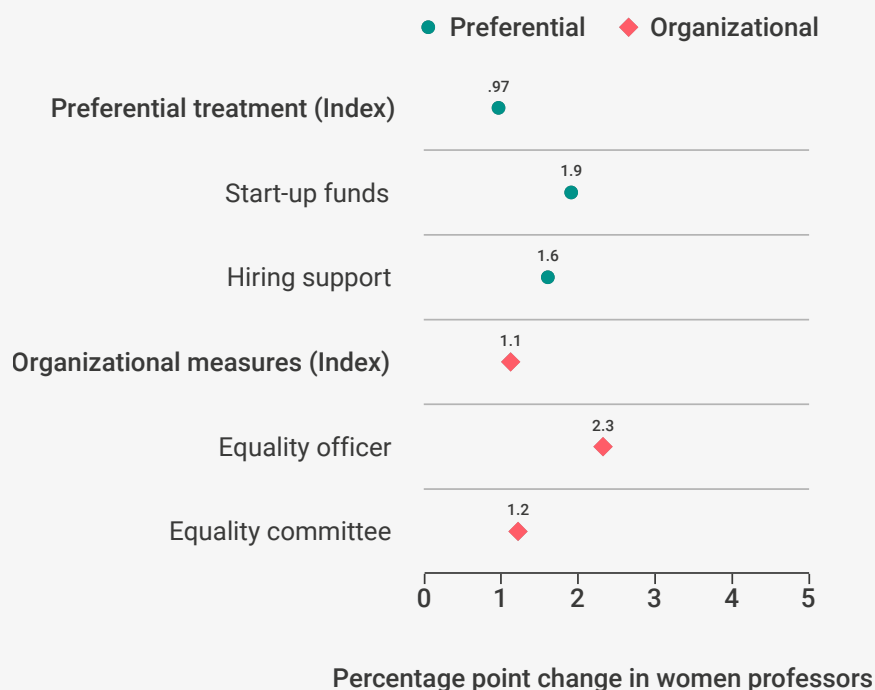
## Organizational responsibility and hiring incentives seem to work

Over time, there has been an increase in measures aimed at “fixing the organization” rather than “fixing individuals.” The mix of measures has also developed, with a trend toward softer measures, such as equality and diversity training. Instead of efforts aimed at better positioning women to create gender balance, universities are increasingly shifting their focus toward organizational issues and implementing measures

that contribute to structural or organizational changes that promote gender equality.

Having an equality officer had a significant effect on improving gender balance among professors. Also, direct measures, such as hiring programs with start-up funds for women researchers, are strongly associated with an increase in women professors.

### Effects of measures on share of woman professors



### About this research

This presentation is based on a study by Ida Drange, Maria Pietilä, Liza Reisel & Charlotte Silander. Research results are published in the open access article [Advancing Women’s Representation in Top Academic Positions – What Works?](#) In *Studies in Higher Education* (2023).

The study uses unique retrospective survey data from 37 universities in Sweden, Finland and Norway to examine Nordic universities’ equality policies in the period 1995–2019 coupled with register data on gender composition in top academic positions.

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Evaluation of gender equality policies – what works?  
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Further information about the project can be found on the [project webpage](#) (QR code)

