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Iceland's capital area waste collection no  
longer rubbish

Feb 25, 2022

## Theme: Gender equality



Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 2/2022



Financed by  
Nordic Council of  
Ministers

## **NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL**

Work Research Institute  
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,  
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130  
Oslo

## **PUBLISHER**

Work Research Institute, OsloMet  
commissioned by the Nordic Council of  
Ministers.  
The Nordic Council of Ministers is not  
responsible for the content

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An email edition of the newsletter can  
be ordered free of charge from  
[www.nordiclabourjournal.org](http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org)

ISSN 1504-9019 tildelt: Nordic labour  
journal (online)



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# Nordic gender equality paradoxes and power distribution

More than 100 years after Swedish women got voting rights, Sweden got its first female Prime Minister last year.

EDITORIAL

25.02.2022

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Magdalena Andersson helped lift the Nordic region to a new record level of 90 points in the Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer, where 100 points mean full gender equality for the 24 positions of power we measure in each of the Nordic countries.

The barometer looks at whether a man or a woman holds the positions of power on International Women's Day 8 March each year. We have some days to go, so unforeseen things could still happen.

Since 2009 we have looked at the gender of 13 different government ministers, leaders for top labour market organisations and for five symbolically important jobs. But the barometer goes all the way back to 1971, with the foundation of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

It is an easy way of measuring gender equality, a bit like having a landmark to steer towards when you are out sailing in order to measure whether you are on course or if the headwind pushes you away from your goal.

This year we also take stock of the situation at the very top of the power hierarchy. Queen Margrethe of Denmark might not have much political power, but her symbolic power is all the more evident. One of the things she has used this power for is to promote gender equality. This year marks her 50 years anniversary as Denmark's head of state.

There are far more sophisticated indexes for measuring gender equality out there, but our barometer is easy to understand. The fact that all the Nordic countries have now not only had female prime ministers but also women in all the twelve other ministerial posts we include, says something about gender equality.

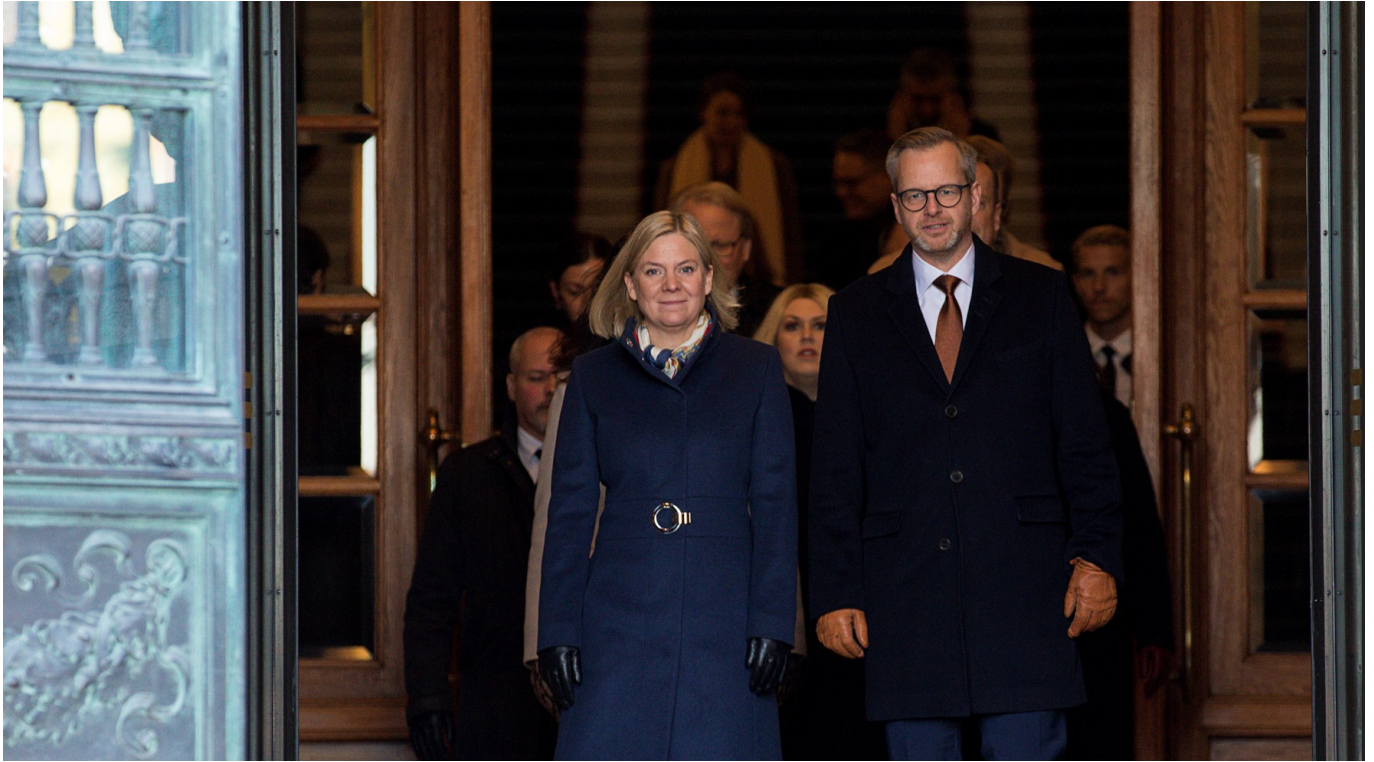
But we also look at gender equality in some more detail. All Nordic countries want entrepreneurs since most new jobs are created by new companies. But why are there far more male entrepreneurs than women? And are they motivated by the

same things? We look at two new studies – one from Sweden and one from Finland – that focus on these issues.

The Nordic centre of excellence Nordwit has spent five years studying women who have chosen a tech career. We talk to retired professor Päivi Korvajärvi, who has been part of the centre's work and who discusses what is being called the Nordic gender equality paradox – the higher their education, the less women are willing to discuss the issue. She says there is a culture of silence around gender equality in academia.

We also write about violence as a hidden cause of long-term unemployment. The Swedish Public Employment Service has been awarded the 2022 Swedish Gender Equality Prize for their four-year-long work on violence in close relationships. 6,000 employees have been trained to easier spot the problem.

With runaway energy prices and the invasion of Ukraine, there is a risk that there will be less focus on the green change. The environment is the theme for our next edition. But we make a head-start with a story from Iceland where households in the capital area will finally begin to separate waste long after this has become routine in the rest of the Nordics.



## Magdalena Andersson increases Nordic gender equality

This year's International Women's Day on 8 March is historic. The distribution of power in the Nordics has never been this equal, according to the Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer, where women get a record 92 points.

THEME

24.02.2022

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: NINNI ANDERSSON/REGERINGSKANSLIET

Our barometer measures whether a man or a woman holds 24 different positions of power in each of the Nordic countries. A total of 200 points are given out. This means that for the Nordic combined, total gender equality is reached for these positions when women get 100 points.





After two years of a stable 83 points, this year sees the total jump to 92 points. Sweden, which for the first time has reached 20 points, has therefore reached full gender equality according to our barometer. Previously the same has happened in Norway and Denmark. Here are this year's points:

	Points	Change
Denmark	21	-
Finland	13	+2
Iceland	19	-
Norway	17	+2
Sweden	20	+3
Total	90	+7

International women's day on 8 March this year will be historic because by then, for the first time, women will have held all twelve government ministerial posts plus the post as prime minister in the period between 1970 and 2022.

Sweden's first Prime Minister was also joined by Iceland's first female Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries.

All ministerial posts do not attract the same amount of points (see more in the fact box). Prime Ministers get 5 points, Finance Ministers 3, Foreign Ministers 2 and the rest get 1 point each.

We also include other positions of power linked to working life and other positions that mirror power – within religion, defence, central banks, supreme courts and the police. Here, things are moving a bit slower. In the grid below, one X means that a woman has held that position at some time.

	Archbishop	Chief of defence	Central Bank governor	Supreme Court	Director of Police
Denmark			X		
Finland			X	X	
Iceland	X				
Norge	X		X	X	X
Sverige	X			X	

Norway stands out here. The country has not only had women in most of the positions, but it has also had two female archbishops and two female heads of police. This year Norway could also have had a female head of its central bank since there were only two people in the running for the job: deputy head of the central bank Ida Wolden Bache and Jens Stoltenberg – the former Prime Minister and current NATO Secretary General.

So far, no country has had a female commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The Norwegian government has appointed Stoltenberg as head of the central bank, but he must serve out his term at NATO, which was extended earlier until the end of September this year in light of tensions with Russia.

Ida Wolden Bache will serve as temporary head of the central bank until then. By 8 March she will have held the position for eight days.

In the working life category, Finland stands out from the other Nordic countries. We include the heads of confederations of labour unions (LO), the largest confederations for white-collar workers and the confederations for academic unions.

	LO	White collar	Academics	Employer CEO	Employer chair
Denmark	X	X	X		X
Finland					
Iceland	X	X	X		
Norway	X	X	X	X	X
Sweden	X	X	X	X	X

While the other countries have had women in all the trade union positions and also partly on the employers' side, Finland draws a blank. There has never been a woman in one of the three unions we include from 1970 until today – not in Finland FLC, STTK and Akava, nor in the employers' organisation Confederation of Finnish Industries.

The final category we include is heads of state. Changes happen very rarely here compared to the other positions of power. Queen Margrethe of Denmark has held that position for 50 years, Carl Gustaf of Sweden has held it for 49 years. Norway has had two kings during that period – Olav, who died in 1991, and now Harald.

Finland has had presidents serving for long periods of time – Uhro Kekkonen was President for 26 years when he stepped down in 1982. Since then, the country has had four presidents, and Tarja Halonen was the first female one between 2000 and 2012.

Iceland has had four presidents since 1970. Vigdis Finnbogadóttir became the world's first democratically elected female head of state in 1980 and held that position for 12 years.

In this edition of NLJ, we write about what Queen Margrethe has meant for gender equality in Denmark, but Vigdis Finnbogadóttir and Tarja Halonen have also played important roles in that regard. The three Scandinavian countries have also been linked by the fact that the monarchs are related to each other.

Here are the main changes in each country this year compared to 8 March 2021:

## DENMARK

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has held power since 27 June 2019. She has faced her share of problems but the opposition has been further fragmented. The latest development came as five Danish People's Party MPs left to take up independent seats in February.

But other parties, including Left, Denmark's Liberal Party, have faced leadership challenges. Mette Frederiksen's toughest decision so far in her premiership has been to kill all of the country's minis, which turned out to be illegal. There have been three minor reshuffles, the latest came this year when Minister for Transport Benny Engelbrecht lost parliament's confidence.

Minister of Defence Trine Bramsen took his portfolio and also that of gender equality. She has signalled that Denmark should not only follow EU demands for women on company boards but also seriously expand the number of companies the new demands cover. 2,400 private companies will be covered by the demand for at least 40% women on boards.

Lisbeth Lintz became President of the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations on 1 January 2022.

## FINLAND

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin has held power since 10 December 2019. Her government has seen a few ministers come and go in the past year. On 27 May 2021, Annika Saarikko became Minister of Finance. This is one of the most powerful government posts and gets 3 points in our gender equality barometer.

Since Saarikko was replaced as Minister of Culture by a man, Finland only gets 2 extra points. But Li Andersson returned as Minister of Education after her parental leave. This gives

Finland one more point and the country increases its total with 3 to 13.

## ICELAND

After Iceland's elections on 25 September last year, more than two months passed before a government could be formed. Questions over the validity of results from one constituency meant that it took until 28 November before Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir could carry on as the leader of the same three-party coalition that had run the country since 2017.

Certain changes were made – Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir became Minister for Foreign Affairs, which gives 2 points, while men took over the justice and education portfolios. Iceland therefore remains unchanged with 19 points.

## NORWAY

There were elections in Norway last year too. Erna Solberg stepped down after eight years as Prime Minister and Jonas Gahr Støre took the helm. This means Norway loses 5 points. The day after 8 March 2021, LO President Hans-Christian Gabrielsen passed away and deputy leader Peggy Hessen Følsvik took the reins.

In May she was elected his successor. LO leaders get 4 points on the gender equality barometer. There were also some changes to government minister posts, which meant a further 2 points. Finally, Norway got a female head of the central bank, albeit for a limited time. In the end, Norway gets a total of 17 points, 2 more than last year.

## SWEDEN

103 years after women got the right to vote in Sweden, the country got its first female Prime Minister in Magdalena Andersson. Initially, she held the post for only seven hours, because her budget failed to secure a majority in parliament. But she quickly returned. Because she came from the post of Minister for Finance, her new position secures only 2 extra points. But a new female Minister for the Environment means Sweden gets 20 points – an all-time high for the country.

Errata: When we did the calculation of the gender equality barometer 2023, we discovered that we had missed that Lisbeth Lintz became President of the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations on 1 January 2022. The total amount of points has because of that been raised to 92.



## Danish Queen historically important for gender equality

The Danes chose a woman to be sovereign, and Queen Margrethe has made a considerable contribution toward gender equality.

THEME

22.02.2022

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: THE ROYAL HOUSE

Margrethe II of Denmark has written herself into the history books in several ways. She has been Denmark's Queen for 50 years and thus the longest-reigning sovereign in the Nordic region. She has also contributed so much to gender equality as a female sovereign that this too will become historic, believes Jeanette Varberg, historian and curator at the National Museum of Denmark.

"I predict that future historians will look back on Margrethe II as a sovereign who meant a lot for gender equality. She has influenced Danish history by preparing the way for a society where the genders are more equal both when it comes to working life and parenthood."



*Jeanette Varberg, foto: Tinde Bonde Christensen.*



The National Museum is Denmark's main cultural history museum and a research institution reporting to the Ministry of Culture. Jeanette Varberg is the curator for the department of ancient Denmark and Mediterranean countries.

She therefore takes a long-term view of history and keeps an eye on the exceptions to the norm, since these have often signalled new tendencies. One such exception happened when Margrethe, the oldest of three daughters, became Queen after her father, Frederik IX. Until then, only a man could become king, but a referendum in 1953 decided to open up for a female heir to the Danish throne.

"Queen Margrethe is therefore the first Danish monarch to be directly elected by the people. The Danes chose her, and this was a historical first. Gender equality was in its very early days back then, and the choice of Margrethe became a staring shot for our modern era where we try to create equal access to power for both men and women," says Jeanette Varberg.

The law for succession has since been changed again, to allow for full gender equality: The monarch's oldest child – regardless of gender – inherits the crown. There are similar rules in several other European monarchies, including Norway and Sweden.

### **Father is just as good as mother**

The way in which Queen Margrethe has executed her role as a female monarch has also helped her become an important female role model and exponent for gender equality, believes Jeanette Varberg.



*Queen Margrethe's father Frederik IX was the first Danish King to give up political influence. He very much defined the role of modern monarch in Denmark.*

"The Queen is extremely well educated, curious and has fulfilled her role and duty to a far larger extent than anyone probably expected in 1953. Having a female monarch who knows and uses her power and stands by it, has meant a lot for how Danish women and men view gender equality."

Queen Margrethe has been an important role model also by not allowing her role as mother and wife take away from her duty to serve her country. This is a historical breakthrough, explains Jeanette Varberg.

"Queen Margrethe basically shared her parental leave with her husband and was often away from her boys when they were little in order to look after her professional duties. They had a good father who was equally adept at looking after them. This made Queen Margrethe a trailblazer."

Jeanette Varberg has herself shared parental leave with her husband and left her children with him while they were little.

"I and other women found strength in the fact that someone had made this choice before us – Queen Margrethe did it first."

### **Back to the gender equality of old**

The royal household is apolitical and the Queen has never spoken publicly about her views on gender equality, but in reality she has been a clear example of how it should look – in sharp contrast to the Victorian era, which Jeanette Varberg calls "a historic low point for gender equality".



*Queen Margrethe in government council.*

"Queen Victoria constantly let it be known that women's primary duty was family and that they should leave it to their husbands to go out into the world."

In the times before the Victorian era, there was a stream of powerful queens who either stood by their King or took power themselves, explains Jeanette Varberg. Female high priests also played a central role in ancient societies, and if we go as far back as hunter-gatherer societies gender equality might have been somewhat similar to what we have today.

"People lived in big families where able-bodied people of both genders went out to gather food, while small children were looked after by their older siblings. In hunter-gatherer cultures, people did not have that many children, and women and men did not need to hunt for more than three to five hours a day when there were enough animals to be hunted.



The rest of the time they could spend with their children. More time, gender equality and less stress.”

### **Above party politics**

As head-of-state, Queen Margrethe is loyal to the sitting government and cannot instigate legislation herself. She is above party politics and does not express her political views. But she does use her annual televised New Year’s address to firmly underline that Danes should look after each other and not least vulnerable people – without being too concrete.

On 14 January this year, the Queen celebrated 50 years as Denmark’s monarch and the jubilee will be celebrated through a range of events during 2022. Because of the Corona situation, most of them have been postponed to the late summer.



# Finland's tech sector's culture of silence on gender equality

Women who have chosen a tech career tend to avoid gender equality debates, according to the Nordwit centre of excellence which has spent the past five years studying women's careers in technology-driven work environments.

THEME

22.02.2022

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: MIKA RANTA, HELSINGIN SANOMAT

The Nordic countries have achieved a lot in the fight for gender equality. It is a cornerstone for the modern Nordic welfare states and the Nordics are trailblazers for gender equality in Europe.

But perhaps things have been going too well? Have we been led to believe that there are no problems left to solve? In tech research and industry there is talk about a Nordic gender paradox, where people keep quiet when they once in a while experience a problem.

Part of this paradox is that many no longer see any gender inequality issues. There seems to be a culture of silence, and problems are hushed up or “kicked into the long grass” as someone recently put it at a Nordwit conference.

## Tech-driven careers

Nordwit stands for Nordic Centre of Excellence on Women in Technology Driven Careers. It is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers' funding organisation Nordforsk and began work in 2017. The project will conclude later this spring with the publication of a book. Uppsala University, the Western Norway Research Institute and Tampere University are all Nordwit partners.

The project has looked at women's tech-driven careers and how they get into technology in different ways compared to their male colleagues. E-health services are part of the project's research areas, as is digital humanities in the gaming industry.

Nordwit also looks at imbalances and practical problems in the Nordic academic and tech industry labour market. Women in the trade seem to be harder hit by workload levels and project culture.

### **"Gender equality means growth"**

Finland held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2021, and wanted to promote gender equality and a youth perspective in the Nordic cooperation, while also involving businesses and civil society.

The Finnish Presidency programme said that gender equality in working life leads to stronger economic growth because it gives access to a larger and more skilled labour force.



*Päivi Korvajärvi. Photo: Jonne Renvall, Tampere University.*

Päivi Korvajärvi is a retired professor of gender studies at Tampere University, specialising in labour market research. Korvajärvi sees the Nordic cooperation as valuable and underlines the importance of having one Nordic channel that finances research and measures that improves gender equality.

### **"Gender leads to awkward conflicts"**

Nordwit's research team in Tampere has interviewed some 30 highly educated women, and some of their answers seem to provide a new view of gender equality.

Highly educated women in academia and in private businesses and institutions would prefer to avoid gender issues, as they are regarded more as an awkward conflict between men and women.

It even looks like women who work in research try to avoid the gender debate altogether. Gender equality is sometimes more about having the opportunity to find a good balance between being a mother and having an interesting job.

The interviewees talked about a job that has become increasingly demanding with more temporary employment and shorter projects. Put together, these become challenging full-time jobs that feel far too demanding.

"Earlier research has already shown that when gender issues are seen as a conflict in the workplace, it results in disagreements and a bad atmosphere. Who wants to work in an environment with conflicts and a bad ambience?" wonders Päivi Korvajärvi.

There seems to be a desire to disregard the feeling of gender inequality and focus instead on international statistics, which of course show that everything is going well. People do not want to see existing discrimination or harassment in their own environments, and let issues pass.

Korvajärvi refers to utterances like "everything is fine in my workplace, but there are those who have it worse". Some want to keep things at a distance: "In Finland everything is fine, but if you look at Arab countries, for instance, women are seriously oppressed".

### **A culture of silence rather than sisterhood?**

The Finnish interviews show that there is some kind of curtain or barrier. Neither the women in the workplace nor management want to see and act on problems.

The Nordwit project is therefore also about a culture of silence that seems to be present at least in many Finnish workplaces. All workplaces should have gender equality plans, but these are not even being used. If they are, it is to a small degree – they are considered to be no more than an obligatory piece of paper, says Päivi Korvajärvi.

She underlines the importance of management committing to gender equality and treating it as an important issue. This is important for the welfare and the atmosphere in the workplace, and, as a result, productivity.

In other words, it might look as if female emancipation and sisterhood has disappeared from the workplace. That is not quite so, says Päivi Korvajärvi.

In some workplaces, quite a lot is happening. But these are often one-off occurrences. #MeToo was a global issue but had an impact on individual workplaces.

### **Gender equality in modern "gig academia"**

Päivi Korvajärvi's expertise lies in labour market gender research. Finnish politicians argue gender equality in the workplace leads to a stronger economy with greater growth thanks to a larger and more knowledgeable workforce.

The Nordic cooperation on labour market issues and gender equality has been developed in step with changes to the labour market, driven partly by educational and technological innovation, climate change, demographic developments and the integration of immigrants.

Päivi Korvajärvi also highlights how new technology changes working methods and structures in the workplace, procedures, goals, organisation of work and the segregation of

women and men. There is also an increasing focus on individual workers.

“The neo-liberal way of thinking has penetrated workplaces in both the private and public sectors. Although many still talk about all kinds of team and Lean and so on, there is an increasing focus on individual choices and aims.”

The platform economy has also reached higher education and resulted in a “gig academia” with new working conditions.

### Quotas or no quotas?

Women still only make up 30% of all professors at Finnish universities, and the number is even lower in the tech sector where it is less than 10%. The issue of quotas is a tricky one in Finland, says Päivi Korvajärvi.

Quotas are seen as a fundamental aim in Finnish gender equality legislation. Women and men should be able to participate on equal terms in social decision-making and planning.

State and municipal authorities must have at least 40% women or men. The quota can also be implemented in leadership and management bodies in companies that are majority-owned by the state or municipalities. The law does take into account practical issues which might mean the goal is less often met or will be met later on.

Things seem to go in the opposite direction when it comes to company and research leadership. Many women in leadership positions publicly say they do not support quotas, as they have bad connotations. People do not want to be a “quota woman”, but to be chosen based on merit and skills – not because of their gender.

There are still some Finnish listed companies that have no women at all on their board. These companies also have very few female CEOs, points out Päivi Korvajärvi.

Where there are women in the leadership, they face scrutiny. Professor Korvajärvi points to a recent interview in Helsingin Sanomat from 17 February 2022.



*Nora Huovila didn't let her pregnancy stop her from expanding her company. Photo: Mika Ranta, Helsingin Sanomat.*

Startup businesswoman Nora Huovila told the newspaper how her company's hunt for investors suddenly came to a halt when it turned out she was pregnant. She felt it was an obvious thing to talk about, but many possible investors pulled out. Huovila wonders how many male CEOs have lost financing for their companies because they have been expecting a baby.

### Do we need more men?

Päivi Korvajärvi's research interviews also covered numerical gender equality. According to the interviewees, it is not considered a good thing to have only women in a company's leadership. Women in various leadership positions also seem to believe men are needed at the top, even if they are not as skilled as female applicants.

The demand or request might come from external forces, like clients or investors, who do not value women's progress. This became clear in situations where women were dominant in a company.

“There seems to be a view that women-led organisations' reputations are not quite right, their reputation improves if there are men in the leadership as well. We looked at the health technology sector, where males were considered necessary – without them, products or knowledge was seen as less than trustworthy,” says Päivi Korvajärvi.

### Anger leads to action

Does it pay to get angry? It seems that only concrete discrimination cases lead to action. Päivi Korvajärvi would like to see emotional reactions, anger leads to action. But this seems to be lacking among the highest educated women in Finland's tech industry – and beyond.

The opposite emotion is silence and joint acceptance in the workplace. So it is not possible to argue that gender equality has reached its conclusion in the Nordics and that we can concentrate on solving other problems.



Still, there seems to be slightly less interest in gender equality right now, and the interest is cyclical. The issue needs to be addressed regularly in order to stay visible.

The joint Nordic project for gender issues in technology has several aims – to create solution-focused research and proposals for measures that lead to permanent change.



## Is there gender equality among Nordic entrepreneurs?

Both in Sweden and in Finland there are more male than female entrepreneurs. What happens to gender equality when women live with men who are entrepreneurs? Are male and female entrepreneurs motivated by different things?

THEME

21.02.2022

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO OSKAR OMNE

Two new studies from Sweden and Finland look at these issues.

70% of Swedish companies are started by men. To succeed, many of them depend on the support from their partner – economically and practically. This support is not recognised in entrepreneurial literature nor in policy documents concerning entrepreneurship, according to Matilda Eriksson. She recently presented her PhD thesis “Entrepreneurships’ silent/silenced voices: A narrative study of women living with male entrepreneurs” at Stockholm University.

“In the early 1980s, we learned that growth comes from small and medium-sized enterprises. The Swedish government and

global institutions recommended creating a culture that would secure the supply of entrepreneurs. Since then, researchers have believed we live in an entrepreneurial culture, Matilda Eriksson tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

Ensuring the creation of such a culture led to many policy documents, action plans and strategies which later informed Matilda Eriksson’s work while she was a project leader at Västerås Science Park.

“I saw first hand the considerable effort being made to promote gender equality while supporting entrepreneurship. Gender equality here meant women running companies, but entrepreneurship and gender equality is a considerably more

complex issue than what we like to think. That is what I want to highlight,” she says.

### Language can be inclusive and exclusive

As project leader, Matilda Eriksson initiated a cooperation project between the employer and Stockholm University and began looking at gender equality in situations where the man is the entrepreneur and owner of the enterprise, while the woman is the one who makes the enterprise possible. The project grew into a PhD thesis where language takes centre stage since Eriksson believes language is what allows us to create our surroundings.

“My thesis looks at which voices own the narrative of what constitutes entrepreneurship – what we listen to and which voices are silenced – and which voices have not been interpreted or spoken of what entrepreneurship means,” she says.

Eriksson interviewed 12 women living with an entrepreneur whose company has received public support. She also analysed the policy documents outlining entrepreneurship support and has been able to establish that society sees the entrepreneur as an individual who acts in the public sphere, while the women who were interviewed painted a picture of what goes on in private – namely a collective effort.

“These two perspectives are fairly different and shows how we understand entrepreneurship depending on who we listen to. When we study entrepreneurship from a gender perspective, it is synonymous with studying the woman involved in the enterprise. It is never looked at from the point of view of how a company might influence a partner or a family in a culture that changes in order to promote entrepreneurship and company creation,” she says.

### Joint effort, joint benefits?

Matilda Eriksson’s interviews did not identify a single case of a couple having a written contract to compensate the woman for the responsibility she took on while the man established and developed his enterprise. This despite the fact that the answers she got showed the women had made considerable efforts.

“Some of the women said that the man and herself, sometimes the entire family, would live off her wages while he set up his company. One said she sacrificed herself for him, so now he should pay her pension. Two said they had invested so much of their time and money that they wanted to get married to secure a legal right to their half of the company,” says Eriksson.

Only three of the 12 women interviewees were partners in their other half’s company.

### Socially sustainable?

Matilda Eriksson believes it is important to provide some nuance to the debate about what entrepreneurship should entail and to question the silence around the efforts that

women who are in relationships with entrepreneurs put into the business. In her thesis, Eriksson describes this silence as structural discrimination.

“It is not individual men or men as a group, but rather the entire system that needs looking at, and how the state can intervene. We must also ask ourselves whether it is socially sustainable growth to carry on disregarding women’s efforts rather than shining a light on them and highlighting the problem – not least because the Swedish models for entrepreneurship are export-heavy,” says Matilda Eriksson.

### What motivates a future entrepreneur?

In Finland, as in Sweden, more men than women choose to become entrepreneurs and set up their own company. This is despite the fact that these countries – like Denmark, Iceland and Norway – are considered to be the most gender-neutral in the world.

Wilma Westerholm wanted to find out why. The results from her study appeared in the thesis “Entrepreneurship from a gender perspective – what motivates Finnish men and women to pursue entrepreneurship?” which she presented at the Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki in 2020.

“I have always been interested in gender equality issues and already in my bachelor thesis I had started looking at the main topic of entrepreneurship and business management. Earlier research has shown that the gender gap still exists here. I wanted to delve deeper into the differences between women and men when it comes to entrepreneurship and motivation,” she tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

Wilma Westerholm created a questionnaire focusing on nine aspects of the motivation behind entrepreneurship. She divided them into pull and push factors – the first being what tempts people to become entrepreneurs and the second being what forces women to choose it.

Pull factors	Push factors
More independence	Dissatisfaction with being an employee
Higher income	Changes to the labour market
Relations to other entrepreneurs	To create balance between work and family life
Desire to go against stereotypes	Last resort
Desire to take on challenges	

*The categories are somewhat simplified compared to the thesis.*

When Wilma Westerholm gathered answers from a total of 146 people (70.5% of them women), her hypothesis was that there would be a marked difference between how men and women consider money to be a pull factor, and that the desire to take on challenges would be higher among men than women.

In terms of money, there was a notable albeit not very large difference between men and women. When it came to the desire to take on new challenges there was no significant difference between the genders, however.

Her hypothesis for the “desire to go against stereotypes” was that women would have this higher on their list of pull factors. This turned out to be right, but neither women nor men considered this to be an important reason to start a company.

So, somewhat surprisingly, the answers did not deviate to a great extent from a gender perspective. It is worth noting, however, that the factor “to create balance between work and family life” got considerably more support from women compared to men.

“Women want the flexibility to be able to decide the length of their working day, as well as when it starts and ends. This result matches what other researchers have found – that for women, the need for flexibility is linked to the chance to control their working day and thus being able to take care of their families, households and themselves as well,” says Wilma Westerholm.

She is looking forward to the continuation of the research and debate around women entrepreneurs.

“It is important for society as a whole that we have entrepreneurs from both genders,” she says.





## Swedish Employment Service wins award for anti-violence work

Over the past four years, the Swedish Public Employment Service has worked to increase awareness around violence in close relationships, which is often a hidden cause of long-term unemployment. They have trained 6,000 staff as well as suppliers and clients. Now they have been awarded the 2022 Swedish Gender Equality Award.

### NEWS

12.02.2022

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: NIKLAS LEHMAN

The award was presented at the Forum for Gender Equality conference on 8 February. In the finals, the Public Employment Service competed alongside a bank, a sports club, a university and a municipality. With traditional award ceremony pomp and circumstance, there were drum rolls and a golden envelope hiding the winner's name.

"It is so good that someone focuses on positive things about the Public Employment Service. We are the first authority to win this award and our staff show a lot of engagement for these issues," says Åsa Frostfeldt, the project manager for the project.

Four years ago the government asked the Public Employment Service to find ways of uncovering violence in close relationships, in cooperation with the Social Insurance Agency, the Migration Board, the National Board of Health and Wel-

fare, the Gender Equality Agency and the coordination associations.

Åsa Frostfeldt has been with the project since the start. Being "project manager" often refers to people introducing new IT systems. Using the title in this project gives it a special meaning. Training to dare to highlight domestic violence was not about getting those already interested in the issue on board. It would be training for all those who deal with clients in their daily work.

This is not a project, but a new way of working that concerns the entire agency, and that also introduces existing methods to help women and men who are victims of violence.

### A missing jigsaw piece

"Our evaluation shows that more women than men were positive to attending the online course, but that more men said

they improved their potential for matching after attending the course and starting to ask questions about violence. To ask about violence in close relationships is a missing jigsaw piece in our work with the long-term unemployed, but one that has prevented many of our clients to move forward,” says Åsa Frostfeldt.

The question of violence in close relationships is most often relevant when there is deeper cooperation between the client and the Public Employment Service because of long-term unemployment and difficulties finding work. It becomes part of the conversation about the reasons why people struggle to enter the labour market. Many have a positive reaction. “Why has nobody asked me about this before?,” explains Åsa Frostfeldt.

### **Control expresses itself in many ways**

Addressing violence in close relationships when talking about poor connections to the labour market has disclosed how this has been a hidden obstacle that used to remain the client’s secret. This is control and violence that expresses itself in many different ways.

It could be physical or psychological violence, but also financial and digital. If you do not have your own Bank ID, bank account or email address and are not digitally independent, it could be difficult to get out of a destructive relationship.

“We see this both among newly arrived and established Swedes. When you share an e-mail address with your husband or share codes for electronic ID and computer and account logins, you are vulnerable. It makes it hard to get out of a relationship if you for instance rack up debt without knowing about it, or if your partner has taken out a loan in your name,” says Åsa Frostfeldt.

Women with foreign backgrounds can also be victims of norms dictating that they should be at home and look after the children. Learning Swedish for immigrants can be OK, or having an apprenticeship, but when employers want to hire a good apprentice things sometimes come to a halt.

Families can also have strong opinions about what kind of jobs are suitable for female family members. This is not necessarily linked to honour, but it is an expression of other norms and this is more prevalent among newly arrived than established Swedes.

“If you don’t know how society works, you are extra vulnerable, but there are many ways of being vulnerable – including poor language skills, having mental health issues, bad economy or precarious housing conditions,” says Åsa Frostfeldt.

Caseworkers at the Public Employment Service also meet women who have been suffering from post-traumatic stress after sexual attacks, but since they have not been asked about it nor been able to tell themselves, they are wrongly diag-

nosed and never get the help they need to find the real reason behind their mental health problems.

After spending years working with this, the Public Employment Service has seen that violence in close relationships is a common reason why women do not manage to find work but live their lives in periods of long-term unemployment and sick leave. Others might live in shielded accommodation and need to move if their current location is revealed, which means breaking up and looking for a new job and a place to live again.

The Public Employment Service is not allowed to record statistics for this kind of conversation, but an anonymous survey by the Public Employment Service in Skaraborg showed that 80% of those participating in work-related rehabilitation had experienced violence in close relationships. Those who struggle to do job training for more than ten hours a week can be referred to some of the over 80 coordination associations around the country.

“They confirm the image that has emerged in Skaraborg, that many who find themselves far from the labour market suffer from trauma caused by mental health issues which impact on their ability to work,” says Åsa Frostfeldt.

### **The agency as an agent of change**

During the four years the Public Employment Service has worked with violence in close relationships, the agency has also changed the way it works. Caseworkers now know where to refer clients who have suffered so that they can get help. There have also been changes to how job seekers who live under threat are treated. If there is a threat linked to a town, the person is not required to look for work there.

People with protected identities are also not required to apply for jobs where they will be visible, for instance in a check-out or in reception. The agency has created courses and information sites for victims of violence and provides information about where victims can turn for help.

The Public Employment Service’ award was justified thus:

“Male violence against women is the ultimate expression of an unequal society. When authorities discover and act against violence, women and children get the chance to live free and secure lives. Finding a job and supporting yourself is also important in order to be able to leave a destructive relationship. This year’s winner – the Public Employment Service – has spent four years working systematically and innovatively to integrate the protection of women and gender equality in its day-to-day operations.”

Åsa Frostfeldt thinks the award cup – a hexagonal pillar made from volcanic material – symbolises the work which the Public Employment Service has undertaken.

“This is the symbol of breaking through a foundation and it happens after a volcanic eruption when nature creates a new order. It is a very nice thought and it is precisely what we have been doing. In the beginning, we faced resistance, but now – as people understand that it is relevant to highlight the issue of domestic violence and that we can make a difference – it has become part of a new order. We have created a change to our day-to-day work, and the Public Employment Service is now an agent that can act when there are issues of violence in close relations,” she says.

The agency is now looking to develop the support in a more digitalised format. A final report will be presented to the government in March, but more money has been set aside to carry on work throughout 2022.



# Iceland's capital area waste collection no longer rubbish

Despite all the progress that has taken place in waste management, Iceland's six capital municipalities still do not recycle household biological waste. The municipalities do not even share the same waste management system. But now things are finally changing.

## NEWS

10.02.2022

TEXT: HALLGRÍMUR INDRÍÐASON, PHOTO: SOPRA

In January, the Association of Municipalities in Iceland's capital area announced that a common household waste management system could be implemented as soon as next spring and would be fully operational by spring 2023. This would include collecting organic waste.

Sorpa – a municipal waste recycling association owned by these six municipalities in the capital area – will play a key part in its implementation. The amount of waste is huge, according to Gunnar Dofri Ólafsson, Sorpa's director of communication and development.

“We get 600 tonnes of waste every day. That is the same as a Toyota Yaris every second minute. And this is only what comes to us from the capital area.”

### Three incompatible systems

Ólafsson explains that right now there are three different waste management systems in the capital area – one in Reykjavík, one in Kópavogur and a shared one for the four municipalities of Hafnarfjörður, Garðabær, Seltjarnarnes and Mosfellsbær. Waste from each system is now handled in a different way.

“The Association of Municipalities in the capital area decided 18 months ago to build one household waste management



system for the whole area. Sorpa put that system together with the help of experts from the municipalities,” says Gunnar Dofri Ólafsson.

The change will mean that household users can now separate four different types of waste for their bins: paper and cardboard, plastic, biowaste and general waste. Today, only paper and cardboard can be recycled in most places.

### **Agreed on a standard system**

“The biowaste is extremely important, but it’s also a bit embarrassing that it has not been possible for households to recycle it until now. This has been done in Akureyri in the north of Iceland for the past 20 years, for example. Now the municipalities have all agreed to adopt that system, making it the standard for the whole capital area where around two thirds of Iceland’s population lives,” Ólafsson says.

He claims that this will all be implemented in most apartment buildings in the area as soon as this April or May.

“Two bins will then be enough for a household, each of which will have a separation in the middle allowing two kinds of waste to be put in the same bin.”

Ólafsson says this is based on the Scandinavian model.

“I saw eight kinds of waste in one bin in Gothenburg in Sweden. So this is just a small start!”

### **Nearest site soon only 500 meters away**

But this is not all. The number of collection points for other kinds of waste will also increase, including for metals, textiles, glass and return packaging like drink cans and bottles.

“Every household should soon be able to depose of their waste within a 500 meter radius.”

But why has separate household biowaste collection not been implemented sooner?

Ólafsson says the municipalities simply failed to reach an agreement on how to do it. Yet from 1 January next year, a new law will require all municipalities to collect these four types of household waste. He also points out that the waste-collecting companies have been ahead of the public, and have pushed people towards recycling more.

“Now there is far more awareness among people. The public wants us to do better. So this is a very important step in responding to that call,” says Ólafsson.

### **A huge controversy**

Another issue has pushed things forward. The GAJA biogas and composting plant opened in 2020, aiming to produce soil and biogas from household waste. It soon became clear the soil from GAJA contained too much plastic. The whole thing became a huge controversy.

GAJA cost some 6 billion Icelandic Kroner (€42,5m) and for a while, it looked like the investment was wasted. It cost the Sorpa CEO his job. Ólafsson says that GAJA’s original purpose was to produce organic soil from mixed household waste.

“As soon as we got the results of the chemical analysis of the soil back, we saw that this was not possible. For the soil to reach the required quality the organic waste had to be collected separately.

“So that also pushed the municipalities to prepare for the collection of organic waste. When GAJA gets the organic waste separately, it will not only produce soil of required quality – it can also produce more gas than from mixed household waste.”

### **Plastic exported for recycling**

This has not been the only controversy regarding waste collection. For years, Iceland has been forced to export some of its plastic to Sweden for recycling since Iceland does not have the resources to recycle it all.

In December, the Stundin news magazine reported that 1,500 tonnes of plastic registered as recycled in Iceland had sat in a warehouse in Sweden for five years. That is roughly half of the plastic that was exported to Sweden.

“It’s very bad for the credibility of recycling when something like this comes up. We are trying to get people to recycle and they have to trust that what can be recycled is actually recycled,” Ólafsson says.

Later, the Icelandic Recycling Fund said only a small part of the plastic found in the Swedish warehouse was from Iceland and that there was no indication that the two large waste recycling companies – Terra and Íslenska gámafélagið – had done anything wrong in connection with their exports of plastic for recycling.

Ólafsson says some plastic is recycled in Iceland, for example plastic used by farmers to roll up their hay.

“However, it’s not practical for us from a resources point of view to recycle all our plastic waste in Iceland.”

### **Not all plastic is the same**

Then there is the issue of having to deal with different types of plastic.

“If it is too mixed you can’t recycle it. So there needs to be a discussion with the producers to make plastic that is more easily recyclable. Today, only half of the plastic we get is recyclable. The rest can only be burned, or worse, landfilled. Our biggest landfill site is shutting down at the end of next year, which also means huge changes for Sorpa,” Ólafsson says.

But back to the changes to household waste collection. According to Ólafsson, people are very happy with them, which

is not always the case when people are asked to change their behavioural patterns.

“This tells us that there is room for more changes. We have started to consider which types of waste we should focus on next. This would most likely be more paper separation and more plastic separation. We are already experimenting with foam plastic, whose fibres can pollute other kinds of plastic and prevent recycling.

"So we are asking people to bring foam plastic to our recycling centres instead of putting it in the household waste. From there we can either send it to companies that can use it to make other things or press it down to 2% of its size.

"Then it has a value and we can sell it to reduce the taxpayers' cost of running Sorpa. We are also looking at further big changes in waste management in the capital area," Ólafsson says.