

Nordic Gender Equality in Figures



Nordic Council
of Ministers



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INTRODUCTION

The Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, together with Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland, have a long history of cooperating and sharing knowledge on gender equality. The cooperation is driven by a shared vision of a gender equitable Nordic region with equal opportunities, power, rights and obligations for all women and men, girls and boys.

In **Nordic Gender Equality in Figures 2021** you will find the latest gender statistics for the Nordic region. Thirty-three indicators show how far the region has come and what challenges remain in the context of demography, family and care, health, education, labor market, income, as well as power and influence. Gender statistics are, as defined by the UN, sex-disaggregated statistics that adequately reflect differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men in all areas of life. This handbook will hopefully be useful for anyone seeking reliable and comparable data on Nordic gender equality.

Indicators are drawn from Nordic Statistics Database, a collection of statistics kept up by the Nordic Council of Ministers since the 1960s. Data are gathered from the Nordic Statistical Institutes, NOMESCO/NOSOSCO, Eurostat, the OECD and the UN. Nordic Statistics Database supports the work of the Nordic governments and parliamentarians in forging bonds, solutions and cooperation across the region.

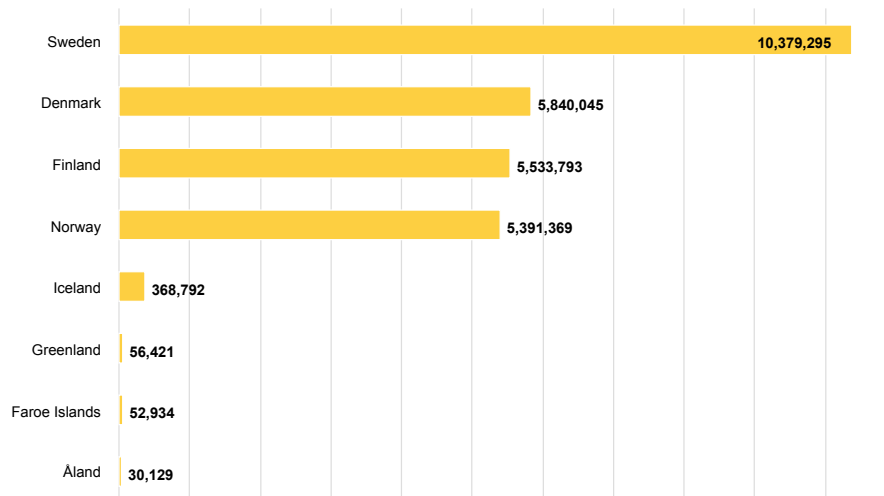


Photo: Unsplash

1. DEMOGRAPHY

Population

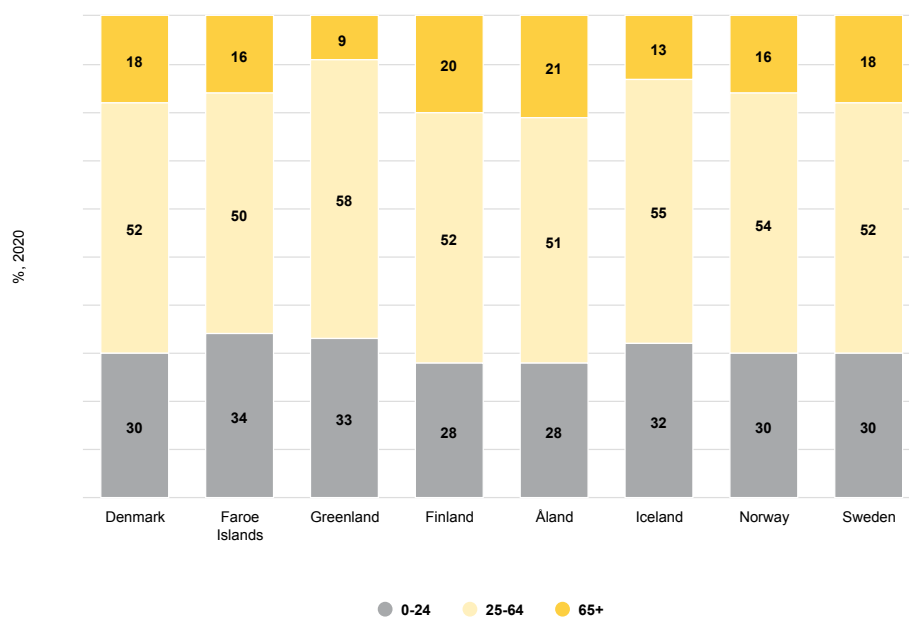
These figures illustrate the size and composition of Nordic populations. Today the Nordics are facing similar challenges as the rest of Europe. The populations are aging and those in paid work shoulder a larger burden to pay for welfare through taxes. This development may not be unmanageable for the Nordics, since generous family policies have increased the fertility rate in the past and immigration has been greater than in the rest of Europe.



Number of people, 2021

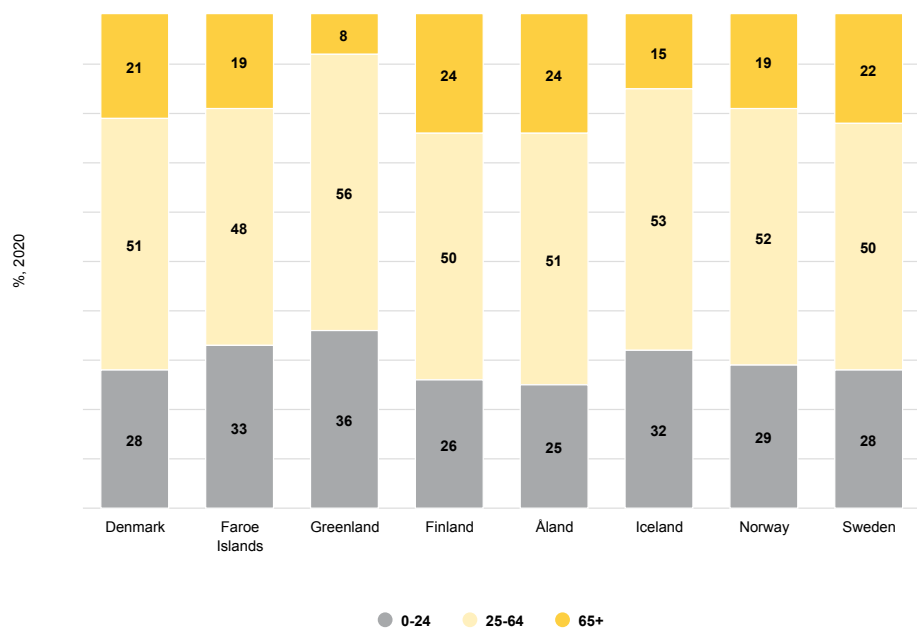
1.1 Population

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)



1.2 Distribution of population by age – men

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)



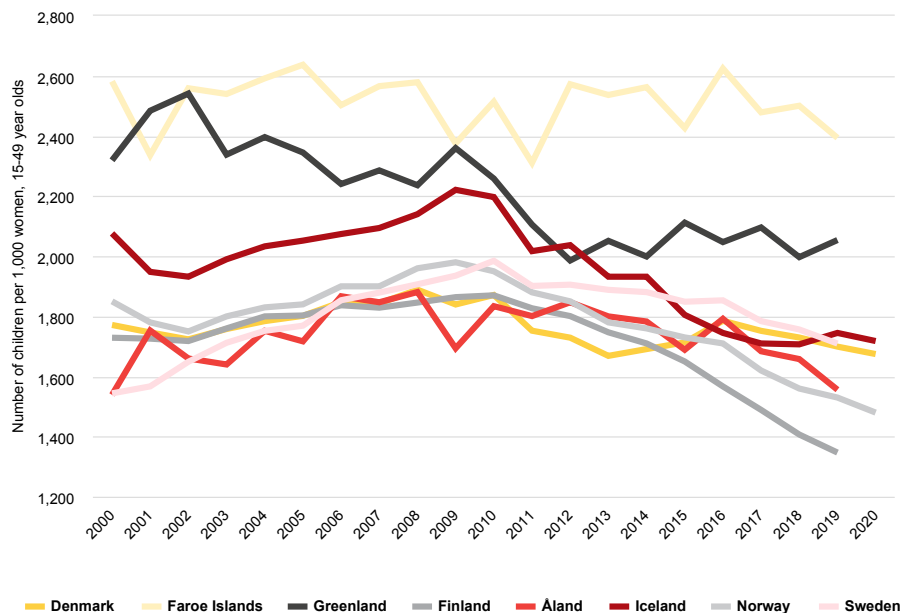
1.3 Distribution of population by age – women

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Fertility

Fertility rates have seen a general decline since 2010. The total fertility rate is the number of live births per year per 1,000 women between the ages of 15-49. Current fertility rates are between a stable level (2,100) and a critical level (1,500) in most of the Nordic countries, except in the Faroe Islands, where it is above, and in Finland, where it is below. There is no single explanation for the falling rates. Choosing to have children later and financial uncertainty are seen as part of the reason, despite generous parental leave and access to affordable and quality childcare.

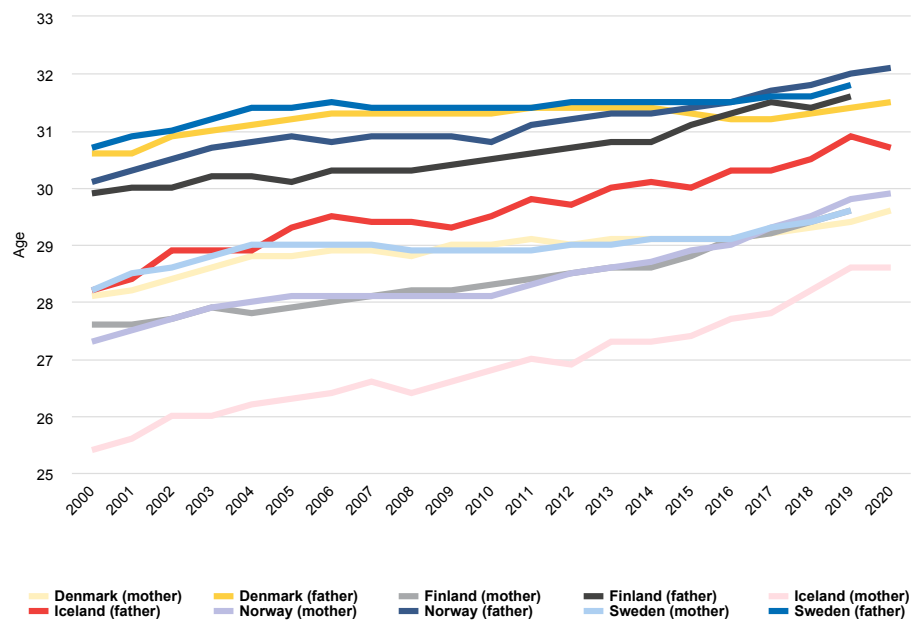
Women in the Nordics are waiting longer to have children. Over the past 20 years, the age of women when they have their first child has been rising from about 27 years old to just under 30 years old. The age of new fathers has also been rising to just under 32 years old in 2020. Choosing to postpone parenthood has been associated with greater opportunities for women to pursue higher education and careers.



1.4 Total fertility rate

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Data (latest year): Denmark 1,674.7 Faroe Islands 2,393.8 Greenland 2,054 Finland 1,347 Åland 1,556 Iceland 1,718 Norway 1,480 Sweden 1,709.7



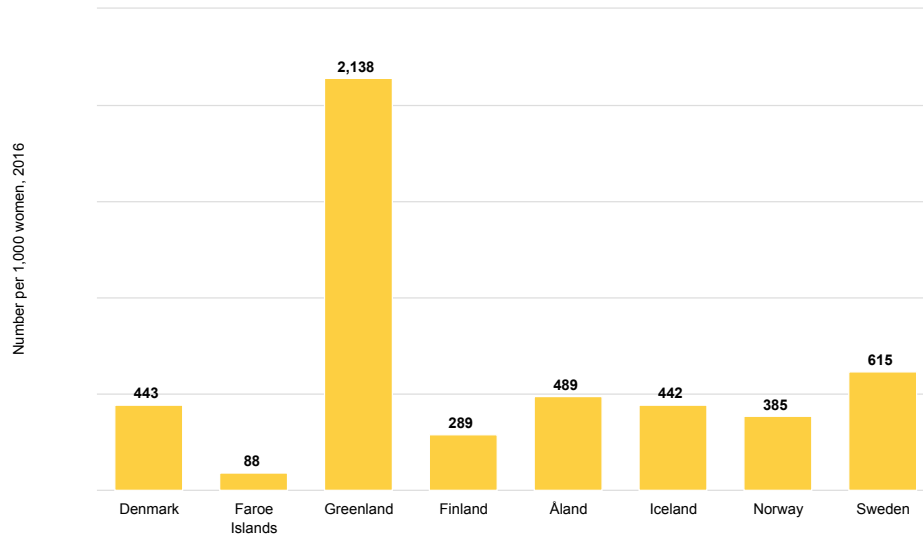
1.5 Parent's age at birth of first child

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Data (latest year): Denmark (mother) 29.6 (father) 31.5 Finland (mother) 29.6 (father) 31.6 Iceland (mother) 28.6 (father) 30.7 Norway (mother) 29.9 (father) 32.1 Sweden (mother) 29.6 (father) 31.8

Abortion

This figure shows the total abortion rate. It is defined as the number of legal abortions per 1,000 women provided they lived to be 50 years old. Since the mid-1970s, induced legal abortions have been available in most Nordic countries. Abortion rates have remained at the same levels in the Nordic countries for the past 20 years, except in Greenland, where the rate has been higher and seen a decrease.



1.6 Total abortion rate

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Denmark 2015



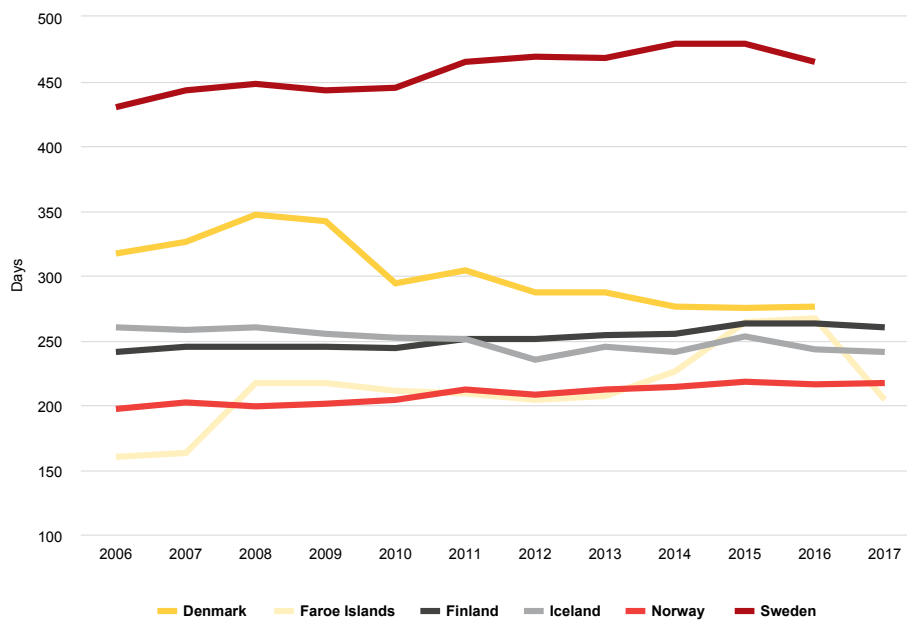
Photo: Getty Images

2. FAMILY AND CARE

Parental leave

In the Nordic region, parents are entitled to generous paid parental leave, although the specifics of parental leave schemes vary from country to country. Efforts have been made across the region for parents to share the leave more equally. Figure 2.1 shows the number of days in which parental benefits, for both mothers and fathers, were drawn per newborn in the given year.

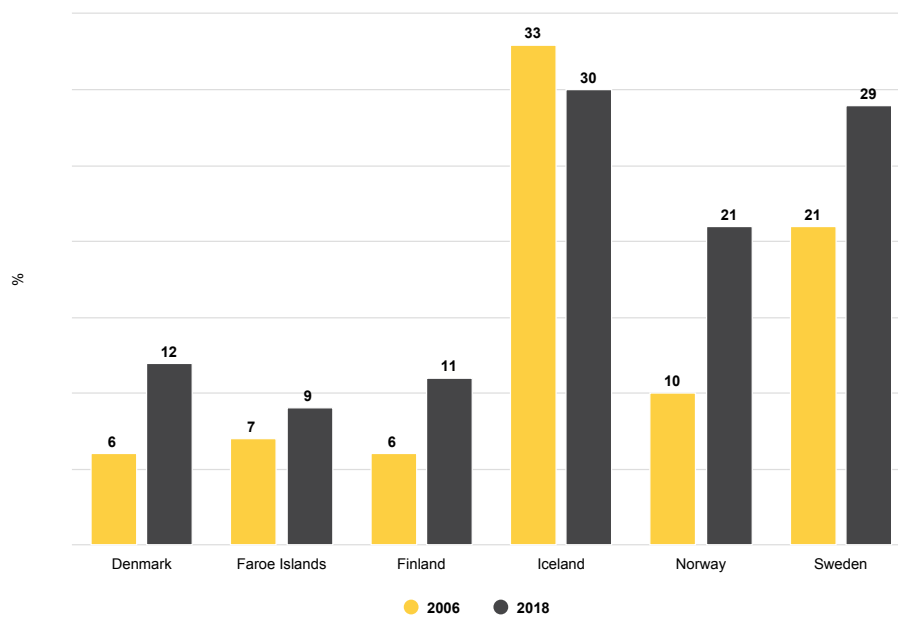
The share of parental leave taken by fathers has grown steadily in the Nordics over the past 20 years. Shared leave is considered good for fathers, for mothers and for the child, who has a right to all parents. That is why certain weeks are earmarked for each parent. Over time, paternity leave has been lengthened, and as shown in Figure 2.2, Nordic dads now take up to one-third of the leave.



2.1 Number of days in which parental leave benefits were drawn per newborn

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Data (latest year): Denmark 276 Faroe Islands 204 Finland 260 Iceland 241 Norway 217 Sweden 465

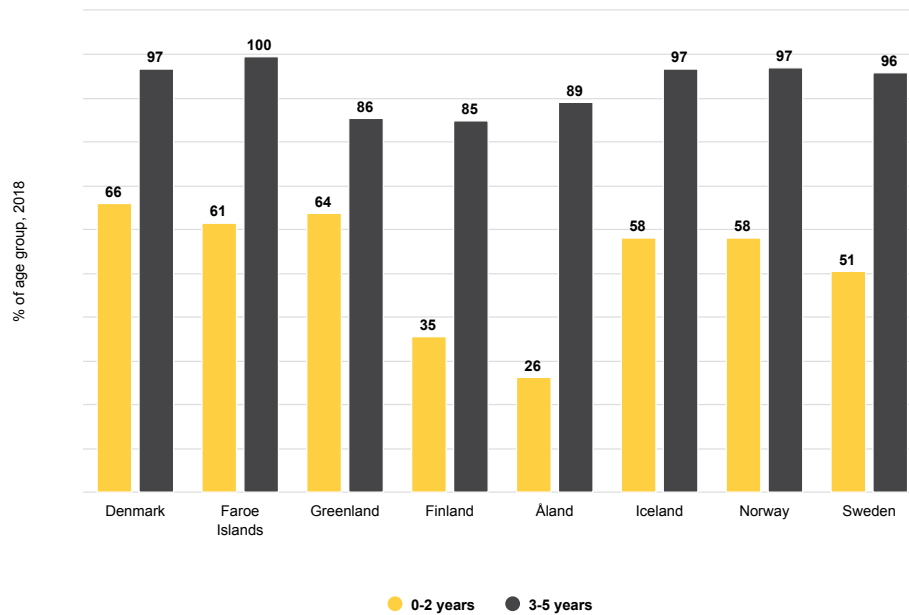


2.2 Father's share of parental leave

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Childcare

Childcare arrangements in the Nordic region are subsidized and accessible. This figure shows that almost all children between 3-5 years old are enrolled in some form of daycare institution. The share of younger children in daycare is lower due to the region's comparatively long parental leave. Access to affordable and quality childcare enables working parents, especially mothers, to pursue careers and combine family and work-life.

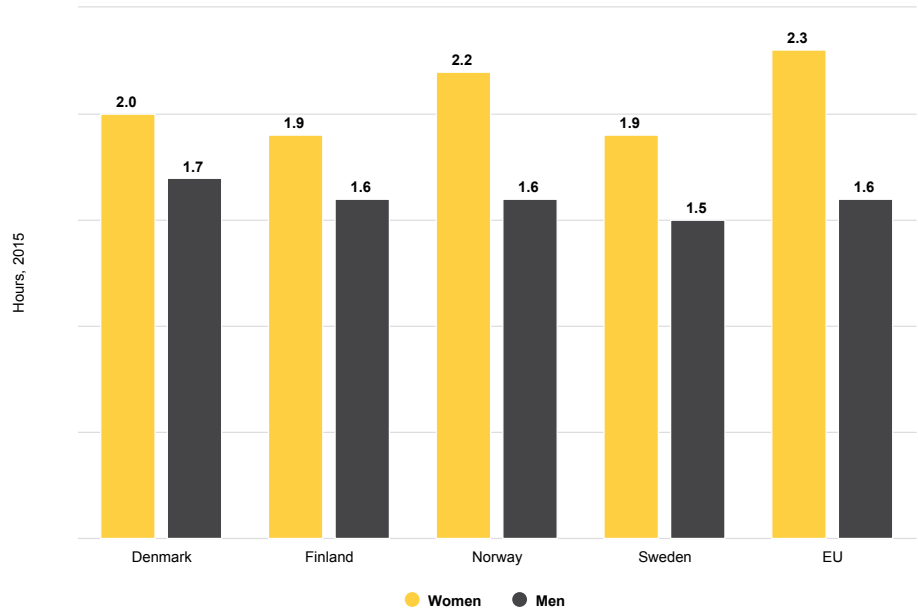


2.3 Children in daycare

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Unpaid housework

Even though it is narrowing, there is still a gap between women and men in the Nordics when it comes to time spent on unpaid housework. This figure shows that men spend about half an hour less than women on housework per day. The division of responsibilities for the family, children and the home can have a large impact on women’s opportunities to be in the labor market on equal terms.



2.4 Time spent on housework outside work

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

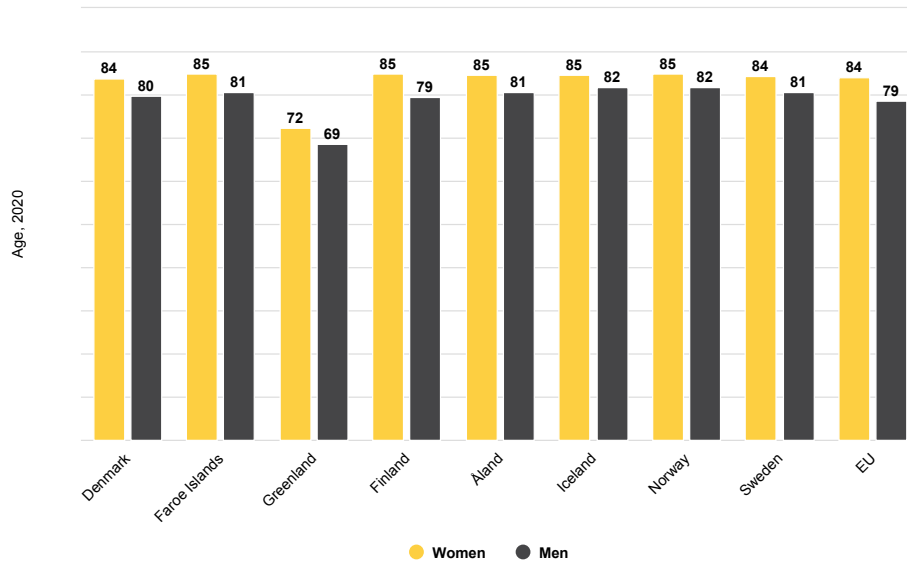


Foto: Johnér

3. HEALTH

Life expectancy

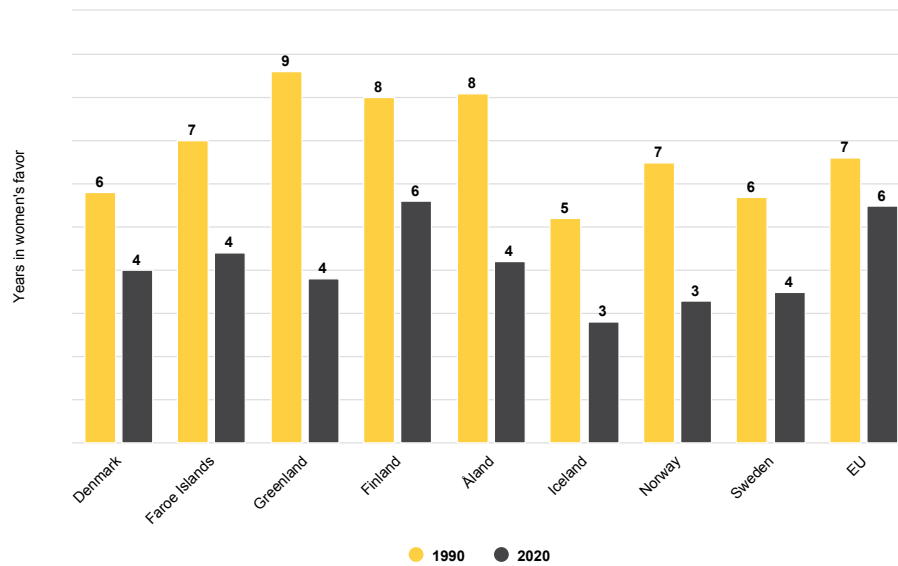
Women live longer than men in the Nordic region. These figures show life expectancy at birth, defined as how many years a newborn, on average, can expect to live, based on current patterns of mortality. It is frequently used as an indicator for a population's health. The gender gap in life expectancy at birth currently favors women, as it does in the EU at large. However, heightened focus on men's physical and mental health can be seen as part of the reason behind the gap narrowing in the past 20 years.



3.1 Life expectancy at birth

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Greenland, Åland, Faroe Islands 2018. EU 2019



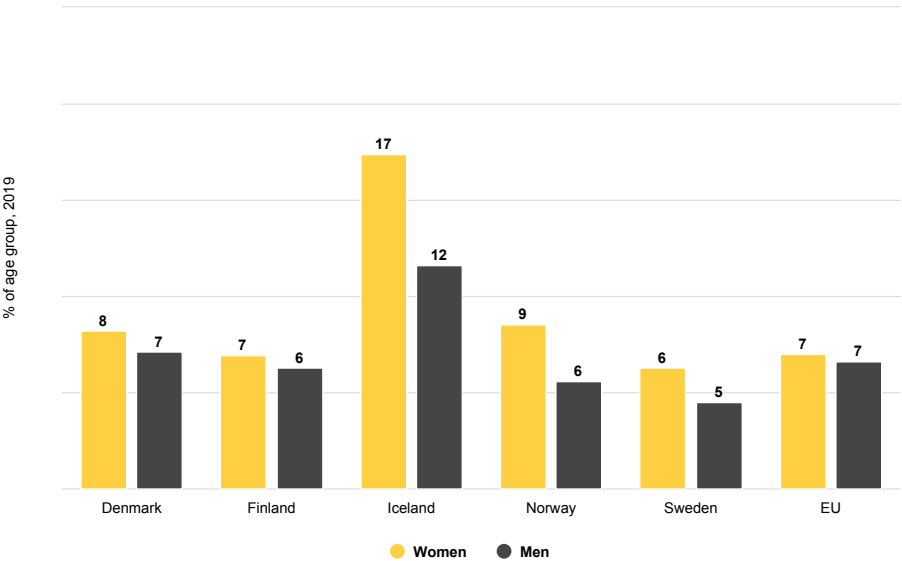
3.2 Gender gap in life expectancy at birth

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Greenland, Åland, Faroe Islands 2018. EU 2002 and 2019

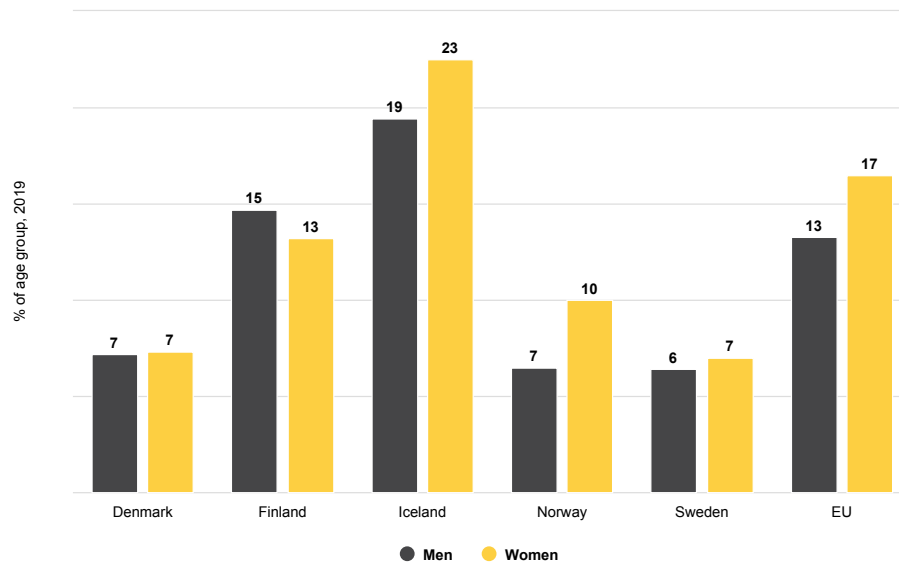
Self-perceived health

Women in the Nordics experience more severe self-perceived limitations due to health problems than men. This can feel like a restraint on opportunities for work and social life later in life. These figures show that in all Nordic countries, women experience more limitations than men, except for men in Finland aged over 65. There is more of a difference between countries, than between women and men, reflecting cultural differences in how people perceive their limitations. In comparison to other health data, men have been overrepresented in mortality rates from cancer and women in mortality rates from diseases of the circulatory systems (based on latest data from 2015).



3.3 Limitations due to severe health problems – 45-64 year olds

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

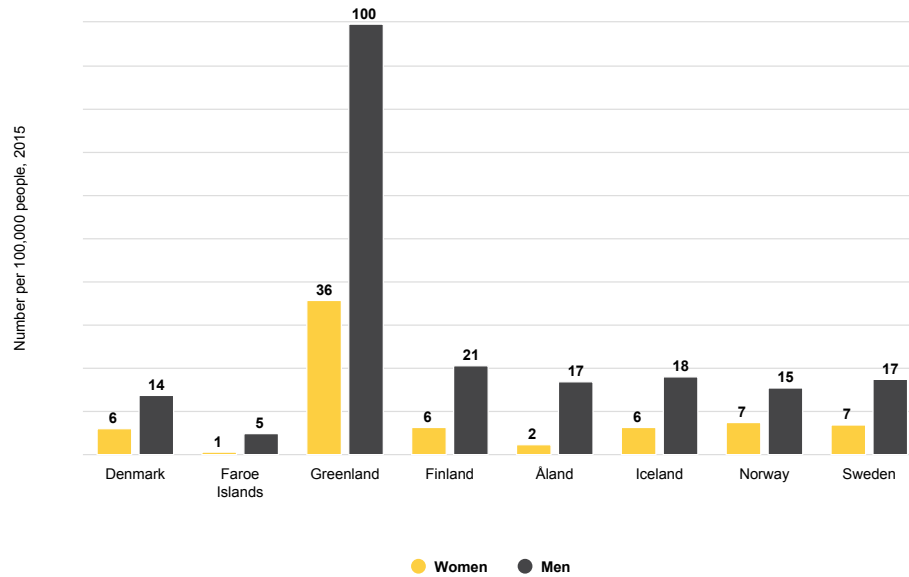


3.4 Limitations due to severe health problems – 65+ year olds

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Suicide

Men die by suicide more frequently than women, while women are more often diagnosed with depression. Poor mental health for both men and women can be linked to constricting gender stereotypes and expectations. This figure shows the number of deaths due to suicide per 100,000 of the average population. Practices for coding suicides differ from country to country, and comparisons should be made with caution. The mortality rate from suicides has generally declined in the Nordic countries for both men and women.

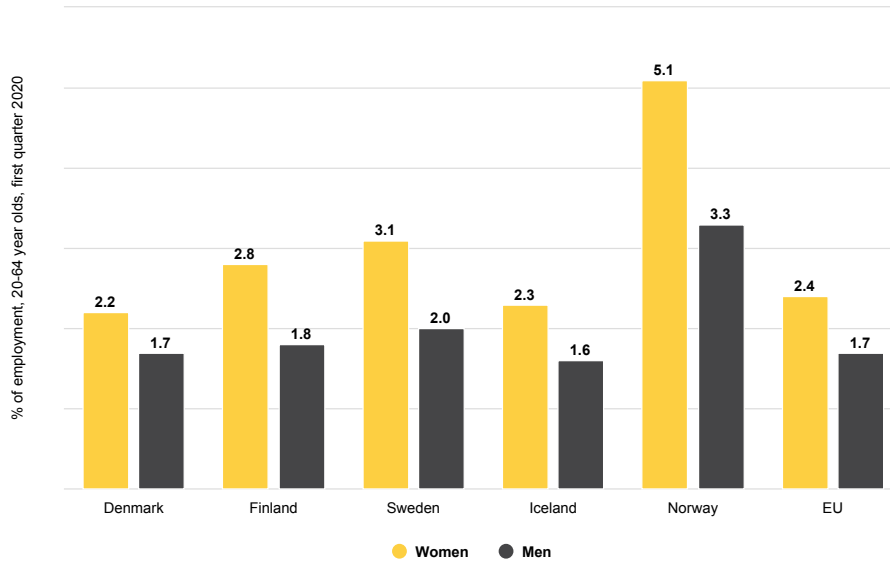


3.5 Deaths due to suicide

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Absence from work

Women are more absent from work due to illness or disability than men. Absence from work is in principle paid, although structures vary considerably by country. This overrepresentation of women can be partially explained by differences in women's and men's working conditions and by occupational gender segregation. Women also shoulder a larger share of unpaid housework and childcare, which affects paid employment.



3.6 Absence from work due to own illness or disability

Source: [Eurostat](#)

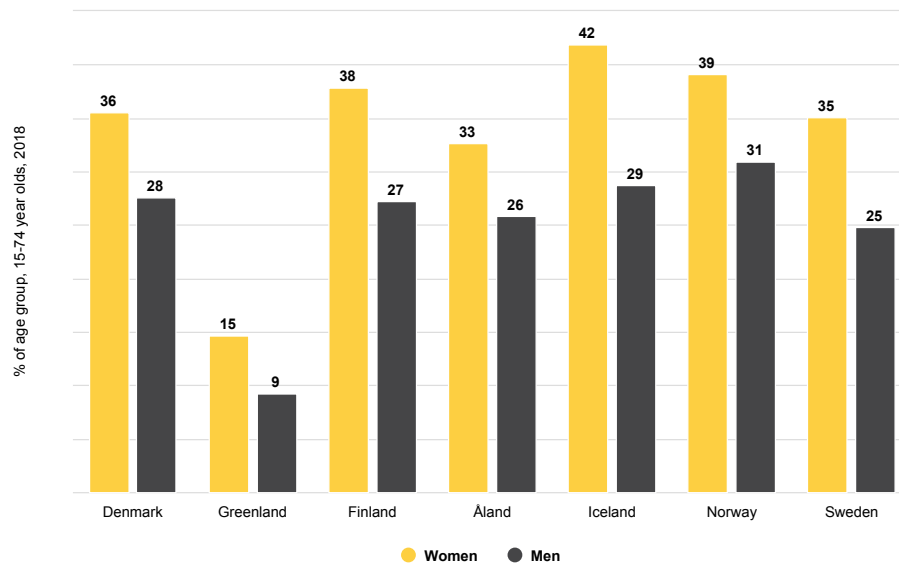


Photo: Johnér

4. EDUCATION

Tertiary education

Educational levels have been rising in the Nordics. More women than men are now graduates of higher education at large. This figure shows that at least 25 percent of men and 30 percent of women in the Nordics have completed some form of tertiary education after upper secondary education, except in Greenland, where the percentages are lower.



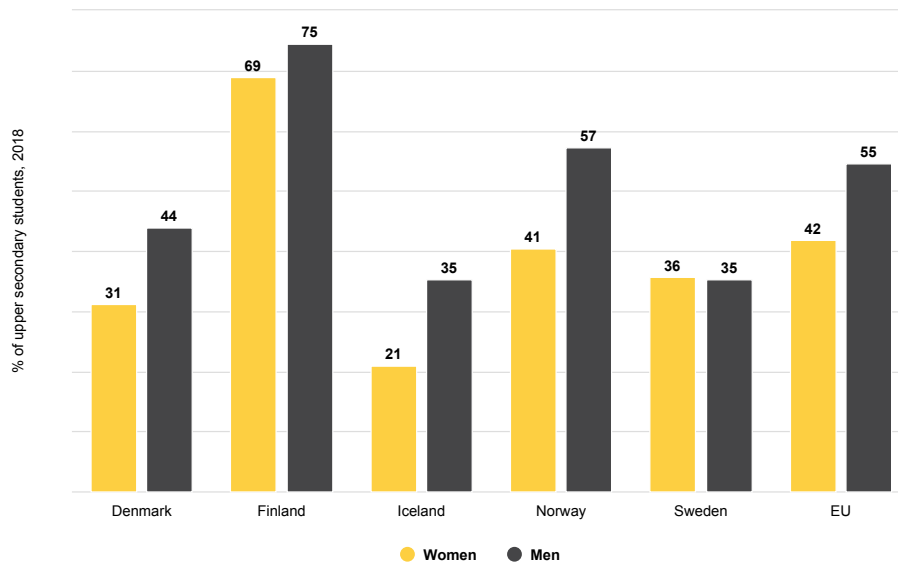
4.1 Tertiary education attainment

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Denmark, Finland, Sweden 2017

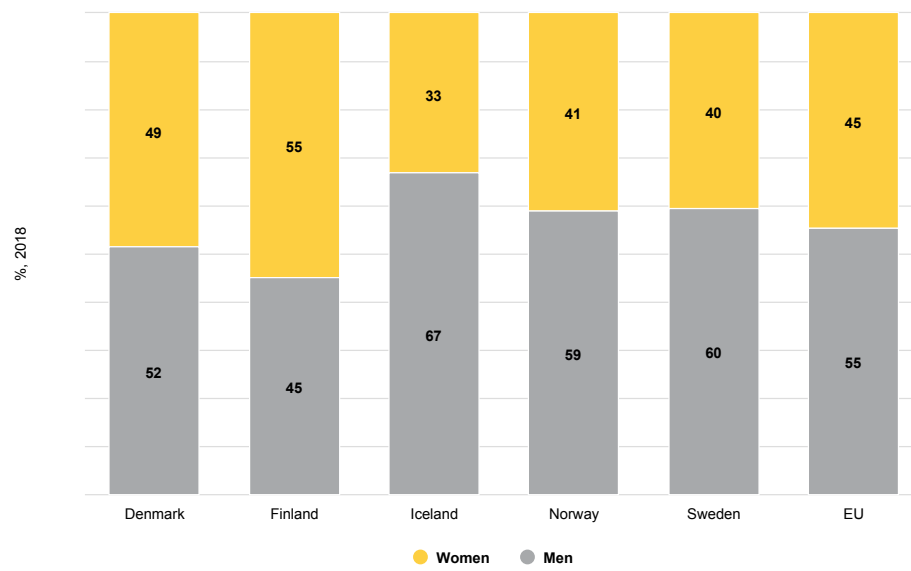
Vocational education and training

Upper secondary education in the Nordics includes vocational education that prepare young men and women for career in a specific trade. Professions include carpenter, hairdresser, gardener, electrician and many other skilled jobs, where graduates have completed both school and apprenticeship. These figures show that more men than women tend to pursue vocational training. Among students enrolled in upper secondary education, men are overrepresented in vocational programs. Men also represent more than half of graduates. Finland is the exception with more women graduates and with high shares of students in vocational training at large.



4.2 Students in vocational education and training

Source: [Eurostat](#)

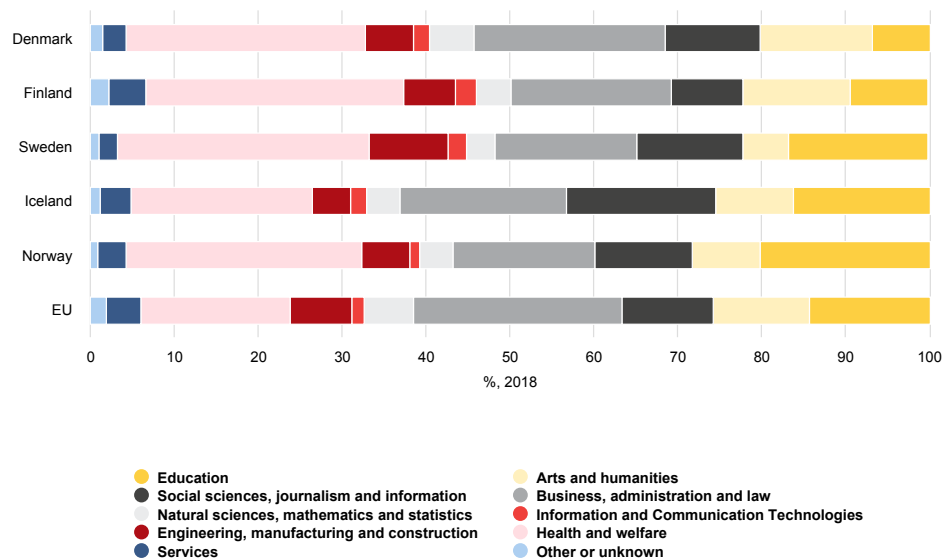


4.3 Graduated from vocational education and training

Source: [Eurostat](#)

Educational gender segregation

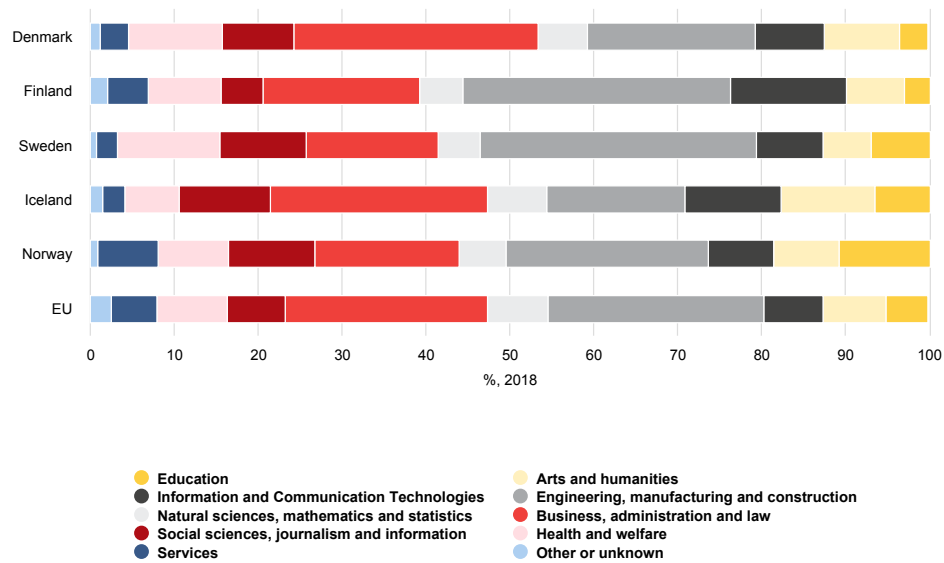
There are considerable gendered differences in academic majors and disciplines in tertiary education. These figures show that women are overrepresented as graduates in the fields of health and welfare, social sciences, journalism and information, as well as education. Men are overrepresented in engineering, manufacturing and construction, information and communication technologies, as well as natural sciences, mathematics and statistics. The fields of services, business, administration and law are as common for men as for women. These patterns have, among other factors, led to high occupational gender segregation in the labor market, since men and women go on to work in different sectors.



4.4 Graduated from tertiary education by field – women

Source: [Eurostat](#)

Data: All specific data can be found in the [online version of this publication](#). In short, health and welfare studies are most frequent for women in: Denmark 28.5 Finland 30.8 Sweden 29.9 Iceland 21.7 Norway 28. For the EU, health and welfare (17.7) is surpassed by business, administration and law (24.9). ITC studies are most infrequent in both the Nordics and the EU.



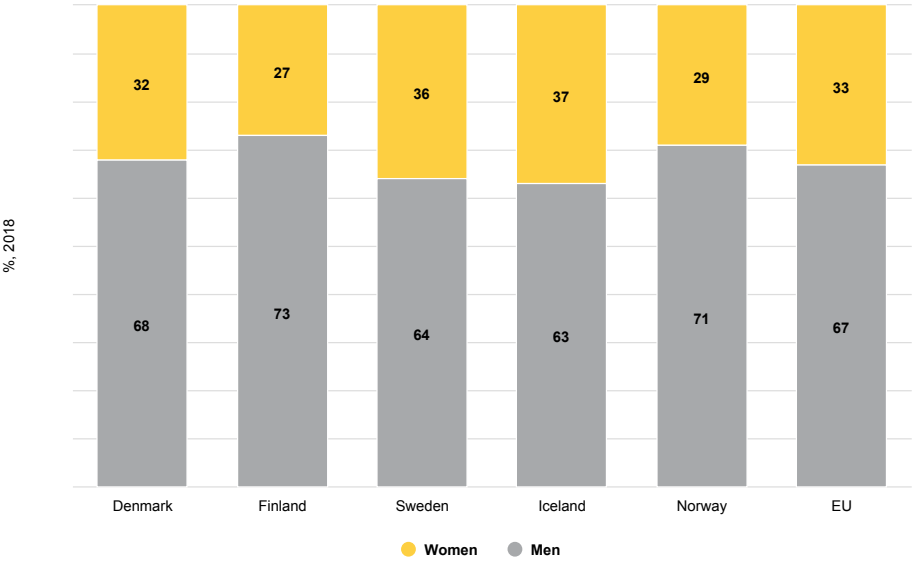
4.5 Graduated from tertiary education by field – men

Source: [Eurostat](#)

Data: All specific data can be found in the [online version of this publication](#). In short, engineering, manufacturing and construction studies are most frequent for men in: Finland 31.9 Sweden 32.9 Norway 25.8. Business, administration and law is the highest share for men in: Denmark 29.1 Iceland 25.9. Services and education studies are some of the most infrequent in both the Nordics and the EU.

STEM education

There are more and more women graduating from STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education at the tertiary level in the Nordics. These fields are recognized as important for the future and the increasingly digitalized labor market. Women currently account for one-third of graduates, but these subjects are still predominantly taken up by men.

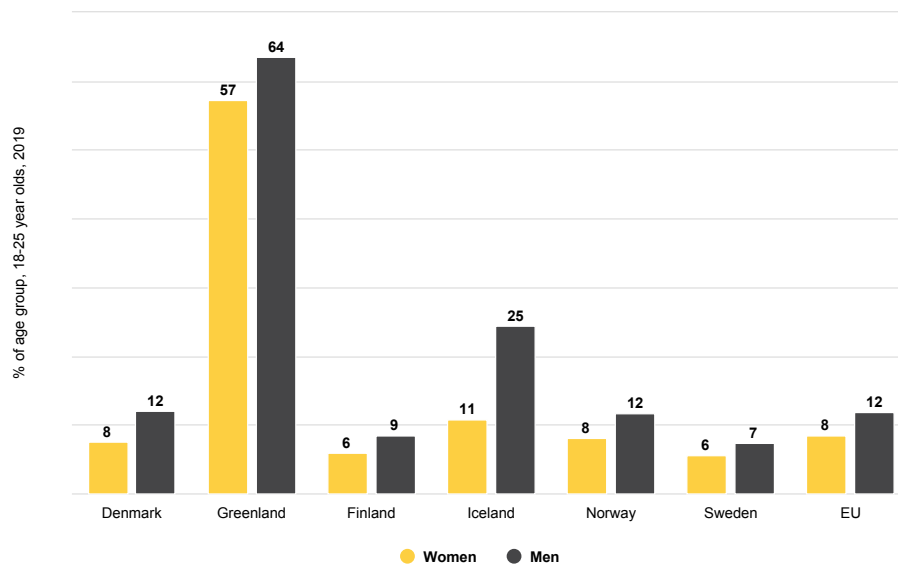


4.6 Graduated from STEM education

Source: [Eurostat](#)

Early leavers from education

There is tendency across the EU for more boys than girls aged 18-24 to leave education after the lower secondary level. In all the Nordic countries, boys have a higher share of early leavers than girls. However, there is a higher share of early leavers among Icelandic girls than of Swedish and Finnish boys. Dropping out has implications for young people's labor market prospects and their risk of social exclusion. There is no single explanation for the gender gap, but mental health issues among young people and constricting gender stereotypes for young men have been linked to this.



4.7 Early leavers from education

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Greenland 2017



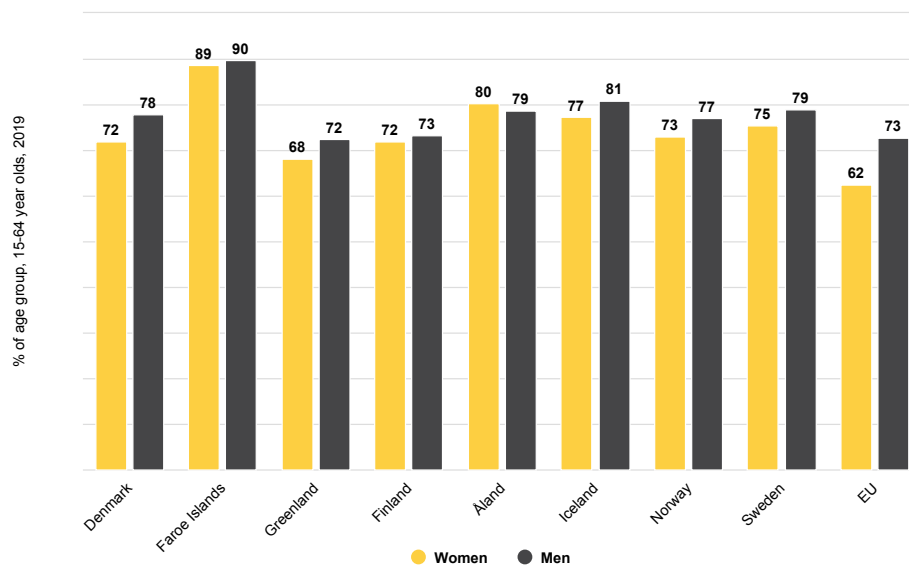
Photo: Johnér

5. LABOR MARKET

Employment

Employment levels are comparatively high in the Nordic region. Almost as many women as men are in paid employment. In the Faroe Islands, the share of the population working is approaching 90 percent, and in the rest of the Nordic region, the shares of women and men working are between 70-80 percent. The high employment rates for both women and men are linked to – and could not be sustained if it wasn't for – the Nordic countries' commitments to subsidized childcare, education, generous parental leave and good working conditions.

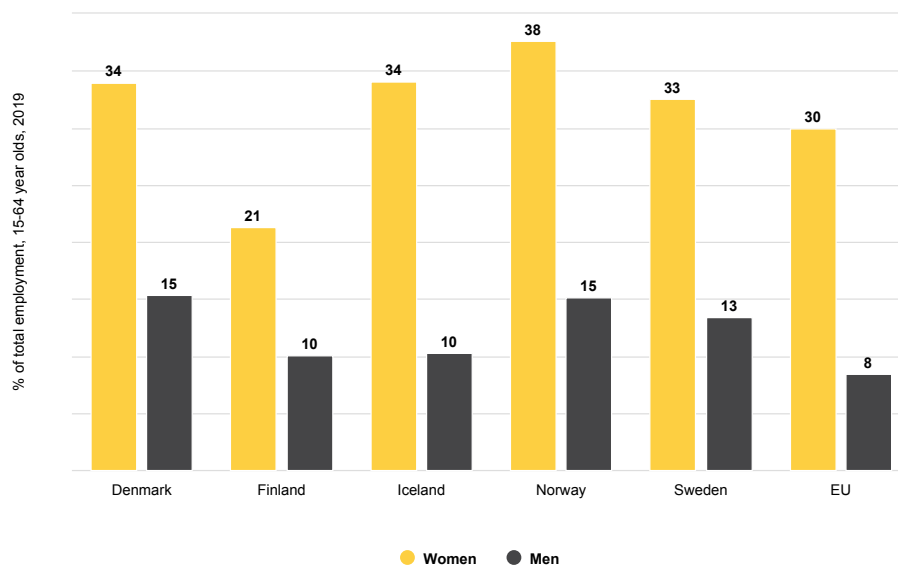
More women than men work part-time in the Nordic countries. While having the opportunity for part-time work has a positive effect on the employment rate of women, it affects women's economic standing. More women work part-time, since there is a tradition for part-time hours and shift-work in female-dominated industries. At the same time, women shoulder a larger share of unpaid care and housework. This leads to inequality in working hours and ultimately in life-time earnings.



5.1 Employment rate

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Åland, Greenland 2018

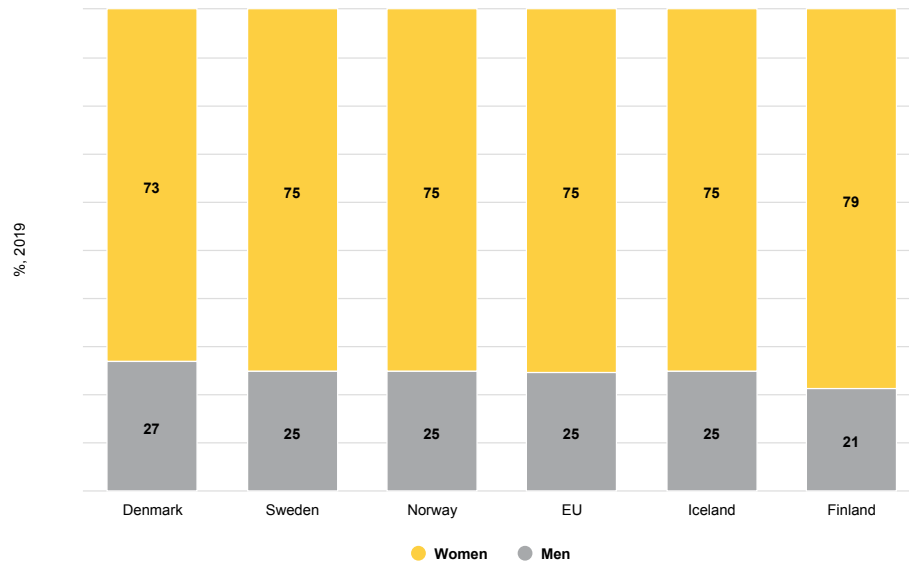


5.2 Part-time employment

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

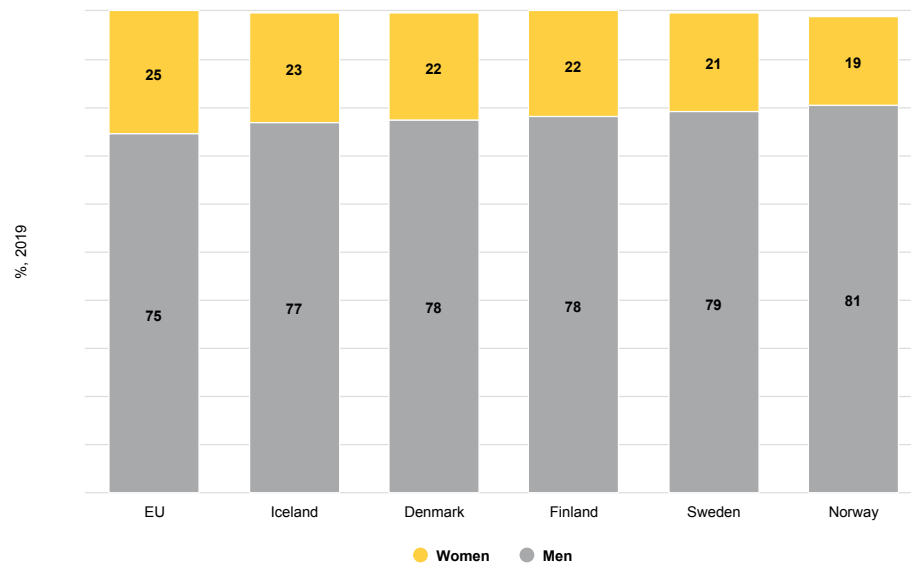
Occupational gender segregation

While both women's and men's employment rates are high, the Nordic labor markets are highly gender-segregated. These figures show that most women work in female-dominated industries, like care work, health and education, whereas men are mainly employed in male-dominated industries such as agriculture, construction, utilities, transport and IT. This occupational segregation is the most important explanation behind the Nordic gender pay gap.



5.3 Gender distribution in female-dominated industries

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)



5.4 Gender distribution in male-dominated industries

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

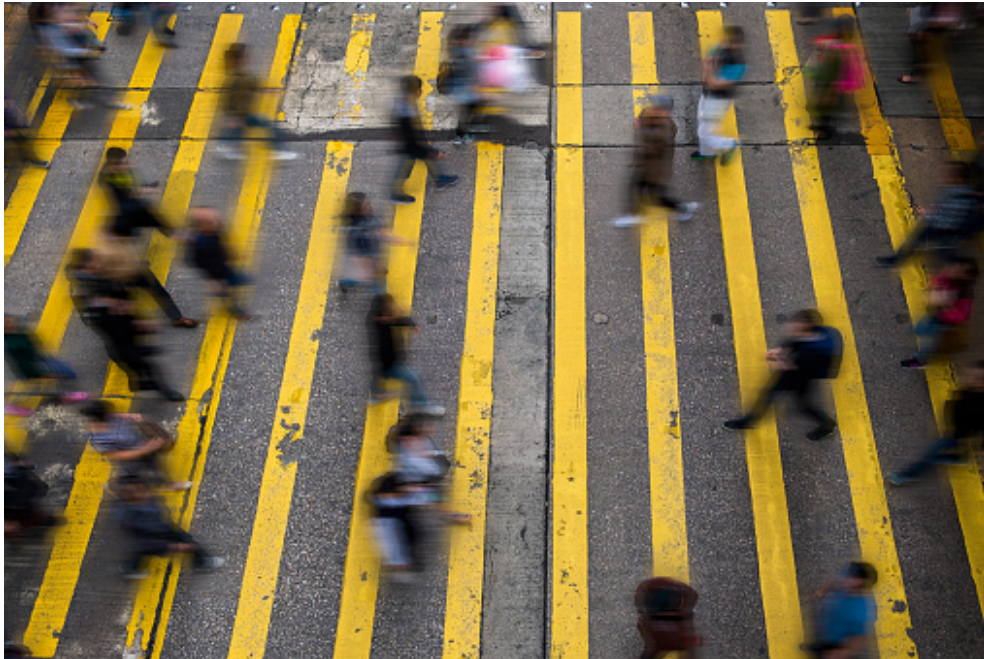


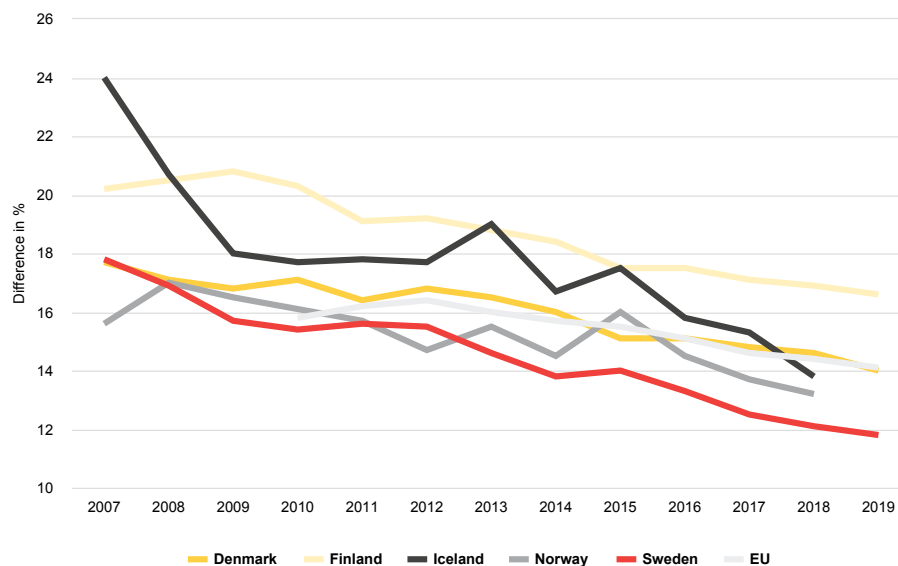
Photo: Getty Images

6. INCOME

Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap has seen a general decline in the past decade. However, women still earn 13.8 percent less than men. Figure 6.1 shows the unadjusted gender pay gap, representing the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. Despite decades of gender equality policy and reform, certain occupations are dominated by men and others by women. The fields dominated by women tend to have lower average pay. Unequal pay is a key indicator revealing inequalities between women and men in society at large.

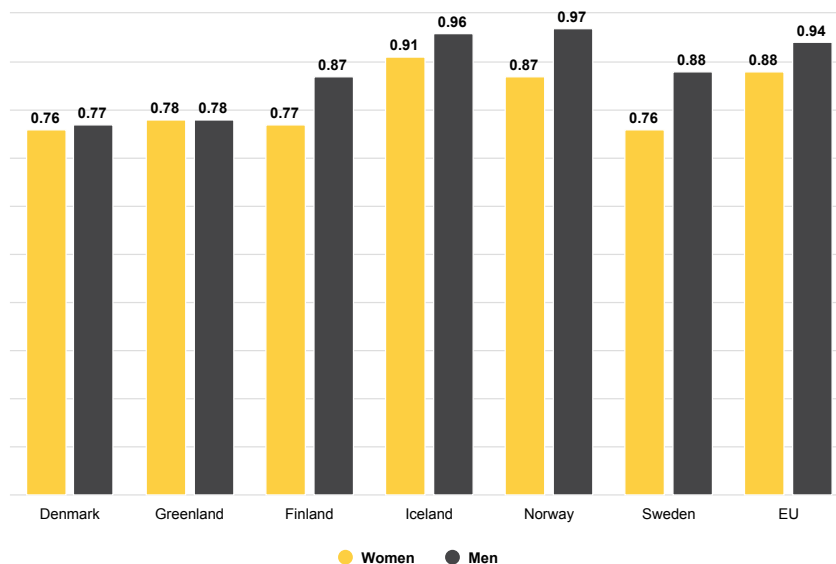
Later in life, women in the Nordic countries rely on less income than men. Figure 6.2 shows the relative median income ratio, defined as the ratio of the median equivalized disposable income of people aged above 65 to that of those aged 65 or below. The gender gap in income for people aged above 65 is often more pronounced in countries, where a relatively large proportion of women live alone, which is more common across the Nordic region than the EU at large. Smaller retirement savings for women are linked to the periods of time when women don't work or work part-time due to childcare or family responsibilities. Even the gender gap in leadership positions leads to a gap in lifetime earnings.



6.1 Gender pay gap

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Data (latest year): Denmark 14 Finland 16.6 Iceland 13.8 Norway 13.2 Sweden 11.8 EU 14.1



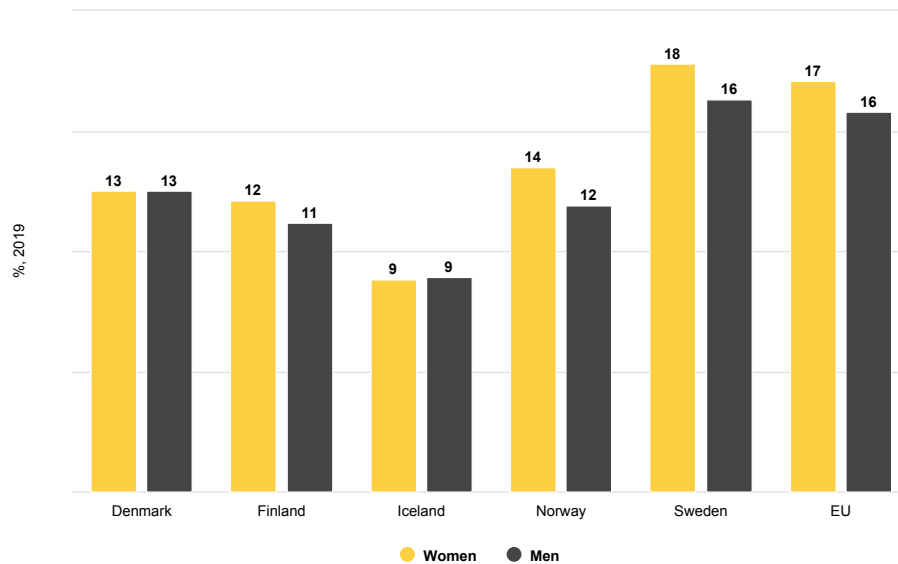
6.2 Relative median income ratio (65+)

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Greenland, Iceland 2018

Poverty risk

Women in the Nordic region are at a slightly higher risk of living in poverty than men. This figure shows the share of persons with an equivalized disposable income below the EU threshold set at 60 percent of the national median equivalized disposable income after social transfers. For most Nordic countries, both women and men's risk of poverty lies below the EU average. Monetary poverty can lead to social exclusion and degrade quality of life. That is why Nordic reforms over the past 50 years have actively sought to address economic gender inequality.



6.3 Persons at risk of poverty

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Note: Iceland 2018

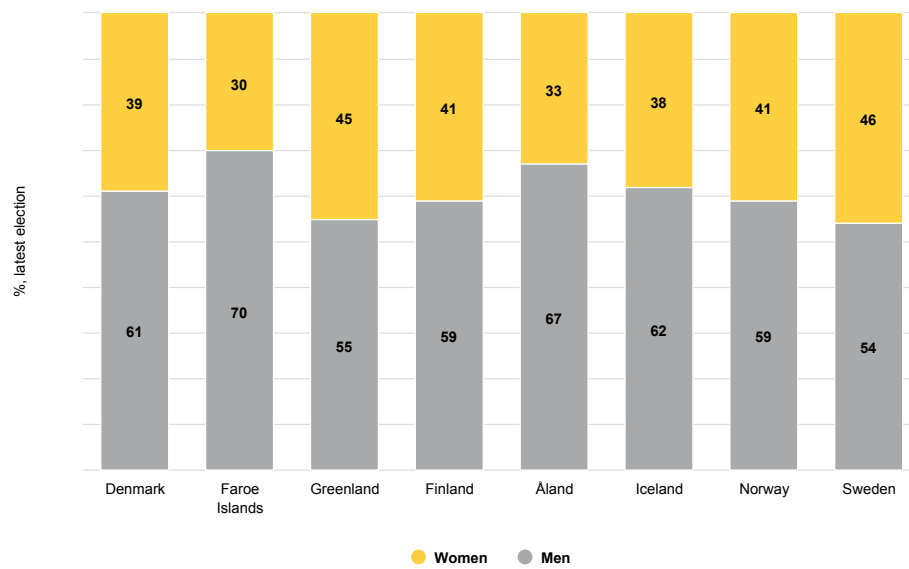


Photo: Johnér

7. INFLUENCE AND POWER

National parliaments

The national parliaments in the Nordic countries are relatively close to being balanced, which is defined as at least 40 percent of either sex. However, there are still more men elected than women. This figure shows the gender distribution based on the latest elections in each country. Equal political participation – from local government to the highest offices – is important to change gender stereotypes around power and to ensure that every person, regardless of gender, can influence their own life.



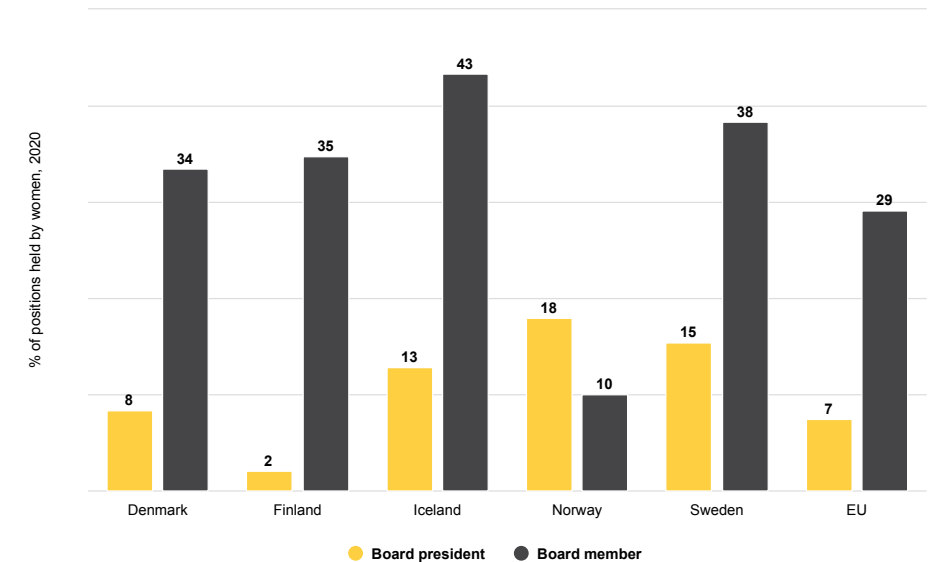
7.1 Gender balance among candidates elected to national parliaments

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

Leadership in business life

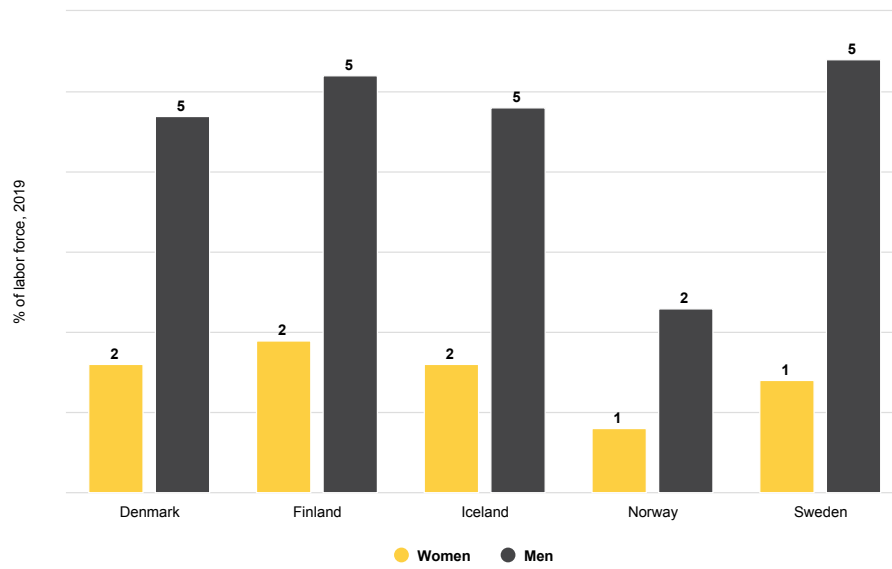
Figure 7.2 shows the share of women on boards of larger publicly listed companies in the Nordic countries. These boards are almost gender balanced, defined as at least 40 percent of either sex. However, women are underrepresented as board presidents. Legislation across the region varies. In Iceland and Norway, quota legislation has been enacted, which leads to the share of women on boards in these countries surpassing 40 percent.

Only a very small share of women in the labor force hold a leadership position as employer in the Nordics. Figure 7.3 shows that men are significantly overrepresented as employers. Even though there has been progress made towards equality in education and employment, there are large gaps in entrepreneurship and other leadership positions in business life.



7.2 Gender balance on boards

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)



7.3 Gender balance among employers

Source: [Nordic Statistics Database](#)

About this publication

Nordic Gender Equality in Figures 2021

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Nord 2021:036

ISBN 978-92-893-7045-5 PDF

ISBN978-92-893-7046-2 ONLINE

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/nord2021-036>

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Published: 28.06.2021

Layout: Mette Agger Tang

Cover photo: Johanna Hannu

Animations: Marengdeluxe

Nordic co-operation

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

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

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