

An abstract graphic consisting of several blue lines of varying thicknesses that curve and intersect across the top half of the page. At various points where the lines intersect or terminate, there are small red circles with white centers. The background is a solid, bright yellow color.

Gender equality and Nordic welfare societies

Inkeri Tanhua



Contents

Gender equality and Nordic welfare societies

Introduction.....	3
Key themes.....	5
Dual earner / dual carer model and women's socioeconomic position.....	6
Dual earners.....	6
Dual carers?	8
Employed care workers' position in Nordic welfare societies	10
Gender equality in public and publicly subsidized services	11
Diversity and Nordic welfare societies	13
Strengths and weaknesses of the Nordic welfare model in realizing gender equality	15
Recommendations for future policy development and research	17
References.....	18
Appendix 1	19
Appendix 2	19



Introduction

Is the Nordic welfare model gender equal or not? What kind of new challenges do the changes in the Nordic welfare policies and operating environment cause from the gender equality perspective? This essay aims to answer those questions, and provides an analysis of the current strengths, weaknesses and challenges that Nordic societies face in realizing gender equality. The essay is based on recent Nordic literature on gender equality and welfare society (see Appendix 1) and the analysis draws also on interviews with a few researchers and other experts (see Appendix 2).

The essay is produced within the framework of the Nordic priority project “Norden 2020” - An Open and Innovative Nordic Region with Healthy People in 2020 - Equal Opportunities for Welfare, Culture, Education and Work.

Gender equality of the Nordic welfare model has been a widely debated issue, although the mainstream literature on comparative analysis of welfare models does not adequately cover gendered aspects (Orloff, 2009). Some feminist authors have claimed that the Nordic welfare society is a woman’s best friend, while others have been critical of this view. One of the best-known authors supporting the claim of woman-friendliness is Helga Hernes, a Norwegian researcher and politician. In 1987, she wrote a book called *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (Hernes, 1987) in which she argued that welfare states bring women’s social status closer to that of men. However, this claim was soon heavily criticized. One of the early critics was a Swedish researcher, Yvonne Hirdman. In 1988, Hirdman argued that even in the welfare state, there is a gender system which operates through gender segregation and hierarchy, leaving women’s position always lower than that of men (Hirdman, 1988). Both authors have had a significant influence on scholarly and political debates, particularly in Norway and Sweden (Borchorst, 2012). The debate on these two theories is meaningful even today.

Hernes’ and Hirdman’s legacy has been passed on and continued by Finnish researchers in books such as *Hyvinvointivaltio käännekohtassa* (Welfare state at a turning point) (Julkunen, 1992) and *Women and the welfare state* (Anttonen et al., 1994). However, the discussion has not included a similar strong debate on opposing theories as the discussions in Sweden and Norway. For instance, Anttonen stresses that Hernes’ woman-friendly welfare society is an ideal, and then continues by analyzing both the positive and negative aspects of welfare societies on gender equality (Anttonen, 1994). Similarities of these

Nordic discussions are the focus on care responsibilities, gendered power, structures of the welfare society, and women’s position both at home, in the labour market, and as a political and public actor.

After three decades since Hernes’ and Hirdman’s powerful argumentations, gender equality of Nordic welfare societies is still a hot topic. One of the main gender equality weaknesses of the Nordic welfare societies is the high level of gender segregation in labour markets. The public sector employs women to work in kindergartens, schools, school kitchens and nursing homes. Consequently, women earn less than if they worked for instance in the private industries. The high gender pay gap is considered as one of the problems of the Nordic welfare states. This phenomenon of high labour market segregation in welfare societies is sometimes called a “welfare state paradox” (Ellingsæter, 2013). In order to overcome this inequality, the Nordic welfare states should either succeed in mitigating gender segregation or value care workers’ professions more. Ideally, the Nordic countries should aim to accomplish both goals.

The ideal of the Nordic welfare model has been to encourage a dual-earner / dual-carer model. The Nordic countries have been successful particularly in increasing women’s employment rates in all socioeconomic classes. However, the rate of women’s employment is still lower than that of men’s and women’s terms of employment are, on average, not as good as men’s. In addition, women still shoulder more unpaid or modestly paid care responsibilities in the Nordic countries. Because socioeconomic position depends heavily on individual income and income related benefits, women’s socioeconomic

position is, on average, lower than men's in the Nordic countries.

Recent changes in political ideologies and in the nature of work pose also new challenges for achieving gender equality. For instance, since the 1990s employment has not been as secure as it used to be. Particularly women work on fixed-term contracts. New technologies have also changed the working environment allowing work from home with different devices and work can thus spill over into family life. Society has also shifted towards the 24/7 model, meaning that many businesses face the pressure of being available all the time. Correspondingly, employees with children would need flexible childcare services. In addition, while legislation aims to secure women's and parents' position in the labour market, entrepreneurs do not usually enjoy the same benefits as employed parents, and the emphasis on entrepreneurship in the Nordic welfare states has been criticized for this reason.

To summarize, the changing nature of work has gendered consequences because the changes have an impact on

the possibilities of reconciling work and care responsibilities.

One of the critical areas for realizing gender equality is in providing welfare services. One of the challenges in organizing services is to address the needs of different groups and particularly the needs of vulnerable groups. For instance, single parents are in a vulnerable position and aged widowed women face higher risks of poverty. Some groups of men are also in a vulnerable position. For instance, the decline of universal health care services particularly affects men in lower socioeconomic positions. Also, Nordic welfare states face a new challenge in meeting their residents' needs, which are broadened by diversity. For these reasons, it is crucial to discuss both diversity and the gendered impacts of welfare policies.

Next, I will introduce the key themes discussed in literature on gender equality in Nordic welfare societies. Then, I will continue discussing these themes and provide recommendations for future research and policy development.



Key themes

In comparison to classical writings on gender equality in Nordic welfare societies, the current key themes focus mainly on the same topics as the classical writings. For example, care responsibilities and gendered power are still at the core of research and researchers continue to debate over the achievement of gender equality in Nordic welfare societies. In addition to the old topics, current literature on gender and welfare societies discusses the new changes in the political environment and operating environment. Also, the focus on diversity is a stronger theme than before. In conclusion, current literature continues the discussion on gender equality in Nordic welfare societies and considers new changes in society.

Recent literature on gender equality in Nordic welfare societies focuses on the following themes:

1. The gendered share of care responsibilities at home
2. The position of employed care workers
3. Inequalities in Nordic welfare societies
4. New threats to gender equality

Researchers contributing to the first key theme, the gendered share of care responsibilities at home, discuss particularly parenting, difficulties in reconciling work and family, women's position at home and in the labour markets, and changing fatherhood (Backhans et al., 2011; Browne, 2013; Duvander and Ellingsæter, 2016; Ellingsæter, 2014; Eydal and Rostgaard, 2014; Neilson and Stanfors, 2014; Öun, 2012). It becomes evident that women still shoulder more care responsibilities than men in the Nordic countries. For this reason, universal care services, or lack of them, particularly affect women's position in society. The familiarization of care increases the amount of non-paid care work women do.

The second key theme, the position of employed care workers, includes research that focuses on the changes in care work and care workers' positions and terms of employment (Hirvonen, 2014). In Nordic welfare societies, labour markets are highly gender segregated because women are employed in different care work professions, such as practical nurses and kindergarten teachers. Thus, care workers' position and terms of employment is also a gender equality issue.

The third key theme is inequalities in Nordic welfare societies. Research challenges the abilities of achieving gender equality in the Nordic countries (Borchorst, 2012; Ellingsæter, 2013; Midtbøen and Teigen, 2014). For instance, high segregation of welfare states is discussed (Ellingsæter, 2013). In addition, researchers discuss the difficulties that Nordic welfare societies have with meeting the needs broadened by diversity (Anttonen et al., 2012; Ebot, 2014; Siim, 2013).

Fourth, current research discusses the changes that threaten the existence of the universal Nordic welfare society model and its ideals on gender equality (Ahl et al., 2016; Dahl, 2012; Eräranta and Kantola, 2016; Hirsto et al., 2014; Piovani and Aydiner-Avsar, 2015). There is, for instance, research on the neo-liberalism and technocraticism of public services. Neoliberal political ideologies and ways of working in the care sector can be seen as a threat to the appreciation of feminine values such as caring (Dahl, 2012). There is also research on the changing nature of work, and its effects on the possibilities of reconciling work and care responsibilities.

Next, I continue discussing the key themes in current literature in more detail. The first topic is the dual earner / dual carer model and its impacts on women's socioeconomic position in society. Second, I focus on the position of employed care workers. Third, I discuss gender equality in public and publicly subsidized welfare services. Fourth, diversity is discussed as a separate topic. At the end of the essay, I provide recommendations for future research and policy development.

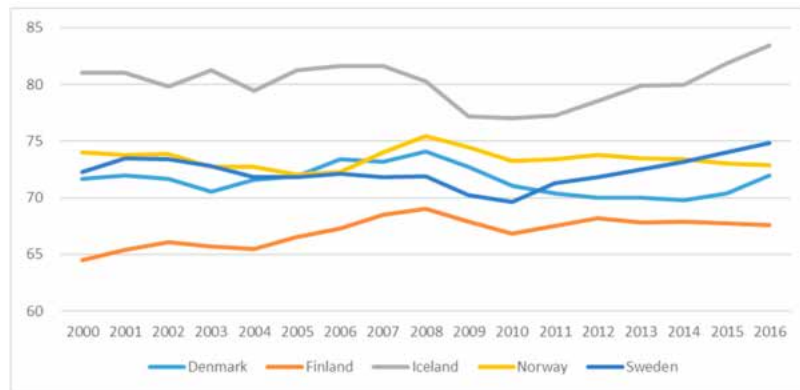
Dual earner / dual carer model and women's socioeconomic position

The Nordic welfare model emphasizes the ideal of the dual earner / dual carer model, which means that both women and men work outside the home and take care of the children at home. In the Nordic context, the dual earner model is encouraged through individual and strongly progressive income taxation, and legislation aiming to secure and ease the employment of parents. At the same time, families' care work is supported by

providing inexpensive publicly subsidised childcare for young children and free education for older children, including also meals. Policy changes in these areas affect realization of the dual earner / dual carer model in families. Next, I examine how the dual earner / dual carer model is achieved in the Nordic countries. I then analyse the differences in family policies between the Nordic countries.

Dual earners

It can be argued that the dual earner side of the model is achieved rather well in the Nordic countries. Graph 1 shows women's employment rates in the Nordic countries. While women's employment rates are higher in all Nordic countries than in the OECD countries on average, which is below 58%, there are differences between the Nordic countries. For instance, Finnish women's employment rate is lower than the women's employment rate in the other Nordic countries, whereas Icelandic women's employment rate is higher than in the other Nordic countries. Although women's employment rates partly mirror the average employment rates in each country, this does not fully explain the differences. Why are Finnish women working less than women in the other Nordic countries? How are the Nordic countries supporting the dual earner / dual carer model?



Graph 1. Women's employment rates in the Nordic countries 2000–2016 (OECD, 2016a)

Regarding Finland, one explanation might be that women do not work part-time as often as in the other Nordic countries. In 2012, part-time employment as a percentage of women's total employment was only 19% in Finland compared to 46% in Iceland, 42% in Norway, 39% in Sweden and 36% in Denmark (Drange and Ege-land, 2014). These differences might explain why Finnish women's employment rate is lower than that in the oth-

er Nordic countries. The Nordic states support part-time working to different extents. Increasing part-time work could have a positive effect on women's socioeconomic position: the possibility to work part-time can ease women's possibilities to both work and take care of their care responsibilities at the same time. Particularly well-paid part-time employment has a positive effect on women's position in the society. However, sometimes part-time

work is not well-paid and does not include the same career possibilities as full-time work. In that case, part-time work can have also a negative effect on women's socio-economic position.

That Iceland has the highest employment rate for women is partly explained by the fact that Iceland has the highest employment rate not only among the Nordic countries but in the whole of Europe, with a relatively small difference between men and women. An additional explanation might be the parental benefit system with the shortest parental leave when compared with the other Nordic countries. Further, Icelandic men are increasingly benefiting from parental leaves, leading in numbers of taking out days with daily cash benefits at childbirth and adoption.

Women's employment and particularly women's terms of employment are linked to discrimination of women in the labour markets. The Nordic model aims to secure the possibilities for women to both work and take care of their care responsibilities at home. While this has positive effects on women's employment rates, it can have both positive and negative effects on women's terms of employment. When employers expect women to shoulder more care responsibilities at home, women's negotiation power at work is lower than that of men's. These beliefs coupled with other gender beliefs disadvantage mothers in the labour market (Berggren and Lauster, 2014). Even childless women experience discrimination in recruitment because family matters are not discussed in job interviews. However, Berggren and Lauster (2014) argue that professional experience and credentials reduce

discrimination. In their study of the Swedish labour market, they found that this is particularly true in the public sector and in certain professions, such as medicine (Berggren and Lauster, 2014). There are also practices that can decrease recruitment discrimination. For instance, the use of blind CVs, where names and gender are not disclosed in CVs.

While legislation aims to secure women's and parents' position in the labour market, entrepreneurs do not usually enjoy the same benefits as employed parents. For this reason, the emphasis on entrepreneurialism of the Nordic welfare states has also been criticized (Ahl et al., 2016). It is important to understand that many of the welfare benefits have been tight on employment. However, it is also possible to change the policies in order to better incorporate different situations.

The changing nature of work brings also new challenges for reconciling work and family. For instance, since the 1990s employment has not been as secure as it used to be. Particularly women work on fixed-term contracts. New technologies have also changed the working environment allowing work from home with different devices. Work can thus spill over into family life. On the other hand, possibilities for remote work can sometimes help in reconciling work and family. Society has also shifted towards the 24/7 model, meaning that many businesses face the pressure of being available all the time. Correspondingly, employees with children would need flexible childcare services. Thus, the changing operating environment creates challenges for policies and in reconciling work and family.



Dual carers?

While the dual earner side of the dual earner / dual carer model is achieved rather well in the Nordic countries, the achievements in the dual carer side vary. For instance, there are major differences between the Nordic countries in the usage of parental leaves by mothers and fathers. In Iceland, Sweden and Norway fathers took over 40% of parental leaves in 2013. During the same year, fathers took under 30% of parental leaves in Denmark and under 20% of parental leaves in Finland. (OECD, 2016b) While parental leaves are an interesting case because of the differences between the Nordic countries, there are also many other care responsibilities, which are unevenly divided between men and women. For instance, women shoulder more responsibilities in taking care of the elderly, such as their ageing parents. In this essay, I focus on parenting because the literature review includes more studies on parenting.

The usage of parental leaves by fathers is strongly related to family policies. For example, before Iceland introduced the 3+3+3 parental leave model (3 months for mothers, 3 months for fathers, and 3 months can be shared) in 2000, only 3% of Icelandic fathers took parental leaves (Eydal and Gislason, 2014). Father's quotas are seen as a very positive policy in the Nordic countries because they have made it possible for fathers to stay at home with the children. Currently, when fathers shoulder their care responsibilities, they face different problems as parents than mothers do. For instance, in Denmark, fathers need to negotiate their parental leaves individually, while women can only announce when they take parental leaves. This means that fathers' entitlement to take parental leaves varies a lot between industries and workplaces. (Bloksgaard, 2014). Father's quotas have made fathers' parental leaves more accepted and reduced discrimination in Iceland, Sweden and Norway. However, men still face different kinds of expectations at work in comparison to women in the Nordic countries. For instance, it might be easier for a mother to take a day off in order to care for a sick child at home. In order to realize dual caring, men's possibilities in shouldering care responsibilities would need to be addressed.

Although caring can make life meaningful in many ways, the uneven share of care responsibilities has a negative effect on women's socioeconomic position. In addition to making dual caring possible, the Nordic countries provide childcare services for families. There are, however, also differences in the usage of childcare services in the Nordic countries. For instance, in Finland only 29% of 1-year old children were in publicly subsidized childcare in 2013, whereas the corresponding figures were 89% in

Denmark, 74% in Iceland, 69% in Norway and 51% in Sweden (Duvander and Ellingsæter, 2016). These differences can be caused by differences in the possibilities to work part-time. Also, the quality of childcare and parents' confidence in it can make a difference. On the other hand, in Sweden income-based parental leaves are more extensive and flexible than in the other Nordic countries, and can be used also when the child is more than 1-year old. In Finland, the parents of over 1-year old children cannot get income-based higher compensation but take care of children at home for a very low child home care allowance, which also does not contribute to their pensions. This is highly problematic because it lowers particularly Finnish mothers' socioeconomic position in society. However, the solution might not be that simple, because some women also take care of children at home because they do not have a workplace to which they could return.

In international literature, the situation in which both state and family are responsible for care is called defamiliarization of care responsibilities. In Nordic literature, the lost capacity to defamiliarize care responsibilities is seen as a threat to a universal Nordic welfare model (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011; Lister, 2009; Rauch, 2007). For example, Eydal and Rostgaard (2011) argue that the recent introduction of cash-for-care schemes in the Nordic countries seems to go against the Nordic dual earner / dual carer model and ideals of gender equality, because these schemes support maternal care of children at home. Although Finland has a longer history of child home care allowances, also the other Nordic countries have taken steps towards the direction of familiarization. Why is familiarisation women's problem then? And why is it a problem anyway?

Many care responsibilities are not paid, even in the Nordic countries. And when care responsibilities are paid, payment is usually modest in comparison to wages. The Nordic welfare system provides the most generous benefits, for instance pensions, for those individuals who have paid high amounts of income tax. Care responsibilities have no or modest effect on increasing the income tax related benefits. It can be argued that even the Nordic welfare society ideal is thus founded on valuing the norm of a (male) wage earner. Full-time work is valued because it is seen as guaranteeing economic independence and as being one of the most important ways of social inclusion (Julkunen, 2013). The aim of the dual earner / dual carer model is to include women in the wage-earning society. Parental leave benefits are also income-based, meaning that those parents who have been working before having children receive higher benefits. In this kind of welfare system, the uneven share of care responsibilities is a gender equality problem.

Families' well-being is also important in assessing the success of family policies. Öun (2012) studied the differences in experiences of conflicting demands between work and family of parents in the Nordic countries. According to her study, a majority of the respondents reported that they experience a balance between their work and family life. In addition to parents, also childless participants reported only somewhat lower levels of work and family life conflicts. One of the interesting findings of the study is that in Finland the reported level of work-family conflict was significantly lower than in the other Nordic countries. Öun concludes that the policies aiming to facilitate reconciliation between work and family bring more mothers into the labour market and thus increase the overall level of work-family conflict. She also concludes that gender equality at the household

level entails lower levels of work-family conflict. (Öun, 2012). While Finnish women suffer financially when they use child home care allowances, they also experience less conflicts in reconciling work and family life.

To summarize, the ideal of the Nordic welfare model has been to encourage the dual earner / dual carer model. The Nordic countries have been successful particularly in increasing women's employment rates. However, the rate of women's employment is still lower than that of men's. In addition, women still shoulder more unpaid or modestly paid care responsibilities. Because socioeconomic position depends heavily on individual income and income-related benefits, women's socioeconomic position is, on average, lower than men's in the Nordic countries. There are also big differences in family and employment policies and their outcomes in the Nordic countries. Policy changes in these areas affect families' well-being and their possibilities to realize the dual earner / dual carer model.

In addition to lowering mothers' socioeconomic position, changes in childcare, parenting and employment security policies can also contribute to the decline in fertility rates in countries providing affordable methods of birth control. Fertility rates per woman are still higher in the Nordic countries than in OECD countries (OECD, 2015). This supports the view that, despite its problems, the Nordic welfare model has been successful in encouraging parenting through childcare services, parental leaves and child benefits. However, recent changes show that this success might not continue. Fertility rates have been declining recently particularly in Finland and Norway. Declining fertility rates are a concern for the sustainability of the tax-funded welfare state.



Employed care workers' position in Nordic welfare societies

One of the main gender equality weaknesses of the Nordic welfare society is the high level of gender segregation in the Nordic countries. The welfare state employs women to work in kindergartens, schools, school kitchens and nursing homes. In these jobs women do not earn as much as they would if they worked in private industry and the high gender pay gap is seen as one of the problems of Nordic welfare states. This phenomenon of the high segregation of welfare states is sometimes called a “welfare state paradox” (Ellingsæter, 2013). In order to overcome this inequality, Nordic welfare states should either succeed in mitigating gender segregation or value care workers' professions more. Ideally, the Nordic countries should aim to accomplish both goals. Next, I focus on employed care workers.

Changes in the terms of employment of care workers is also a gender equality issue because the majority of care workers are women. For instance, in Finland, parliament is working on a major health and social services (SOTE) reform. This reform includes healthcare and social services personnel, a total of 220,000 employees, currently employed by the municipalities, who will be transferred to the employment of the newly formed counties (“Health, social services and regional government reform - Personnel”). In addition to working for counties, the goal of the reform is for a large proportion of care workers to work for private companies, from which counties can buy services. This reform includes a high future risk of care workers being valued less and that they will have worse terms of employment. Initially, these private companies might provide good terms of employment. However, if only a few companies are left to provide services, they would probably begin to compete by lowering wages. Also, professional requirements may be lowered in order to save money.

For instance, in Sweden the professional requirements in home care services for the elderly have been lowered. It would be crucial to consider the risk of a change in the position of these care workers as a result of the reform.

Research on current values of managing care work and care workers is also troubling. Hirvonen (2013) interviewed front-line care workers, such as nurses, in Finland. Her study showed that care workers argue that medico-managerial management ideology views care work as disembodied and technical work. She concludes that the reconstruction of the welfare state since the 1990s has emphasized care workers' technical and medical competence, while elements of social care have become regarded as a non-professional activity. (Hirvonen, 2014). The appreciation of only medical and technical aspects of care work means that traditionally female values of care are not respected. This could be addressed by changing managerial practices and ideologies.



Gender equality in public and publicly subsidized services

In all the Nordic countries, legislation requires public authorities to promote gender equality. The strategies for promoting gender equality and diversity are specified in legislations to different extents but, in practice, the strategies for promoting gender equality consist of a dual strategy. This dual strategy includes a gender mainstreaming strategy and a strategy of special projects and services. Gender mainstreaming means that the gender perspective is mainstreamed both in public services and in public decision-making. For instance, the gender perspective should be mainstreamed in the policies discussed above, including social, health, education and employment policies. By special projects and services, I mean services designed for certain groups of women or men or gender minorities.

One of the challenges in organizing public and publicly subsidized services is to address the needs of vulnerable groups. For instance, single parents are in a vulnerable position and most single parents are women. Improving their position would also help their children. Aged widowed women face higher risks of poverty. Some groups of men are also in a vulnerable position. For instance, older working-class men use health services less often than other groups. Some groups of boys are at high risk of not completing their education. Addressing gender equality in public and publicly subsidized services would require these vulnerable groups to be taken into account and perhaps designing special services for them. In addition to vulnerable groups, gender equality is important for all citizens. For instance, in schools, gender equality ideals, or a lack of them, affect children's views of their future possibilities.

I will present a few examples of gender mainstreaming. In Sweden, public health policy goals and gender equality policy goals are intertwined and addressing domestic violence is included in the health policy. Many state agencies practice gender mainstreaming and analyze gender inequality within their specific policy areas. The general finding of the analysis is that women are more ill and that they do not get the same amount of treatment as men. The Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten) includes a gender aspect in their yearly reports about public health. The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) has also written reports about gender equal health and healthcare. In 2007, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SALAR, (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting) released a report about equality in health and healthcare. Gender equal health and its development over time are also discussed in a report by the Swedish Gender Equality Investigation from 2015. In

addition, one of the Swedish state agencies, the Swedish Public Employment Service PES, recommends further developing gender mainstreaming in the process of procurement and in the evaluation of procured services and service providers, in order to secure women's and men's equal access to services.

A second example of gender mainstreaming also comes from Sweden. The Swedish government and parliament organized a fixed-term gender mainstreaming programme called JÄMI. The programme focused on creating sustainable support structures, which would last even after the programme (Callerstig, 2014: 42-47). In order to be sustainable, gender mainstreaming requires also support structures. These structures can require and encourage gender mainstreaming, and provide information and possibilities for benchmarking.

In Finland, the ministry of Social Affairs and Health has developed a guide for gender mainstreaming in law making and has provided several training courses on gender mainstreaming for law makers. In Norway, students of medicine are offered courses on gender perspectives. These courses help them in realizing gender equality in their profession.

In Denmark, the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality publishes an equality report every other year. This equality report focuses on women's and men's level of education, wage differences, labour-market participation, unemployment, retirement and other statistics. The other Nordic countries publish similar statistics, too. This information helps in improving public and publicly subsidized services from the gender perspective. However, the statistics are not useful without analysis and theories. For this reason, also analysis and recom-

mendations based on both data and theories are necessary in order to make the reports helpful. In addition, qualitative studies are also useful in gender mainstreaming. In Sweden, the government appointed a Delegation for Gender Equality in Working Life in 2011 to collect and disseminate knowledge about the different conditions and opportunities for women and men in working life. In their report, the delegation stated that the Swedish labour market is still unequal: women and men still tend to choose gender stereotypical jobs and typically male jobs still pay more.

I will present also a few examples of special projects and services. In Denmark, a special campaign encourages men to react to symptoms and seek health advice. In the campaign picture, there are two older men and a text "Real men go to the doctor". The aim of the campaign was to get particularly men above the age of 55 years with a low education background to react to cancer-related symptoms. In Finland, a network of diversified families brings together 10 family organizations, including an organization for families with a single parent and an organization for families with LGBT parents. The aim of the network is to influence family policies.



Diversity and Nordic welfare societies

Diversity and gender equality are intertwined. For instance, without the recognition of diversity, some groups of women are excluded from the definition of equality. Feminist identity politics have called for recognition of all women. Sometimes diversity has been defined through the “big eight” socio-cultural categorizations, which include gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexual orientation and (dis)ability. In addition to women, also groups of men can be in a vulnerable position. Considering two or more socio-cultural categorizations and their combined effects is called intersectionality. In this essay, I focus mainly on ethnic minorities, considering also intersection of gender and ethnicity.

There is a growing number of studies which discuss the difficulties that Nordic welfare societies have in meeting their residents’ needs, which are broadened by diversity (Borchorst, 2012; Ebot, 2014; Häikiö and Hvinden, 2012; Siim, 2013). Some argue that Nordic universalism is in fact false universalism because in reality, not all people fit into the earner role, which is required to receive the best benefits (Häikiö and Hvinden, 2012). This earner norm can also be described as white, male, middle-class and non-disabled. When services and benefits in the welfare society are designed with only this group and their families in mind, other people and their families are not recognized by the system. For instance, the aim of gender and diversity mainstreaming of public and publicly subsidized services is to design services that are good for all genders and diversified groups of people.

From the point of view of designing public services and welfare benefits, equality is not achieved by treating all people strictly in the same way. Instead, equality of outcomes can be achieved by treating persons in different circumstances in dissimilar ways. This has not been typical in the Nordic countries. While the universality of welfare services and benefits is differentiated in various ways in the Nordic countries this differentiation is rarely done to accommodate diversity. Instead, differentiation has involved exclusion, marginalization and reduced access to welfare. (Häikiö and Hvinden, 2012) For example, while newly-arrived migrants are entitled to means-tested financial benefits, the payments are lower than regular social assistance benefits. In addition, the level of benefits is related to the amount of earlier earnings in the country. (Häikiö and Hvinden, 2012) This kind of direct and indirect limitation cannot be defined as universal welfare.

Sometimes the Nordic ideals on gender equality seem to conflict with recognizing ethnic diversity. Currently, new

forms of inequalities among women are an obstacle for achieving gender equality from the perspective of some ethnic and religious minorities. Nordic countries face common challenges in overcoming the present marginalization of diverse migrant groups and diverse ethnic and religious minorities. (Siim, 2013) The recognition of ethnic and religious minorities means recognizing their values and cultural practices. Ebot (2014) explains that because family policies in the Nordic countries focus on realizing the dual earner / dual carer model, policy makers and researchers do not pay attention to the large-scale social dynamics and realities of ethnic minority groups. Shared parenting has become a prevalent social norm and service providers judge other ways of parenting as patriarchal and peculiar. The rhetoric of gender equality is detached from religion, leaving different religious values unrecognized. (Ebot, 2014) In his paper, Ebot draws on interviews with Black African parents in Finland. He concludes that for those parents, the gendered patterns of caring include also ethics of mutual support, solidarity and obligation. He argues that Black African parents do not link gendered patterns of caring into devaluing women’s work. (Ebot, 2014) In order to include ethnic minorities in Nordic gender equality politics, their views need to be recognized and listened to.

The recognition of ethnic and religious minorities might mean that public service providers train their personnel and employ more personnel with diversified backgrounds and/or professional skills for diversity. However, service providers are only at the surface of the entire system. In order to accommodate ethnic and religious diversity, the dual earner norm should be challenged also in the design of social assistance for families with children. In the redistribution of benefits, there is less scope for accommodating diversity: benefit arrangements tend to be tightly controlled, discretionary, means-tested

and meagre, particularly for persons with ethnic minority backgrounds and short residence in a Nordic country (Häikiö and Hvinden, 2012). Although there is less room for diversity mainstreaming of these service practices, it would be possible to take into account diversity in developing the benefit systems. For instance, the systems could be gradually made more flexible.

Nordic countries have also taken many steps towards recognizing diversity. For instance, in Finland lesbian and gay parents are currently recognized better than in the 1990s. However, at the same time the number of chil-

dren living in poor families has grown. Social assistance for families with children has deteriorated and this particularly hits those families in a vulnerable position, such as single parent families. This observation illustrates how equality requires both recognition and redistribution of tax-financed resources, as stated by Häikiö and Hvinden (2012). While the recognition of diversified groups is a crucial step towards equality, without redistribution it mainly helps the wealthy. On the other hand, redistribution without the recognition of diversified groups only helps those who fit into certain strict norms.



Strengths and weaknesses of the Nordic welfare model in realizing gender equality

The level of gender equality has both increased and decreased due to Nordic welfare policies since the 1990s. Some of the policies made in the Nordic countries have had a positive effect on gender equality. These include father's quotas, policies supporting part-time work, parental support in maternity health care, better recognition of certain minorities and the development of gender equality politics and policies. On the other hand, some of the policy changes in the Nordic countries have had a negative effect on gender equality. These include the reduced capacity of defamiliarizing care responsibilities, and social and health sector reforms building on technocratic and neoliberal ideologies. These ideologies cause feminine values of care to not be appreciated in the reforms.

From the perspective of gender equality, the strengths of Nordic welfare societies are that there are good universal services such as health care and education, there are benefits for parents and possibilities to reconcile work and family, there are many women as political actors, gender equality is mainstreamed into politics, and people trust the public sector. In Sweden, Norway and Iceland father's quotas have enabled fathers to have more time with children. In addition, some groups, which used to be marginalized, such as families with lesbian and gay parents, are now better recognized in public services. The Nordic welfare model has also been successful in encouraging parenting because fertility rates per woman are higher in the Nordic countries than in OECD countries.

Currently, the weaknesses of Nordic welfare societies are that the level of gender segregation is high, employed care workers are not valued as much as people employed by the private sector, vulnerable groups have suffered due to budget cuts since the 1990s, and gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming are not as efficient as fine speeches claim them to be. It is also a weakness that gender equality is often seen only as single cases and that gendered structures are ignored. At the same time, the theories on which these views are based are not openly discussed. In addition, diversity of residents is not adequately recognized in public and publicly subsidized services. Current weaknesses also include the ideologies and attitudes which have already altered the Nordic welfare model.

In addition to the current weaknesses, Nordic societies will face more challenges in the future. The operating environment causes some challenges for achieving gender

equality in Nordic societies. For example, the changing nature of work can increase the difficulties of reconciling work and care responsibilities. Public and publicly subsidized services would need to be flexible in order to meet the new requirements. Changes in the trade unions can mean that the terms of employment need to be negotiated in new forums, which causes a challenge for gender equality. Increased diversity and polarization of different groups can cause problems if the situation is not addressed in time. In addition, the dependency ratio will cause problems in funding the welfare state in the future. The dependency ratio is linked to fertility rates, too. If Nordic societies are unable to encourage women and men to have children anymore, fertility rates will decline and this will create concern for the sustainability of the tax-funded welfare state. General threats to the Nordic welfare model have gendered effects, too. For instance, a possible change in how citizens trust the public sector and difficulties in funding its services would be a risk for the quality of services in the future.

In addition to the operating environment, also politics can cause challenges for achieving gender equality in the future. For instance, while earlier reforms in the social and health sector have been criticized as being technocratic and neoliberal, this risk continues in the current and future reforms. This is a risk regarding women's terms of employment. One of the future challenges of gender equality politics is that gender equality and diversity need to be considered together in a meaningful way. Particularly in Finland and Denmark, there is a risk that gender equality is seen as already having been achieved and that gender equality politics are thus forgotten or changed into gender blind diversity politics.

Despite the challenges, Nordic societies also have many opportunities to further develop gender equality. The Nordic countries have made many positive policy changes and because there are differences between the Nordic countries, they have a possibility to learn from each other. For instance, there are many good examples of policies on father's quotas, part-time work, better recognition of minorities, and good gender equality politics and poli-

cies. In addition, the Nordic countries have a possibility to reconsider some of their new political ideologies, which aim at abandoning the universal welfare model and will cause polarization. However, at the same time, it has to be acknowledged that even earlier welfare models have sometimes been accused of false universalism and new challenges require new solutions, too.



Recommendations for future policy development and research

Based on the literature review and interviews, I provide some policy recommendations.

First, **the existence of universal care services is crucial** for maintaining gender equality. Women in particular benefit from the existence of these services because otherwise they tend to shoulder the care responsibilities at home. In addition, the existence of universal services might encourage parenting and prevent a decline in the fertility rate. For these two reasons, gender equality and the gendered share of care responsibilities should be taken into account in the process of designing reforms and developing public and publicly subsidized services.

Secondly, **health and social services reforms should aim at increasing the value of care and secure the terms of employment for employed care workers.**

Thirdly, **it would be important to develop policies which address the problems faced by vulnerable groups in society.** This would include addressing poor families, single parents, migrants, old women in poverty and young men at risk of dropping out of school. In addition, social assistance and benefits should be designed to meet also new gendered and diversified needs of residents in the Nordic countries.

Fourthly, **gender mainstreaming should be supported at all levels of public administration and required also from private organizations providing publicly subsidized services.** This would require support structures for gender mainstreaming. There are some problems related to project funding of gender mainstreaming but also project funding could be more successful if there were permanent support structures in place.

The fifth recommendation is that **governments could develop their gender equality politics openly and state the theories that their policies are based on.** This would mean developing government statements on the desired gender equality outcomes of family, social,

employment, education and youth policies. Such statements would increase the transparency of political decisions. In addition, government statements could help public servants in gender mainstreaming. Currently, public servants are required to do gender mainstreaming in all the Nordic countries, but their possibilities and capacities for gender mainstreaming vary. For instance, gender mainstreaming cannot be based solely on gender-segregated statistics. Even though statistics are important, gender mainstreaming would benefit from theories. Nordic governments could support the usage of theories on gender equality and draw on the knowledge acquired in their politics. In addition, qualitative research could be used more in gender mainstreaming.

The sixth recommendation is that **Nordic benchmarking of best practices in addressing gender equality in different policy areas would be very beneficial.** For instance, there are many good examples of policies on father's quotas, part-time work, better recognition of minorities, and good gender equality politics and policies.

I provide also some specific recommendations for future research. First, **health and social services reforms must be studied carefully.** Particularly, the changes in care workers' terms of employment need to be studied. Equality in needs assessment has to be studied, too. There is also a possibility to compare Nordic research. For instance, in Sweden there is a growing number of studies on health and social services and their reforms. Secondly, **the changes in possibilities on reconciling work and family need to be studied. The reasons affecting fertility rates should be studied, too. Gender mainstreaming should also be studied in order to support gender equality work.** The research on gender and welfare policies could support gender mainstreaming by analyzing and comparing current Nordic policies, developing theories and providing visions for better policies.

References

- Ahl, H., Berglund, K., Pettersson, K. and Tillmar, M. (2016), "From feminism to FemInc.ism: On the uneasy relationship between feminism, entrepreneurship and the Nordic welfare state", *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 369–392.
- Anttonen, A. (1994), "Welfare pluralism or woman friendly welfare politics?", *Women and the Welfare State*, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, pp. 9–34.
- Anttonen, A., Häikiö, L. and Stefansson, K. (Eds.). (2012), *Welfare State, Universalism and Diversity*, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham and Northampton.
- Anttonen, A., Henriksson, L. and Nätkin, R. (1994), *Naisten Hyvinvointivaltio [Women and the Welfare State]*, Vastapaino, Tampere.
- Backhans, M.C., Burström, B. and Marklund, S. (2011), "Gender Policy Developments and Policy Regimes in 22 OECD Countries, 1979-2008", *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 595–623.
- Berggren, C. and Lauster, N. (2014), "The motherhood penalty and the professional credential: inequality in career development for those with professional degrees", *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 44–64.
- Bloksgaard, L. (2014), "Negotiating leave in the workplace: leave practices and masculinity constructions among Danish fathers", in Eydal, G.B. and Rostgaard, T. (Eds.), *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States: Comparing Care Policies and Practice*, Policy Press, Bristol and Chicago, pp. 141–162.
- Borchorst, A. (2012), "Reassessing woman-friendliness and the gender system", in Anttonen, A., Häikiö, L. and Stefansson, K. (Eds.), *Welfare State, Universalism and Diversity*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham and Northampton, pp. 106–120.
- Browne, J. (2013), "The Default Model: Gender Equality, Fatherhood, and Structural Constraint", *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 9 No. 2013, pp. 152–173.
- Callerstig, A. (2014), *Making Equality Work: Ambiguities, Conflicts and Change Agents in the Implementation of Equality Policies in Public Sector Organisations*, Linköping University, Linköping.
- Dahl, H.M. (2012), "Neo-liberalism Meets the Nordic Welfare State—Gaps and Silences", *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 283–288.
- Drange, I. and Egeland, C. (2014), *Part-Time Work in the Nordic Region II. A Research Review on Important Reasons*, available at: <http://doi.org/10.6027/TN2014-560>.
- Duvander, A.-Z. and Ellingsæter, A.L. (2016), "Cash for childcare schemes in the Nordic welfare states - how durable?", *European Societies*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 70–90.
- Ebot, M.E. (2014), "Gender Caring: The Everyday Construction of Black African Parents in Finland", *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research*, Vol. 49, pp. 143–167.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2013), "Scandinavian welfare states and gender (de)segregation: Recent trends and processes", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 34, pp. 501–518.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2014), "Nordic Earner–Carer Models – Why Stability and Instability?", *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 43 No. 03, pp. 555–574.
- Eräranta, K. and Kantola, J. (2016), "The Europeanization of Nordic Gender Equality: A Foucauldian Analysis of Reconciling Work and Family in Finland", *Gender, Work and Organization*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 414–430.
- Eydal, G.B. and Gislason, I. V. (2014), "Caring fathers and parental leave in prosperous times and times of crisis: the case of Iceland", in Eydal, G.B. and Rostgaard, T. (Eds.), *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States: Comparing Care Policies and Practice*, Policy Press, Bristol and Chicago, p. 325–.
- Eydal, G.B. and Rostgaard, T. (2011), "Gender Equality Revisited - Changes in Nordic Childcare Policies in the 2000s", *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 161–179.
- Eydal, G.B. and Rostgaard, T. (2014), *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States: Comparing Care Policies and Practice*, Policy Press, Bristol and Chicago.
- Häikiö, L. and Hvinden, B. (2012), "Finding the way between universalism and diversity: a challenge to the Nordic model", *Welfare State, Universalism and Diversity*, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham and Northampton, pp. 69–89.
- Hernes, H. (1987), *Welfare State and Woman Power, Essays in State Feminism*, Norwegian University Press., Oslo.
- Hirdman, Y. (1988), *Genussystemet: Teoretiska Funderingar Kring Kvinnors Sociala Underordning [The Gender System: Theoretical Reflections on the Social Subordination of Women]*, Maktutredningen, Uppsala.
- Hirsto, H., Katila, S. and Moisander, J. (2014), "(Re)constructing economic citizenship in a welfare state – intersections of gender and class", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 122–139.
- Hirvonen, H. (2014), "Doing gendered and (dis)embodied work. Care work in the context of medico-managerial welfare state", *Nordic Social Work Research*, Routledge, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 113–128.
- Julkunen, R. (1992), *Hyvinvointivaltio Käännekohdassa [Welfare State at a Turning Point]*, Vastapaino, Tampere.
- Julkunen, R. (2013), "Aktivointipolitiikka hyvinvointivaltion paradigman muutoksena" [Activation policies as a paradigm change in welfare states], in Karjalainen, V. and Kesitalo, E. (Eds.), *Kaikki Työuralle! Työttömien Aktiivipolitiikka Suomessa [Everybody needs to work! Activating policies for unemployed people in Finland]*, THL the National Institute of Health and Welfare, Helsinki, pp. 21–42.
- Lister, R. (2009), "A Nordic Nirvana? Gender, Citizenship, and Social Justice in the Nordic Welfare States", *International Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 242–278.
- Midtbøen, A.H. and Teigen, M. (2014), "Social Investment in Gender Equality? Changing Perspectives on Work and Welfare in Norway", *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 267–282.
- Neilson, J. and Stanfors, M. (2014), "It's About Time! Gender, Parenthood, and Household Divisions of Labor Under Different Welfare Regimes", *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 35 No. 8, pp. 1066–1088.
- OECD. (2015), "Fertility rates", available at: <https://data.oecd.org/pop/fertility-rates.htm>.
- OECD. (2016a), "OECD Stat", available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=LFS_SEXAGE_I_R#.
- OECD. (2016b), *Backgrounder on Fathers' Leave and Its Use*, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/.../Backgrounder-fathers-use-of-leave.pdf>.

- Öun, I. (2012), "Work-Family Conflict in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Analysis", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 165–184.
- Piovani, C. and Aydiner-Avsar, N. (2015), "The Gender Impact of Social Protection Policies: A Critical Review of the Evidence", *Review of Political Economy*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 410–441.
- Rauch, D. (2007), "Is There Really a Scandinavian Social Service Model?", *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 50 No. 3, pp. 249–69.
- Siim, B. (2013), "Gender, diversity and migration - challenges to Nordic welfare, gender politics and research", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, Vol. 32 No. 6, pp. 615–628.

Appendix 1

Literature search on Nordic welfare state and gender

The literature for review was searched in several research databases via Nelliportaali (EBSCO, ARTO, Primo, Proquest, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science), and separately in the Scopus research database with the keywords Nordic welfare state and gender. The focus of the chosen

literature is in articles, which consider either some or preferably several Nordic countries. The literature was mainly limited to articles and books published in 2010 or later. The books were found through book reviews.

Keywords	Database	Number of search results
Nordic "welfare state" AND gender	Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)	42
	ARTO	1
	Primo Central Index	60
	Proquest Databases	60
	PubMed	19
	SCOPUS (Elsevier)	60
	Web of Science - Core Collection	44
Number of articles accepted for literature review		24
Number of books accepted for literature review		2

In addition to 24 articles found in the search with words Nordic welfare state and gender, 2 articles were added to the literature review based on searches done by other researchers in a larger study commissioned by the Nordic priority project "Norden 2020". In conclusion, 26 articles and 2 books were chosen for literature review.

The chosen literature was grouped into four main themes: care responsibilities at home, position of public care workers, inequalities in Nordic welfare societies, and new threats to gender equality. These themes and topics were compared against the classical writings on Nordic welfare societies.

Appendix 2

The analysis draws also from interviews with a few researchers (professor Anneli Anttonen and special researcher Johanna Lammi-Taskula) and a few Finnish gender equality actors. In addition, the analysis utilizes the contribution of the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish project partners.



Norden 2020

#norden2020

This report is part of the Finnish priority project “Norden 2020”.
The views and recommendations expressed in this report belong solely to the author.

