



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

# **The Nordic road towards Beijing+25**



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# The Nordic road towards Beijing+25

The Nordic countries have collaborated in promoting gender equality for over 40 years. Each country has a long history of advancing legislation that facilitates gender equality, both in the labour market and in society as a whole. The most visible result is that the majority of women in the Nordic countries are in paid employment, almost on a par with men. Efforts have also led to a more gender-equal distribution of power, influence and resources in the region, in politics as in business.

Solutions for shared parental leave, equal pay, violence prevention, equal opportunities at work, and greater involvement of men and boys in gender equality – to mention a few – have not evolved organically. They are results of targeted policies by governments, which are backed up by well-organized civil society organisations and a private sector that also benefits from social trust and gender equality. Over time these measures have evolved and been key to progress. The Nordic countries' achievements and rights-based approaches have also garnered respect internationally. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020 asserts that the Nordic countries remain the closest to achieving gender equality, based on the Forum's methodology.

In 2020 the global community marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most visionary agenda for the empowerment of women and girls, everywhere. This report summarizes the five Nordic countries' Beijing+25 review reports. Through six clusters, the report exemplifies the collective Nordic experience and progress, and picks out emerging challenges. 2020 is a year marked by a global gender equality review, and it marks the opportunity to strengthen political efforts in the Nordic countries – and in the rest of the world – for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, once and for all.

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**Beijing Platform for Action:** Developed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 – known as the largest-ever gathering of gender equality advocates – the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted by 189 governments, who committed to taking strategic, bold action in 12 critical areas of concern: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child.

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**Beijing+25:** Leading up to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, UN member states have submitted country reports, which in turn will be collated in a global report to review and celebrate Beijing+25. The report you are reading now is a summary of the Nordic countries' reports, clustered into six dimensions: 1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work; 2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services; 3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes; 4. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions; 5. Peaceful and inclusive societies; 6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation.

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**Nordic Co-operation:** The Nordic countries have worked together for over 40 years to promote gender equality in all aspects of society. The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official forum for governmental co-operation between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The co-operation on gender equality is led by the Nordic ministers for gender equality and based on a co-operation program.

## 1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

**Critical areas of focus:** *gender equality at work, redistribution of unpaid care, work-family conciliation.*

Investments in gender equality in the labour market have made the Nordic region one of the most prosperous areas of the world. The share of women who work in the Nordic countries is larger than the global average, which is partly the effect of commitments to equal workplaces, subsidized childcare and generous parental leave schemes. However, gender inequalities at work do persist. The Nordic countries are grappling with high levels of occupational segregation in the labour market – both vertically and horizontally – as well as a substantial gender pay gap that is narrowing far too slowly. Sex segregation in the labour market is a key explanation for gender gaps in pay, working hours, educational choices and career opportunities.

Here are some of the efforts made in the region the last five years to meet the challenges.

### **Preventing sex segregation at work**

Responding to sex segregation and gender stereotypes in education and at work are priorities for the Nordic countries. The topic has been high up on the political agenda in the last five years. In Norway, research shows that two-thirds of occupational segrega-

tion is linked to the sex segregation in education. To break the pattern women have been awarded gender points in a number of male-dominated educational pathways, and men vice versa, in Norway. Men are for example awarded two gender points if they apply for an education within nursing or child welfare. In Iceland 1000 girls from elementary schools take part in The Girls in STEM Day in Reykjavik and Akureyri every year. The aim is to introduce the various opportunities in technical educations and careers, to break down gender stereotypes and to show girls the diversity that characterizes the technology industry.

### **Ending sexual harassment at work**

The #metoo movement in 2017 showed the true scope of sexual harassment, in the Nordic countries as elsewhere. During the last years all the Nordic countries have taken action to deal with and prevent sexual harassment. The initiatives include a range of measures: from tougher legislation, to responsible authorities being given a bigger mandate, to broad-scale information campaigns.

In the Nordic countries, employers have a responsibility to ensure a work environment free from sexual harassment. As a follow up to #metoo, various measures have been taken to ensure that employers are acting on the problem-

Denmark for example has increased the compensation to victims and strengthened focus on preventing sexual harassment at work. In Sweden, efforts to prevent sexual harassment at work have for example been strengthened through education and information initiatives supporting employers, and greater support to regional health and safety representatives. Finland has in collaboration with employers' organisations prepared a guide for intervention and prevention of sexual harassment at work.

### **Equal pay**

All Nordic countries are taking measures to close the gender pay gap. In Iceland employers are in the process of implementing the 2018 Law on Equal Pay Certification. In short, this law is an enforcement tool to realize the objectives of the 1961 legislation that prohibited gender discrimination in wages. The results of the new law are already positive, and the Icelandic government aims at closing the gender pay gap in 2022.

Sweden has conducted several reforms reducing the differences between men's and women's labour income. The government's decision to draw up an action plan for equal pay in a life cycle perspective is one example. The action plan includes steps to be taken to reduce pay differentials between women and men.

Another example is amendments to the Discrimination Act. From 1 January 2017, all employers must conduct an annual survey and implement measures to prevent pay discrimination. The aim is for employers to be able to discover, remedy and prevent unfair differences in pay between women and men.

### **Sharing the care**

Public services like affordable, quality childcare and well-funded parental leave for mothers and fathers – for all parents – have been instrumental for increased gender equality in the labour market in the Nordics. Since the 1990s, the Nordic countries have been earmarking some weeks of the allotted parental leave period for the father – a daddy quota. Research shows that men have responded to the introduction and expansion of the quota by taking more parental leave. But still, the share of parental leave taken by men in the Nordic countries is much lower than the share taken by women. In recent years, several Nordic countries have made efforts to expand the use of parental leave by fathers – both through national campaigns and new legislation. Today, all countries have similar parental leave schemes consisting of three parts. One part to each parent and one part that can be divided between the parents as they desire.

## 2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

**Critical areas of focus:** *poverty among women and girls, equality in education and health care.*

Women are more likely than men to live in poverty. This is true globally and it is also the case in the Nordic region. Despite some important progress, women have still not achieved economic equality with men. In the Nordic countries, women born outside of Europe are at a particularly high risk of poverty. Here are some of the efforts made in the region the past five years to meet the challenges.

### **Poverty eradication**

All the Nordic countries are taking measures to improve the situation for women in high risk of poverty. The initiatives involve increasing allowances as well as measures targeting groups at particular risk of poverty. The Nordic countries recognize labour market participation as a key to improve living conditions. Universal access to education as well as an inclusive and family-friendly labour market policy are important to provide opportunity for as many as possible to work. For example, creating a family-friendly labour market was the goal when Finland in 2014 introduced "the flexible care allowance". The purpose of the new allowance was to increase the labour market participation among women by making it easier for parents to work part time instead

of staying home caring for children full time.

Measures addressing poverty in the Nordic countries are largely universal – they don't specifically target girls or women. However, all initiatives addressing poverty strive for gender equality. All of the Nordic countries have identified women born outside of Europe as a group with a particularly weak link to the labour market and at high risk of poverty. Part of the explanation is that women make up a large proportion of the newly arrived immigrants with limited education. Different measures have been taken to increase the labour market participation in this specific group. The initiatives include education as well as other measures, like support for women who wish to start and run their own companies.

### **Equality in education**

All people, regardless of gender, should have equal access to education and the possibility to choose freely what to study, without being limited by gender norms. That is the core idea of gender equality in education within the Nordics. Discrimination on the basis of gender is criminalized in all Nordic countries and all countries have also taken other measures towards equality in education. The initiatives include, for example, measures to increase women's opportunities to enter male-dominated fields and



gender equality training for teachers. Finland, for example, have published a guide to promote gender equality in primary education. The guide highlights the challenges of gender equality, encourages greater understanding of gender diversity, as well as provides information on gender-based and sexual harassment. The guide contains suggestions and practical examples of how gender equality work should be carried out in a structured way and how a functional gender equality plan should be drawn up.

### **Equality in healthcare**

During the last years, a number of laws have been amended and other initiatives taken to improve the health of girls and women in the Nordic region. The initiatives involve funding of research on women's health to expand the knowledge and measures to improve the healthcare, for example in relation to childbirth. In 2018 Denmark introduced a new initiative in light of an expected increase in the number of births. The objectives included developing individual birth plans and enhancing the efforts for especially vulnerable persons. Some Nordic countries have also taken measures to improve the work at the maternity and child welfare clinics. In Finland, this work resulted in the manual *"Gender equality when working with clients in maternity and child*

*welfare clinics. How to support parents and children from a gender equality perspective?"*

In general, issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have been highlighted in many ways in the Nordics. In Iceland, The Act on Termination of Pregnancy was adopted by parliament in 2019. Previously, women who wanted to have an abortion needed approval by either two doctors or a doctor and a social worker. With the new law, women are guaranteed the right to decide for themselves up until the end of the 22nd week of pregnancy.

All of the Nordics have identified newly arrived, young immigrants as a group needing support on health including SRHR as well as gender equality and the rights they have. There have been a number of campaigns addressing this group. For example, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society produced a website that includes information on sexual violence, sexual harassment and honour related violence and oppression including female genital mutilation. The website informs about the legislation and rights, including legislation on the purchase of sexual services. Other Nordic countries have had similar initiatives.

### 3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

**Critical areas of focus:** *violence against women and girls, methods for prevention, engaging men.*

Violence against women is a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights. Violence and abuse against girls and women represent a constant challenge in the Nordic region. Despite decades of work on gender equality, violence against women is still a fact. The work against violence in the Nordic countries includes many different issues such as physical and psychological violence in close relations, negative social control, rape, trafficking and female genital mutilation. The violence takes place in many different areas of life, including on the Internet. Online violence is an immediate and growing problem in the Nordic region, with huge consequences for both the women and girls being attacked, and for society as a whole. Here are some of the efforts made in the region the last five years to meet the challenges.

#### **Detecting and ending violence**

Several new laws have been introduced in the Nordic countries to improve the work against violence. For example, Norway have made it easier to stop forced marriage and Denmark have adopted a bill on psychological violence in close relations. Many Nordic countries have also improved the legal protection

from violence and abuse against children. For example, Finland increased the punishment for sexual abuse of a child to maximum of six instead of four years of prison.

All of the Nordic countries recognize that all sectors of society have a big responsibility to detect any form of violence against women. Many initiatives are taken to strengthen the knowledge among professionals within for example the police, healthcare, social services, schools, pre-schools and in asylum reception centres. In Iceland the government has appointed a committee to review homicide cases where the perpetrator had been a current or former partner of the victim. The aim was to find out whether, to what extent, and in what ways the public services management of such cases had failed.

#### **Online violence**

In recent years the Nordic countries have stepped up the work against threats and abuse online. Online violence includes for example threats and sharing of nude photos without consent. Initiatives have been taken to prevent sexual abuse online, for example by clarifying that it is illegal, or by increasing the penalties. Sweden introduced a new crime in 2018 about the unlawful violation of privacy. The law makes it a criminal offence to intrude

into the private life of another person by disseminating sensitive images or other information on the Internet.

The Nordic countries recognize hate speech online as a form of violence, posing a threat to the democratic system. Especially politicians, journalists and opinion makers are often targeted with threats and harassments – and the exposure to hate may affect willingness to engage in the public debate. Preventing hate speech online is a highly prioritized issue in the Nordic countries. During the last years, several public campaigns have been launched to raise awareness on the issue. In Finland, there has also been an initiative to strengthen the law. The legislation has also been strengthened in Denmark.

### **Sexual violence**

All of the Nordic countries recognize sexual harassment as a form of violence. In the wake of #metoo, there has been a number of initiatives in the Nordic countries to combat sexual harassment and abuse in all parts of society. These initiatives involve making schools safer by training teachers and strengthening the sex education. Some Nordic countries have also had new

legislation. Sweden and Iceland have introduced consent-based sexual offences acts that are expected to enable more rape convictions. The laws in the respective countries are also seen as instruments to realize a culture of consent. Denmark, Finland and Norway have also started discussions as to whether the lack of consent should be included in the description of rape in the penal provision.

### **Engaging men**

The work against gender-based violence does not only focus on the victims. The Nordic governments recognize that in the long term, norm-changing and preventive work directed towards men and boys is crucial. Negative gender stereotypes which link masculinity to violence need to be counteracted. In Sweden, for example, several schools are working consciously to challenge these stereotypes and to prevent violence using the method Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP). Another method, developed by Iceland and Surinam, are the so-called Barbershop discussions that bring men to the table as partners for gender equality. All the Nordic countries also have programs directed specifically towards perpetrators.

## 4. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

**Critical areas of focus:** *women's participation in public life and decision making.*

The representation of women in parliamentary politics is high in the Nordic countries, and that is the result of a struggle going back more than a century. Women's right to sit in parliament is based on the belief that everyone should enjoy equal opportunity to political activity, and that the democratic bodies should reflect the population at large. The Nordic countries have come a long way, but there is still an uneven division of political power between women and men. Women are still underrepresented, as are other groups such as young adults and persons with immigrant background.

Here are some of the efforts made in the region the last five years to meet the challenges.

### **Challenges in local politics**

A large number of initiatives have been taken, throughout the Nordic region, to increase the representation of women in local government. In Norway, a digital municipal barometer has been launched, showing the representation of women in different municipalities. The digital barometer makes it possible for each municipality to compare its performance in this respect to others throughout the country. In addition, journalists

and the general public can easily follow how the municipalities are doing as regards to women's representation in local politics. Previous evaluations of measures to increase the proportion of women in politics indicate that focusing on the issue in public arenas and giving it public attention, potentially increases the proportion of women engaged. Another key issue is to make it possible for politicians to combine a political career with family life. In Sweden, this was made easier by a reform in 2018, making it possible for politicians in local government to take parental leave, just as in national politics.

### **Women in management and education**

The Nordic countries have been proactive in promoting the equal representation of women and men in positions of power. Despite the ongoing efforts, a troubling pattern remains: the higher up in the hierarchy you look, the more men you will see. This is particularly true in the private sector. The Nordic countries have actively promoted female representation at the highest decision-making levels, such as gender parity quota laws for company boards. In the last five years, a number of initiatives have been taken to expand the number of women in senior management. In 2018 Norway developed a list of good practice composed of eight sound pieces of advice on how the business

community can be instrumental in promoting women's representation in senior management. The list, entitled "How to achieve gender balance at the top in business", has been distributed to Norway's 500 largest companies and is intended to serve as a toolbox of potential measures.

When it comes to higher education, the Nordic countries have taken measures to attain a more equal distribution of research funding and to raise the number of women in higher positions. In Sweden, for example, the goal is for 50 per cent of newly recruited professors to be women by 2030.

### **Equality in the media**

All of the Nordics recognize the importance of equal representation of women and men in media. During the last years several studies have been carried out, focusing on the numbers of respondents, how women and men are portrayed, what topics women and men are asked to address, as well as to what extent women and men occupy the decision-making positions in the media industry. Finland has, as the chair of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016, prepared two Nordic reports on gender issues related to news media and advertising: *"Women and Men in the News - A report on Gender representation in Nordic News Content and in the Nordic Media Industry"* and *"Regulation of Gender-Discriminatory Advertising in the Nordic Countries"*.

## 5. Peaceful and inclusive societies

**Critical areas of focus:** *women's involvement in peace and security.*

The Nordic countries have worked actively to promote women's involvement in peace and security and to enhance the protection of women in situations of war and conflict. A continually growing research base has recognized the importance of women's involvement in peace and security issues to achieving long lasting stability. In 2000, the Resolution 1325 was adopted due to the hard work of both civil society and the member states of the UN. The Resolution 1325 addresses among many things how women's full participation and involvement is critical to every aspect of achieving and sustaining peace and stability within a community.

Here are some of the efforts made in the region the last five years to meet the challenges.

### **Gender equality in foreign policy**

In the Nordic countries gender and women's rights are key elements in foreign and development policies. An example is Sweden's feminist foreign policy, in which one of the cornerstones is that work on sustainable peace and security must be representative and inclusive. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council 2017-2018, Sweden championed the UN Security

Council's inclusion of information from representatives from women's organisations in its analyses.

All Nordic countries are working for increased involvement of women in peace processes in countries for example through political, technical and financial support. An example is Iceland's efforts in the continued collaboration with UN Women and its mission in Mozambique. The program aims at strengthening women and girls' capacity to meaningfully participate in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as enhancing the national capacity to implement and generate knowledge on women, peace, and security.

### **Measures to support 1325 on women, peace and security**

The Nordic countries were among the first states to adopt National Plans (NAP) on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women peace and security. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

In Denmark the current National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 is very much focused on gender mainstreaming, and

implementation of a gender perspective in operations, education and staffing. Finland has consistently attached great importance to the inclusion of the 1325 theme in joint statements and documents and has worked to engage new countries in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

### **Multilateral aid and cooperation**

In terms of international cooperation and multilateral aid, the Nordic countries have been supporting UN Women, as well as United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in line with its support to sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls. One example is Norway's support to UN Women that has increased over the past two years and is part of the effort to strengthen judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights suffered by women and girls in connection with armed conflict and humanitarian crises. The Nordic countries also pursue the agenda for women, peace and security

within other international cooperation such as UN, NATO, OSCE, the EU and the Council of Europe, and in cooperation with each other.

### **Nordic Women Mediators**

Inspired by a similar initiative in southern Africa, the Nordic governments endorsed the creation of the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) network at the Nordic-African Foreign Ministers' meeting in April 2015. The NWM was launched in Oslo in November 2015 and is a network of women from the five Nordic countries with professional expertise relevant to conflict mediation, peacebuilding and negotiations. It is an instrument for the meaningful involvement of women in advocacy and operational engagement. In November 2018, Denmark hosted the Nordic Women Mediators Network Meeting, where experiences from the Syrian peace process were presented and discussed by women civil society leaders and peace activists from different parts of Syria.

## 6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

**Critical areas:** *gender perspective on climate change and environmental policies.*

Climate change has a greater impact on those sections of the population that are most reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods. Women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change in situations of poverty, and the majority of the world's poor are women. Women's unequal participation in decision-making processes and labour markets compound inequalities and often prevent women from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policy-making and implementation.

Here are some of the efforts made in the region the last five years to meet the challenges.

### **Nordic involvement in climate negotiations**

To incorporate gender perspectives in climate and environmental questions as well as emergency preparedness is a priority for the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries have stressed the need to strengthen women's decision making in climate negotiations. One example is how Sweden and Norway actively spoke in favour of including gendered challenges and women's influence in the international climate negotiations under the UN Framework Convention

for Climate Change (UNFCCC) and particularly within the field of adaptation to climate change.

### **Integrating gender perspectives in environmental policy**

Integrating gender perspective into environmental policies are important matters for the Nordics both internationally, and at home. The Finnish Ministry of the Environment adopted an equality plan for the period 2018-2021. The plan contains the general objectives, measures and responsibilities for promoting equality in the Ministry's key functions and services. Core measures in the plan include increased assessments of the impacts on equality in law-drafting projects, mainstreaming of the equality perspective in all major strategies, plans and projects, as well as in the international activities of the Ministry, including in the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Norway attaches importance to equality and equal treatment, irrespective of gender, in accordance with existing legislation; this also applies to disaster risk reduction, preventing climate change-related problems and damage limitation.

### **Raising awareness about gender-specific health hazards**

In the last years, the Nordic countries have taken action in order to strengthen and raise awareness about gender-specific environmental and health



hazards. Denmark has initiated the national information campaign *"Pregnant? Know your chemicals"*. The campaign, coordinated by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency, provides advice to pregnant women and women planning a pregnancy, through easily accessible advice dealing with everyday chemicals. The purpose is not to scare women but to offer information that enables active

choices regarding chemical exposure. In Sweden, the Swedish Chemicals Agency has been commissioned by the government to produce an *"Action plan for a toxic-free everyday environment"* with a focus on children and young people. From 2017 onwards, a gender equality perspective must also be taken into account in this work. The project will continue until 2020.

# Emerging issues in the Nordic region

The development in the Nordic countries are showing positive trends in several areas related to gender equality: an increased proportion of women is full time paid work; the gender pay gap continues to narrow; and women have a high level of education. Even though the Nordic countries have come far, there are still a number of enduring challenges. Two areas identified as especially emerging are gender-based violence and gender equality in the labour market.

## **Violence against women**

The Nordic countries recognize violence against women as one of the greatest challenges to gender equality. Women are at much greater risk of rape, sexual assault and violence in close relations compared to men. In the Nordic countries, gender-based violence has been highlighted as an important issue for decades, and will be in focus moving forward. All of the Nordics have legislation against gender-based violence and initiatives combating different forms of violence, such as intimate partner violence and negative social control, trafficking and female genital mutilation. At the same time, more measures are needed.

## **Ending sexual harassment and rape**

The #metoo movement in 2017 accumulated into a joint call for action

and resulted in a range of measures in the Nordic countries, from new legislation, to surveys as well as awareness raising and training efforts. The Nordics will follow up on #metoo during the coming years. This includes initiatives to increase the knowledge and awareness for instance of sexual harassment and of consent, as well as norm-changing and preventive work directed towards men and boys.

## **Closing the gender pay gap**

The Nordic governments' policies have helped to reduce income differentials between women and men, but the goal of financial gender equality has not yet been met. All of the Nordic countries are working to end the gap. Iceland, for example, have been recognized for the new Equal Pay Certification law. The obligatory equal pay certification is to be implemented in stages over a period, up until the end of 2022. By then, the aim is for the gender pay gap to be closed. The struggle to end the pay gap will continue to be an issue of priority for all of the Nordic countries during the coming years.

## **Occupational segregation**

Even though the Nordic countries have made a lot of efforts challenging gender stereotypes in the labour market, occupational segregation still remains. The labour market in the Nordic region

is characterized by women and men working in different occupations, industries and sectors. This means social norms continue to restrict occupational choices. The segregation in the labour market is closely related to segregation in education. Women continue to lag behind in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). All of the Nordic countries have made measures to challenge these stereotypes and make it easier for women to make educational choices that challenge the norm. Still, all of the Nordic countries identify this as an area in need of continued focus.

### **Work-family balance**

An important objective for family and equality policy in the Nordic countries has been to make it possible for women to participate in the labour market along the same lines as men, and for men to shoulder more responsibility for housework and childcare. One important instrument to reach this change has been earmarking some weeks of the allotted parental leave period for the father. Research shows that men have responded to the introduction and expansion of the quota by taking more parental leave. But still, the share of parental leave taken by men in the Nordic countries is much lower than the share taken by women.

# Prospects for gender equality in the Nordic region

In 2020, it will be 25 years since the Beijing Platform for Action set out how to remove the systemic barriers that hold women back from equal participation in all areas of life, whether in public or in private. Despite some progress, real change has been agonizingly slow for the majority of women and girls in the world. As a result, women remain undervalued, they continue to work more, earn less, have fewer choices, and experience multiple forms of violence at home and in public spaces.

The Nordic countries have come a long way in working for gender equality and the Nordic contribution has the potential to play an important role in the ongoing process of change towards gender equality on a global scale. The Nordic countries work actively for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, focusing on the 12 critical areas of concern. But challenges and obstacles to gender equality still remain.

## **Agency of youth**

To respond to these challenges, there is a need for joint action – to come together across generational and geographical boundaries. There is a need to join forces and bring together different generations of feminists and human rights activists.

The younger generations in the Nordic countries have high expectations and are often very engaged in issues of social justice. These perspectives and experiences are important for responding to today's biggest challenges and what needs to be done to confront them. The Nordic countries need to spotlight the agency of young people and communicate their very important views on these major global challenges, which still exist today.

## **Engaging boys and men**

Historically, the struggle for gender equality have been fought by women. But in order to reach the next level, involvement of boys and men is crucial. They must get engaged and seen as important drivers for change. Notions of gender that affect and restrict women also affect men. When these notions are challenged, both women and men have greater freedom and more opportunities. Changing norms brings both advantages for the individual and gains for society as a whole. The latter may involve a greater sense of security, improved public health, reduced violence, improved results for boys in school, and breaking up the segregated labour market as well as broadening recruitment to the public sector.

**Focus on intersectionality**

Achieving a gender-equal society requires active gender equality policies that not only improve the situation for the individual, but also lift society. In the Nordic countries a basic premise in the work is that women and men, boys and girls, are not homogeneous groups. Intersectionalities such as socioeconomic background, ethnicity, disabilities, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and

gender expression are important to consider when trying to ensure the accuracy and impact of the work on gender equality. It is also important to emphasise that gender equality challenges change during the course of life, and can be different for younger and older people. Utilizing women's and men's, girls' and boys' competency, experience and ability to exert influence is vital for creating a sustainable future.

The photos in this publication are from the Nordic Council of Ministers' photo competition for young people in the Nordic countries in 2019.

**Topics:**

Democracy, equality and integration.



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### **Nordic co-operation**

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

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

### **Nordic Council of Ministers**

**Nordens Hus**

**Ved Stranden 18**

**DK-1061 Copenhagen K**

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In 2020, the global community marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most visionary agenda for the empowerment of women and girls, everywhere. While the United Nations is undertaking and concluding a global review of the Beijing Platform for Action, this very report summarizes the five Nordic countries' Beijing+25 review reports. It takes stock of progress made thus far – the Nordic road towards Beijing+25. Importantly, the report points towards areas of opportunities for the Nordics – where the prospects for gender equality really lie: in the agency of young people, in intersectional approaches and mind-sets and in the engagement of men and boys in the making of gender equality.