



## ANNUAL REPORT 2020

NORDICORE – NORDIC CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
FOR RESEARCH ON GENDER EQUALITY IN  
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

## NORDICORE 2020

NORDICORE is a Nordic Centre of Excellence (NCoE) at Institute for Social Research (ISF), closely affiliated to CORE – Center for Research on Gender Equality. NORDICORE was established in 2017 to advance the study of gender equality and diversity in academia and beyond in the Nordic countries, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. NORDICORE aims to study gender and diversity in academia in a broader labor market context in which it is integrated.

NORDICORE is granted funding from NordForsk, constituting our basic funding. In addition, the research advances of NORDICORE benefit from funding from other sources, such as the Research Council of Norway, the Ministry of Culture and other ministries, directorates and private organizations.

This report is based on NORDICORE's annual report to NordForsk and is available for anyone interested in keeping updated on NORDICORE's research and activities.

*Mari Teigen & Liza Reisel*

Center Director and Deputy Director

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## 1 | ABOUT NORDICORE

### QUICK FACTS



#### 32 RESEARCHERS

NORDICORE consists of 32 leading researchers from all the Nordic countries.



#### 4 NORDIC COUNTRIES

NORDICORE conducts comparative research in Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland.



#### LONG-TERM PROJECT

NORDICORE started in 2017 and will be finalized in 2023.

## A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

NORDICORE is a single-site Nordic Center of Excellence located at the Institute for Social Research (ISF) in close collaboration with researchers at partner institutions across the Nordic countries (Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden).

The main aim of NORDICORE is to create knowledge that will further advance gender balance and diversity in research and innovation. The future of the Nordic knowledge economy depends on our ability to attract the most highly qualified men and women to excel in the field of research and research-based innovation. At a time where scientific excellence and international competition is increasing in significance and our welfare states are under ever greater pressure, it is crucial to produce solid knowledge on which to base further policies and practices in the field.

The center is funded by NordForsk and led by Mari Teigen and Liza Reisel.

NORDICORE is organized around six work packages targeting different research questions concerning male dominance and gender balance in academia.

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## 2 | GENDER BALANCE IN ACADEMIA

Even though the Nordic countries have comparatively strong gender equality records, major challenges exist regarding gender balance and equality in research and innovation.

**NORDICORE** studies key issues to help us understand and explain what promotes and inhibits gender balance and gender equality within research and innovation.

### NORDICORE AIMS TO ...



.. Establish new knowledge about the Nordic gender equality paradox in research and innovation and about the mechanisms producing, maintaining and changing gender inequalities.



.. Map equality and diversity policies in the Nordic countries, at the national and institutional level.



.. Identify and distinguish which challenges to gender balance and equality are specific to academia and which are related to general aspects of the Nordic labor markets.



.. Disseminate our findings to stakeholders and policy-makers in the Nordic countries, as well as engage in knowledge-exchange processes.



.. Establish knowledge about the benefits and challenges of Nordic family and welfare policies for gender differences in academic careers.



.. Stimulate further international collaboration and identify fruitful avenues for future research in dialogue with stakeholders.

## OUR WORK PACKAGES

Our research design combines quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as observational and experimental data. Thus, it allows us to pinpoint specific mechanisms behind gender inequalities. NORDICORE's data are acquired from a wide range of sources, including questionnaires, field experiments, administrative registers, documents and interviews.

### #1 EVALUATION OF GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To examine the relationship between gender equality policies and the composition of research and teaching staff over time.

**METHOD AND DATA:** Matching institutional gender equality policies to the development with institutional-level data on gender balance in top research positions. Mapping policies through surveys of Human Resource (HR) and Chief Executive Officers in Norway, Finland and Sweden.

### #2 GENDER EQUALITY FROM BELOW

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To develop a better understanding of equality measures at a departmental level and in that way contribute to the development of more inclusive cultures.

**METHOD AND DATA:** Interviews with researchers at all levels at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and follow different departments and their work on gender balance.

### #3 RESEARCH CAREERS AND FAMILY

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To study gender differences in research careers and alternatives to such careers in the public and private sectors in the Nordic countries. Central questions are: How does the research careers of women and men diverge? How do men and women perceive and experience the possibilities and constraints of work-family dynamics in relation to the demands and opportunities inside and outside of academia?

**METHOD AND DATA:** Longitudinal register data and in-depth interviews in Iceland, Sweden and Norway. Mapping research careers and analyzing the impact of age and family situation on career progressions.

## #4 GENDERED PATTERNS OF COMPETENCE AND HIREABILITY

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To examine whether gender inequality can be explained as the result of systematic differences in the perception of women's and men's competence and hireability.

**METHOD AND DATA:** Survey experiment among tenured academic staff in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

## #5 EVALUATIVE CULTURES

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To analyze how meritocratic ideals play out by examining how academic gatekeepers perceive scientific excellence and how evaluative practices vary across organizational contexts. What do we learn by studying recruitment through a gender lens?

**METHOD AND DATA:** Interviews and following all recruitment stages from vacancy to the final hiring decision in three disciplines (history, biology, and political science).

## #6 LABOR MARKET AND POLICY CONTEXTS: COMPARISONS ACROSS SECTORS

**MAIN OBJECTIVE:** To compare and synthesize main findings in all work packages considering existing knowledge about the mechanisms producing, maintaining and changing gender segregation in various parts of the Nordic labor markets.

**METHOD AND DATA:** Drawing on all the work packages to summarize and better understand challenges and avenues for change towards gender equality and diversity in academia. Moreover, we do comparative analyses of cross-sector differences in attitudes to gender equality and diversity, emphasizing similarities and differences between the academic elite and other sector elites.

## 3 | WHO ARE WE?

We are 32 researchers from all the Nordic countries who contribute to NORDICORE's research objectives.



**MARI TEIGEN**

Role: Director of NORDICORE  
Research professor, Director of CORE – Centre for Research on Gender Equality, Institute for Social Research, NORWAY.



**LIZA REISEL**

Role: Deputy Director of NORDICORE  
Research Director, Equality, integration, migration, at the Institute for Social Research, NORWAY.



**CHARLOTTE SILANDER**

Role: Principal investigator  
Senior lecturer, Deputy Head of Department, Department of Pedagogy and Learning, Linnæus University, SWEDEN.



**GUÐBJÖRG LINDA RAFNSDÓTTIR**

Role: Principal investigator  
Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, University of Iceland, ICELAND.



**ARNFINN H. MIDTBØEN**

Role: Principal investigator  
Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Social Research, NORWAY.



**JULIA ORUPABO**

Role: Principal investigator  
Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Social Research, NORWAY.



**VIVIAN ANETTE LAGESEN**

Role: Principal investigator  
Professor of Science and Technology Studies,  
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture,  
NTNU, NORWAY.



**SIRI ØYSLEBØ SØRENSEN**

Role: Researcher  
Associate Professor, Department of  
Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, NTNU,  
NORWAY.



**KNUT HOLTAN SØRENSEN**

Role: Researcher  
Professor of Science and Technology Studies,  
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture,  
NTNU, NORWAY.



**MARJAN NADIM**

Role: Researcher  
Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Social  
Research, NORWAY.



**KJERSTI MISJE ØSTBAKKEN**

Role: Researcher  
Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Social  
Research, NORWAY.



**ANNE GRØNLUND**

Role: Researcher  
Professor at Department of Social Work, Umeå  
University, SWEDEN.



**IVANA SUBOTICKI**

Role: Researcher  
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
of Culture, NTNU, NORWAY.



**SOFIA MORATTI**

Role: Postdoctoral Fellow  
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
of Culture, NTNU, NORWAY.



**IDA DRANGE**

Role: Researcher  
Senior Researcher, Centre for Welfare and  
Labour Research, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan  
University, NORWAY.



**FREDRIK SNELLMANN**

Role: Researcher  
Senior lecturer at Department of Social Work,  
Umeå University, SWEDEN.



**MAYA STAUB**

Role: Doctoral Graduate Student  
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, University  
of Iceland, ICELAND.



**MARIA PIETILÄ**

Role: Postdoctoral Fellow  
Department of Political and Economic Studies,  
University of Helsinki, FINLAND.



**SIGTONA HALRYNJO**

Role: Researcher  
Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Social  
Research, NORWAY.



**KARIN HALLDÉN**

Role: Researcher  
Associate professor, Swedish Institute for Social  
Research, Stockholm University, SWEDEN.



**CHARLOTTA MAGNUSSON**

Role: Researcher  
Associate professor, Swedish Institute for Social  
Research, Stockholm University, SWEDEN.



**MAGNUS CARLSSON**

Role: Researcher  
Associate professor, Department of Economics  
and Statistics, Linnæus University, SWEDEN.



**TURO VIRTANEN**

Role: Advisor  
University lecturer, Department of Political  
and Economic Studies, University of Helsinki,  
FINLAND.



**HENNING FINSERAAS**

Role: Researcher  
Research Professor, Institute for  
Social Research, NORWAY.



**MARTE MANGSET**

Role: Researcher  
Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Professions, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, NORWAY.



**MATHIAS WULLUM NIELSEN**

Role: Advisor  
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, DENMARK.



**RUTH EVA JØRGENSEN**

Role: Project Coordinator/Research Assistant  
Project Coordinator/Research Assistant, Institute for Social Research, NORWAY.



**AURORA BERG**

Role: Research assistant  
Research assistant, Institute for Social Research, NORWAY



**ANDREA S. HJÁLMARSDÓTTIR**

Role: Researcher  
Assistant Professor at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at The University of Akureyri, ICELAND.



**INGRID SKINLO**

Role: Research assistant  
Project Advisor and Research Assistant, Institute for Social Research, NORWAY.



**CARIN BÄCKNÄS**

Role: Research assistant  
Research assistant, Linnaeus University, SWEDEN



**OLOF AXMAN**

Role: Research assistant  
Research assistant, Linnaeus University, SWEDEN

## 4 | RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



NORDICORE's work packages are all progressing. Our Nordic Center of Excellence – NORDICORE – embraces many key research questions, dissemination activities and stakeholder contact.

In the following, we will present some selected main research findings from NORDICORE.

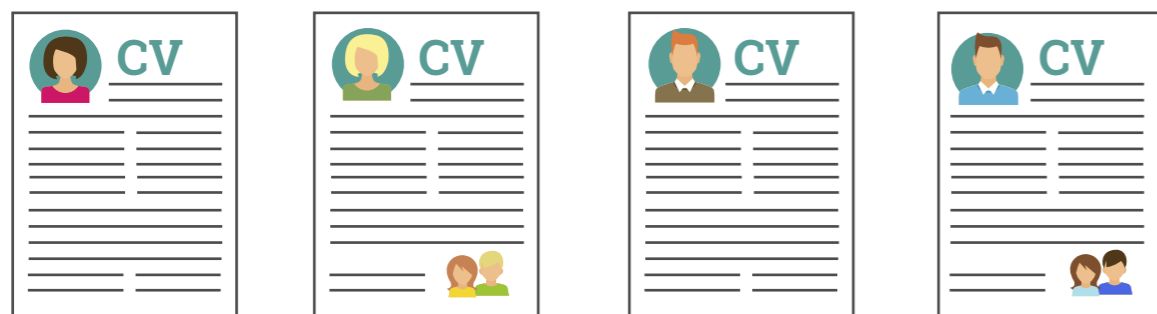


## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM: GENDER BIAS IN ACADEMIC EVALUATION?

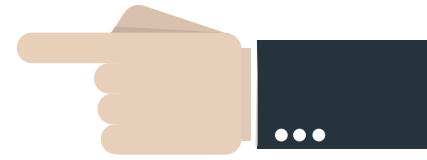
To study the importance of gender bias in academic evaluation in the Nordic context, we have conducted a survey experiment (Carlsson, Finseraas, Midtbøen, Rafnsdóttir 2020). This study examines the role of bias in academic evaluation among faculty members in Economics, Law, Physics, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology from Universities in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.



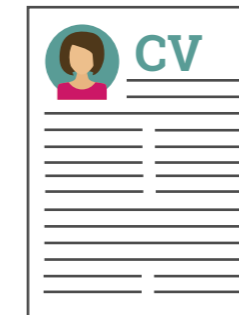
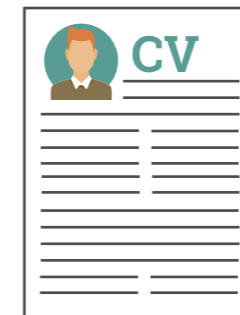
We built on Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) experimental design, asking faculty to rate fictitious applicants' competence and hireability based on typical applicant material (CVs), while like Williams and Ceci (2015), we studied faculty's evaluations of applicants for permanent associate professor positions rather than early-career or even student assistant positions. We used CVs because evaluating a CV is an important part of the hiring process in which stereotypes may play a role, while at the same time being more neutral than a highly positive narrative, which may leave limited room for bias in the evaluation.



Faculty respondents were asked to rate CVs of hypothetical candidates from 1 to 7 according to their competence and hireability. The hypothetical candidates for a permanent position as an associate professor in their discipline were randomly assigned



either a male or a female name. To examine the effects of publication records and children, each participant evaluated two CVs (one with a more extensive publication record) from the same candidate, but were randomly assigned candidates with two, or no children. Importantly, no respondents compared CVs of male and female candidates, as the candidate's gender only varied between respondents. Altogether 775 respondents from 17 universities in Iceland, Norway and Sweden participated in the study.



The main finding was that for both competence and hireability, female CVs received higher ratings than male CVs. This finding was in clear contrast to our expectations. As expected, the average ratings for both males and females were higher when we included the CVs with more publications, but male and female CVs had the same pay-off from additional publications.

Despite the underrepresentation of women in professor positions in all fields, the female candidates were viewed as both more competent and more hireable compared to their male counterparts. The pay-off for children and for a strong CV were not lower for women than for men, and there were no significant differences between the disciplines.

Given these findings, one potential explanation for the persistent gender gap is that the underrepresentation of women in professor positions is the result of sorting mechanisms occurring at earlier stages in the academic career, which — constrained or not — could lead fewer women to ascend to professor positions. Another potential explanation is that bias against female academics occurs earlier in career trajectory: The survey experiment does not rule out the possibility that men experience advantages in other phases of academic life, such as in monitoring, review boards, or peer-review assessments.

We conclude that biased evaluations of equally qualified candidates for associate professor positions do not seem to be the key explanation of the persistent gender gap in academia in the Nordic region.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM:  
**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN  
 ACADEMIC HIRING**



It is important to understand how evaluations are embedded in the organizational process of recruitment, and hence how the criteria for assessing quality are applied in practice in the recruitment process. In an in-depth study of 48 recruitment cases for permanent academic positions in Norway and 52 qualitative interviews with the recruiters involved, we have examined how neutral routines and 'objective' criteria in recruitment may result in an institutional preference for certain types of candidates. By constructing an ideal-type recruitment process comprised of five steps, we show that despite evaluators including diversity concerns in their search for talent during the first stages of the recruitment process, they end up deploying narrow criteria that tend to favor men in the crucial steps of the recruitment process, in which hiring outcomes are determined.



The same data material is further utilized in a study of how excellence is defined in actual recruitment processes. While a significant amount of scholarly work has focused on unconscious biases and deviations from the meritocratic norm, less attention has been paid to the way in which legitimate recruitment is conducted in practice. Moreover, insufficient attention has been paid to the organizational process and procedures, and their role in shaping standards of excellence.



Building on the same data source of 48 recruitment cases for tenure positions at Norwegian universities and 52 qualitative interviews with recruiters, we found different understandings of quality between and within the various steps in the hiring procedure.

To overcome differences and insecurity when faced with a multitude of understandings of quality, and to make decisions, recruiters rely on narrow instruments of evaluation; typically, the number of articles published by applicants in top English-language journals.

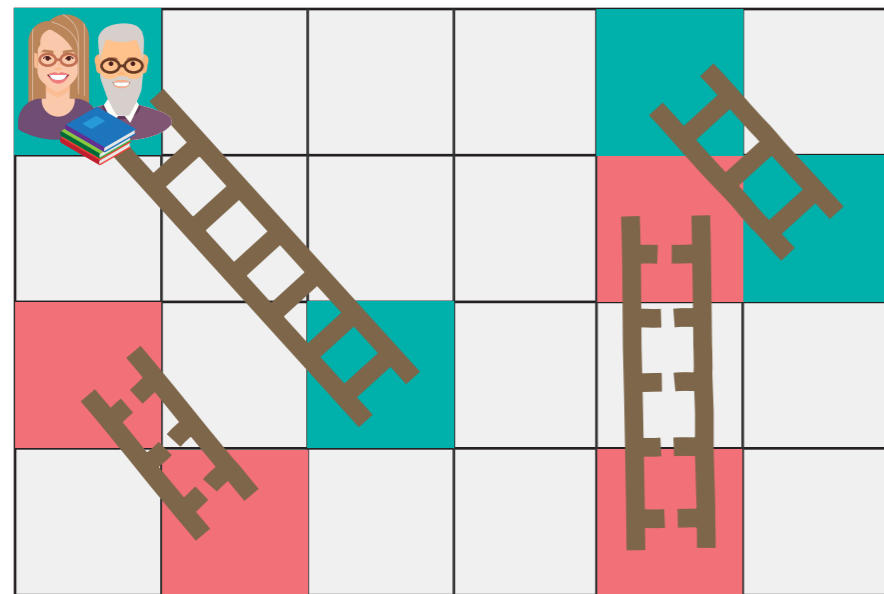


A key insight is that, due to their characteristics and the circumstances in which they are used, these instruments have unintended consequences; they transform the definition of quality and define it narrowly.



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM:

## OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN PROCEDURES OF ACADEMIC HIRING



In another study, we investigated whether low openness and low transparency procedures in academic hiring systematically disadvantage women applicants, as suggested in the international literature. Examples include professorships awarded by direct invitation (as opposed to job calls); contexts where nominally open job calls routinely get only one applicant; and procedural rules that allow the filtering out of qualified applicants without sharing the grounds of the decision with the candidates. We investigated one decade (2007–2017) of hiring of new (associate) professors in one Faculty at the largest university in Norway, NTNU (n = 79) ([Moratti 2020a](#)). The Faculty is a highly gender-equal setting, in that the share of women among associate professors has been >40% for over a decade. We found a high share (about 40%) of women among applicants, maintained among winners, and on overall high degree of openness in the selection procedure when compared to other Scandinavian and Western European studies. Contrary to our expectations, we found no link between low openness in the selection process and gender inequality in the outcome. We conclude that the overall good gender balance locally is an antidote to the potential biasing effect of low-openness and low-transparency procedures, so long as such procedures are used only exceptionally, and their use is clearly tied with organizational contingencies. At the same time, we found no indication that low-openness and low-transparency procedures systematically advantage women.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM:

## THE GENDER EQUALITY PARADOX IN NORDIC ACADEMIA?

A central question is whether the development of gender equality in Nordic academia is slower than one would expect considering developments in the rest of Europe - this has often been raised as a question of whether we are witnessing a particular Nordic gender equality paradox.



The main conclusion from a report on women's and men's employment opportunities in Norwegian universities, of which NORDICORE was central in the preparation, showed that there are no gender differences in employment opportunities (transition probabilities) up to assistant professorships, and relatively small gender differences in the probabilities of being promoted to full professor ([Frølich et al. 2019](#)).

The gender equality paradox in academia are not solely a Nordic paradox. Challenges to gender balanced careers are best understood as a comprehensive problem of most industrialized countries, where we need to better understand the gendered implications of career logics and how they are contributing to unequal career outcomes within different contexts, be it national differences and/or institutional differences.



Women more often than men experience barriers in the balance between family life and work life. However, a finding from the research in NORDICORE is that men also experience challenges related to the balance between work and family. This points to an important challenge for research policy and society of how to change work organizations in a direction that promote diversity and gender balanced career trajectories that are sustainable for all ([Grønlund 2020](#)).

We are investigating this dynamic in a broader labor market perspective, aiming at better understanding different career trajectories in academia in the light of alternative career opportunities in working life. This means that we are concerned with examining gender equality paradoxes that can shed light on barriers to gender balanced careers, but that we challenge the assumption that these are particularly Nordic problems.



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## 5 | PUBLICATIONS 2020

It is a central aim for NORDICORE that our research reach relevant stakeholders and other actors targeting gender equality and diversity in academia. This is to make sure that new and updated knowledge about gender balance and diversity inform ongoing policy and equality work, and to incorporate feedback from stakeholders into our ongoing research efforts.

We regularly communicate our findings and insights to the public and relevant stakeholders so that the knowledge we produce can be applied by policymakers and institutions in their pursuit to change, develop and improve gender equality measures. 2020 was a challenging year in this regard. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the opportunities for communicating our work to stakeholders were limited from March 2020. Despite these limitations we managed to publish several articles, and host digital seminars and workshops.



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Infographic: "[Gender bias in academic recruitment?](#)", published: December 4, 2020.