

# Ending sexual harassment – a precondition for gender equality

Nordic initiatives in the aftermath of #MeToo



**Introduction** – Despite considerable progress in the area of gender equality, serious challenges remain in all of the Nordic countries, one of these being the incidence of sexual harassment. When the #MeToo movement spread around the world, it exposed how common problems of sexual harassment and other types of harassment are. Women, girls and other vulnerable groups testified to the fact of gender-based harassment in the workplace, in the private sphere, and in society in general. That sexual harassment occurs is nothing new, but the #MeToo movement revealed just how widespread the problem is.

A society in which there is gender equality is a society free from sexual harassment. To achieve gender equality, active and continuous efforts are required, so that all people can live a life free from gender-based violence and harassment. The Nordic co-operation Programme on Gender Equality 2019–2022 highlights efforts to combat sexual harassment as particularly urgent and the Nordic co-operation body NIKK, Nordic Information on Gender, has given this issue high priority therefore. NIKK monitors and reports regularly on what is being done in terms of efforts to prevent and combat sexual harassment in the Nordic countries. This publication summarises some of the current initiatives and measures being taken in the Nordic countries. If you would like to know more about legislation against sexual harassment and previous initiatives in the Nordic countries, you can also download our other two publications related to the #MeToo movement: *What does the law say about #MeToo?* (2018) and *One Year after #MeToo – Initiatives and action in the Nordic and Baltic countries* (2018) from [nikk.no](http://nikk.no).

# Initiatives within Nordic co-operation

Sexism, sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based harassment constitute obstacles to gender equality in the Nordic countries. Consequently, efforts to combat these problems are high on the agenda for Nordic co-operation. The issue has been raised in a number of areas of co-operation, and this has led to joint Nordic initiatives and actions of various kinds.

## Nordic countries driving gender equality globally

At the sixty-third session of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women, CSW63, eight Nordic ministers for gender equality handed over a joint declaration promising to deliver on the gender equality goals in Agenda 2030. The eighth and most comprehensive point in this declaration highlights in particular the link between violence committed by men against women and gender inequality in general. The Nordic ministers for gender equality have promised to continue to work actively for all forms of gender-based harassment to cease, and to take into account in particular compound discrimination, where a number of forms of discrimination interact. They invited the other UN countries, in collaboration with the Nordic countries and UN Women, to work for change in order to achieve these gender equality goals. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, stressed that the Nordic countries' wholehearted support for the gender equality goals in Agenda 2030 is an important signal to the other Member States to adopt stronger measures.

*“Recognising the link between men’s violence against women and girls and gender inequality at large, we will continue building policies to end all forms of gender-based and sexual violence and harassment, including by effectively responding to the realities exposed by the #MeToo movement. We recognise that women are rendered even more at risk of discrimination, harassment and violence when gender discrimination is combined with ethnic or racial discrimination and in the case of women with disabilities, LGBT+ women and women who live in poverty. Throughout all our actions we will address this multiple discrimination and we will not rest until all women can live their lives free from violence and the fear of violence.”*

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From the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality Declaration of Support towards the role of UN Women in the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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## Nordic pilot study to increase knowledge

Themes that surfaced in the wake of the #MeToo movement include a lack of knowledge about the causes of sexual harassment, under-reporting of sexual harassment, its perpetrators, its connection with gender-based violence and masculinity norms, and the power and structural relationships that contribute to or hinder the incidence of sexual harassment. The need for more knowledge about gender-based harassment in the workplace, and about sustainable ways to combat the problem, is clearly apparent in the Nordic countries. Individual countries have previously initiated commissions of inquiry and surveys, but there is no overall picture for the Nordic region as a whole. As part of its co-operation in the area of gender equality, the Nordic Council of Ministers has initiated a research-based pilot study which is intended to reveal the knowledge gap concerning sexual harassment in the workplace and how this knowledge gap should be addressed. NIKK has been given the task of carrying out the pilot study, which will be completed in March 2020. The Nordic ministers for gender equality are continuing to discuss how more knowledge about sexual harassment can be gained and to ensure that active measures against sexual harassment continue moving forward.

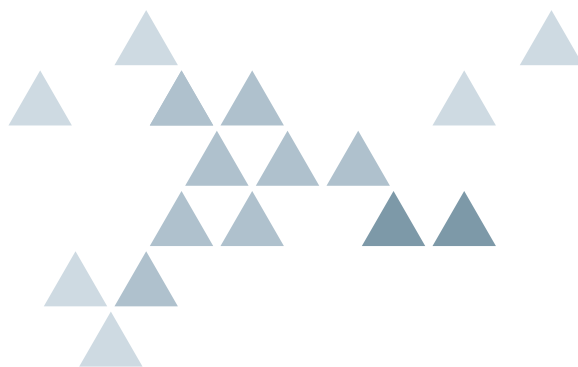
## The #MeToo Moving Forward conference brings the field together

The Nordic and international conference *#MeToo Moving Forward* will investigate the ways in which sexual harassment and other gender-based harassment makes gender inequality systematic and structural. Intersectional perspectives on harassment will be key points of departure when politicians, researchers and activists meet at the conference in Reykjavik to discuss policy

approaches to achieving a society free from sexual harassment. The conference is being organised by the Icelandic Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019 and will take place in mid-September. Men's violence against women and the impact on society of the #MeToo movement are among the priority themes of the Icelandic Presidency during the year.

## Nordic co-operation projects to combat sexual harassment

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Gender Equality Fund supports co-operation within the Nordic-Baltic region on projects related to gender equality. NIKK manages and administers this fund. Several Nordic co-operation projects entail detailed, practical collaborations between government agencies, non-governmental organisations and employer and employee organisations on the issue of sexual harassment. These projects include youth-driven prevention of sexual harassment and violence, and research-based knowledge as a tool in combating sexual harassment and bullying among children and young people. Other projects are focusing on sexual harassment in the workplace within the healthcare sector, and employer-driven prevention of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry. Read more about these projects and get contact details for them on [nikk.no](http://nikk.no)



## Combined efforts in the cultural sector Problems with sexual harassment and other

gender-based harassment in the cultural sector have attracted a lot of attention internationally and in the Nordic countries. In 2018, the eight Nordic ministers for culture promised to shine a spotlight on efforts to combat sexual harassment and for safe workplaces in the cultural sector in the Nordic countries. This has resulted in a project which aims to develop a common concept for efforts to prevent sexual harassment in the cultural sector through exchanging experiences and knowledge-building activities. This project has resulted in roundtable discussions in each country and in each area, and a major tour that brought together key actors from the entire Nordic region to debate these issues. This project is being implemented by Nordic cultural centres and institutions in 2019.

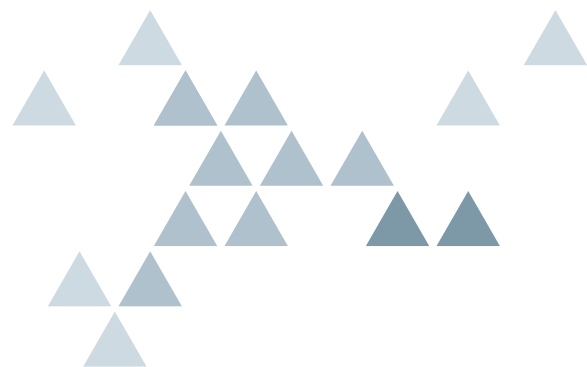
## Handbook on combating sexual harassment in the judiciary

A Nordic countries handbook on combating sexual harassment in the judiciary will be launched in autumn of 2019. This handbook is an initiative of the Nordic governments' co-operation in the area of law, led by the Nordic ministers for justice. The handbook includes examples of how sexual harassment can be prevented and stopped, with a particular focus on workplaces in the legal sector. Work on the handbook has been led by Finland, as part of *#tråkasserifritt Finland*, a campaign that focuses on models for how to intervene when someone else is being subjected to sexual harassment. According to the research, by-standers intervening is an effective means of combating sexual harassment and changing attitudes about what is acceptable in an organisation or other group. By speaking out when someone is

being harassed or when someone says something inappropriate, you are making a positive contribution to a better organisational culture and reducing the incidence of harassment.

## How parliaments are combating harassment

In June 2019, the Norwegian parliament's delegation to the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council's Committee for Welfare in the Nordic Region invited the Nordic countries' parliaments to roundtable talks on gender equality, where the main focus was on how they could work to combat sexual harassment. NIKK's previous summary *One Year after #MeToo* (2018), and our analysis of what still needs to be done in the future, formed the basis for further discussions about how the Nordic countries' parliaments can work preventively and develop frameworks to combat sexual harassment. The Council of Europe's campaign *#notinmyparliament* was also highlighted. The MPs discussed the need for an independent body in their national parliaments for handling complaints about sexual harassment while emphasising the responsibility of the political parties in this arena. All were in agreement that these efforts to combat sexual harassment must continue and the delegation from Sweden's parliament concluded by welcoming its Nordic colleagues to the next Nordic roundtable talks.



# Initiatives in the Nordic countries

In the Nordic countries, there are ongoing efforts to combat sexual harassment in a range of policy areas including the judiciary, schools, children and young people, the workplace, social services and health-care. A sample of the decisions, measures, projects and other initiatives to combat sexual harassment at the national level in the Nordic countries is presented here.

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This publication aims to bring together a sample of the many initiatives currently being taken to combat and prevent sexual harassment in the Nordic countries. Much has happened within the Nordic co-operation and at the national level in the Nordic countries. The initiatives described in this publication are not all that are being undertaken. If you would like to be kept up to date with new information about what is happening in efforts to combat sexual harassment in the Nordic countries, follow NIKK via our information mail-outs and on our social media channels.

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## DENMARK

### Strengthening of legislation

On 1 January 2019, amendments to Denmark's antidiscrimination act came into force. Amendments to this legislation have served to highlight the prohibition on sexual harassment in the workplace that already exists. The law now explicitly states that equal working conditions also mean a prohibition on sexual harassment. The Act also stresses that workplace jargon may not be used as a mitigating circumstance or excuse when cases of sexual harassment are being investigated.

### Higher level of damages for victims

Cases of sexual harassment are handled by the Equality Board or by the civil courts in Denmark. As the result of the law change mentioned above, the average level of damages for victims of sexual harassment has been raised by one third. The size of the damages depends on the Equality Board's or the court's valuation and the individual circumstances in the case.

### Strengthening of the regulatory framework

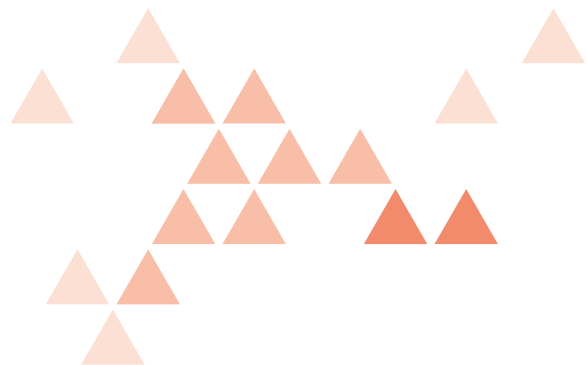
In autumn 2018, the Danish Working Environment Authority amended its executive orders on the performance of work. These executive orders establish the need to ensure that the workplace is free from sexual harassment and the health risks that harassment entails, even if the harassment is not systematic in nature such as with bullying, which was previously the case. The amendment means that the concepts of sexual harassment and bullying have moved further apart than was the case previously. The amendment also means that the supervisory authority is required to act against workplaces where the workplace culture is characterised by offensive jargon of a sexist nature, even when it is not being directed against individuals.

### New guidelines for employers

In February 2019, the Danish Working Environment Authority published new guidelines for dealing with workplace bullying and harassment. The guidelines target primarily employers and focus in particular on how bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace can be prevented and how these phenomena can be dealt with when they do occur. It is apparent from the preventive measures that great importance has been attached to creating a working environment in which there are clear standards for how employees and management are expected to behave and for what is not acceptable. It is also important that there are clear rules concerning sanctions for those who harass or bully others.

### Danish Government meets with music festivals

Problems of sexual harassment at music festivals have received a lot of attention in Denmark and in several other Nordic countries as well. The Danish Government has addressed this problem by holding meetings with Denmark's biggest music festivals. At these meetings, they have discussed best practice to prevent and deal with the problem of people who sexually harass others at music festivals.



## FINLAND

### Finland's new government committed to acting against harassment and threats

Prime Minister Antti Rinne's Government programme states that during the Government's term of office (until 2023), it will be taking horizontal measures to more effectively address systematic harassment, threats and targeting that pose a threat to freedom of expression, official activities, research, and media freedom. The Government will ensure sufficient resources and skills for the prevention and detection of the offences mentioned above. Systematic monitoring of discrimination and hate crime will be promoted at the national and international levels. Gender equality assessments will be included in these measures to provide a cross cutting perspective.

### Guidebook for workplaces

In spring 2018, the guidebook *Free from Harassment – a guidebook to prevent and intervene in sexual harassment at workplaces* was published through the Working Life 2020 programme – an initiative to improve the quality of working life. The programme is being coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in co-operation with an extensive network of various employee and employer organisations, regional bodies and other organisations. Through the network, the guidebook on how to prevent and intervene in sexual harassment has reached thousands of employers around the country.

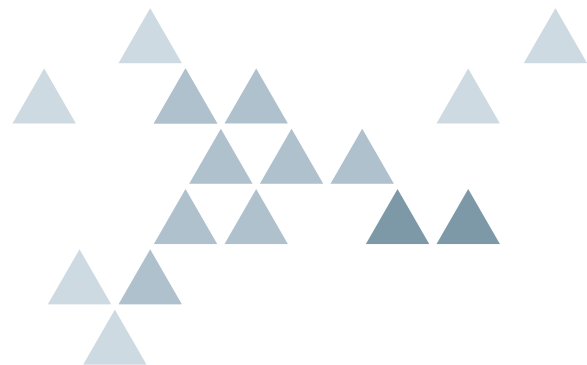
### Report on harassment and other inappropriate treatment in the theatre and film industries

The Ministry of Education and Culture published an extensive report on sexual harassment in the culture sector in September 2018. The report investigated whether film production companies

have fulfilled their employer obligations under Finland's labour law. The report also analysed whether cases of harassment and other inappropriate treatment were due to deficiencies in the legislation or a lack of competence in the practical application of it. According to the report, there were shortcomings in recognizing the obligations set out in Finland's labour legislation, as well as a lack of clarity about power and authority relationships. In some cases, preventive measures were lacking. Furthermore, the report indicates that there is scope for reviewing and tightening the legislation.

### Measures to ensure better conditions in the culture sector

As a result of the report on harassment and other inappropriate treatment in the theatre and film industries, several actions have been taken. The Ministry for Education and Culture has resourced training on employer obligations and the production of educational materials for the film and theatre industries in order to better identify and enforce employer legal obligations. The state aid task force of the same ministry has also prepared a mechanism for clarifying compliance with employer obligations in the context of government grant applications. Launched in 2019, this will apply in particular to operating grants from the Ministry and operating grants from the Finnish Centre for Art Promotion and the Finnish Film Foundation.





## ICELAND

### Expert group on gender-based violence appointed by the Prime Minister

In March 2018, Iceland's Prime Minister appointed a group of experts for efforts to combat gender-based violence. This group is investigating court procedures in cases of sexual harassment to identify opportunities for improvement. It is also investigating how measures to combat gender-based violence can be coordinated between different sectors. The work of this group has resulted in Iceland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence of 2018. A particular focus area in this group's work is formulating policy on measures to combat digital violence.

### Unique study on the impact of trauma on women's health

The SAGA (Stress-And-Gene-Analysis) cohort is a unique nationwide study on the impact of trauma on women's health lead by the University of Iceland, in collaboration with deCODE Genetics. All women living in Iceland, 18-69 years were invited to participate in an extensive online questionnaire assessing health and trauma history. Participating women provided an informed consent for record linkage to the nationwide health registers as well as to genetic data at deCODE Genetics. In July 2019, approximately 32,000 women had enrolled in the study. The SAGA cohort aims to be one of the largest scientific undertakings specifically designed for improved understanding the impact of trauma on women's health and the potential genetic underpinnings of varying trajectories of health after exposure to such trauma. As such, the results may in the future contribute to prevention and treatment of adverse health consequences suffered by the large populations exposed to trauma. The study is

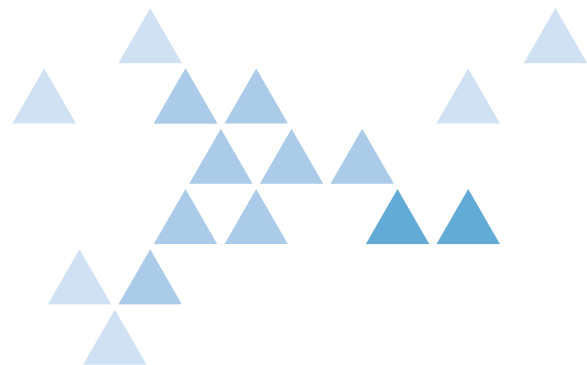
funded by the European Research Council and the Icelandic Research Fund.

### Proposal for measures against sexual harassment and violent behaviour in sports and youth work

Iceland's Minister for Education, Science and Culture has appointed a committee that recently presented a proposal for measures to combat sexual harassment and violence in sports and youth work. The committee was appointed after reports of sexual harassment from women in sports in connection with the #MeToo movement. The proposed measures include the victim being able to report the matter to a neutral party, which is then to be responsible for taking the process further. An additional proposal is to introduce a ban on employing individuals convicted of sexual offences. A complete bill is anticipated in autumn 2020.

### Focus on foreign women's experiences

Women with a foreign background are at a particularly high risk of finding themselves in vulnerable situations compared with women born in Iceland with well-established networks in the country. The Ministry of Welfare is now working with the University of Iceland on a project concerning this issue. The project was initiated by the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing (under the Ministry of Welfare) and aims to identify and analyse knowledge about the situation for foreign women in Iceland.



## NORWAY

### Low threshold service for hearing cases of sexual harassment

In June 2019, the Norwegian parliament passed the government's bill on establishing a low threshold service for hearing cases of sexual harassment. The new law states that the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal is to be established as a low threshold service, which will allow it to enforce the prohibition on sexual harassment under the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act. Previously, cases of sexual harassment were handled by a court. But in practice however, few cases have gone to court and the need for a more accessible service to deal with the problem was identified. The aim of this low threshold service is to give individuals who have been the victims of sexual harassment a cost-free alternative to court proceedings. The service is intended to make reporting harassment and having one's case heard easier and more accessible.

### Expanded powers concerning damages and support

As a result of the change in the law, the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman has been given expanded powers concerning decisions on damages claims in cases of sexual harassment in the workplace. The amended legislation also strengthens the role and duty of the gender equality and anti-discrimination representative to help and support individuals who have been the victims of sexual harassment.

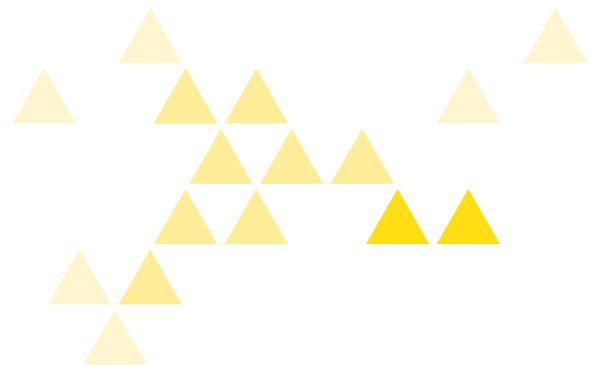
### Enhanced activity and reporting obligations for employers

The activity and reporting obligations in Norway's Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act concerning sexual harassment have been strengthened. The amended, stricter legislation means that all employers are required to work actively to prevent

and hinder bullying, sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace and that employers are required to document these efforts. The same requirements apply to educational institutions.

### Vigorous efforts to combat harassment in the defence forces

Norway's defence forces have been working actively with a number of measures. An extensive inquiry into bullying and sexual harassment in the organisation has been carried out. The existing regulatory framework will be reviewed and revised in order to clarify the rules and bring them together into one directive. An additional measure is that education and skills-building activities at all levels will be quality assured, with a particular focus on measures to combat harassment.



## SWEDEN

### **Sex education has been strengthened and developed**

The government has tasked the Swedish National Agency for Education with reviewing the need for changes in the curriculum to better support sex and relationships education. The Swedish Agency for Education has also been tasked with implementing measures and allocating funds to develop sex education in schools and for work to combat bullying in schools in order to strengthen efforts to prevent sexual harassment. This task also covers civil society organisations, trade unions and school council organisations.

### **Spreading knowledge with the emphasis on children and young people**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has been tasked with gathering and communicating knowledge about sexual harassment, in particular where children and young people are concerned. The Agency also has the task of communicating knowledge about and developing methods for use in universal violence prevention efforts with children and young people, including methods for the prevention of violence in young people's intimate partner relationships.

### **Awareness campaign about sexual offences legislation targeting young people**

On 1 July 2018, Sweden's new sexual offences legislation came into force. The new legislation on consent means that a person who perpetrates sexual intercourse or a similar sexual act with a person who is not a voluntary participant in the act can be charged with and convicted of rape. To broadly increase awareness about the new legislation, the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority has been tasked with developing web-based educational materials including a teacher's

guide on the implications of the new sexual offences legislation. The target audience is young people aged 13–25 years. Among other things, the authority has conducted an awareness campaign entitled *Of your own free will* which is being widely distributed with the aid of young adults who are well-known among young people.

### **Knowledge boost based on vulnerable groups' #MeToo call for action**

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare is tasked with conducting training efforts for social services personnel about violence in intimate relationships and men's violence against women. The needs identified as part of the #MeToo call for action by the vulnerable groups encountered by social services is to form the basis of this training. These groups include older people, people with disabilities, people with drug or alcohol dependence problems or people with experience of prostitution and human trafficking. This task will be carried out in co-operation with the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, which has produced five films in collaboration with representatives of the calls for action, in order to communicate information about the living conditions of these groups.

### **Digital platform for employers**

The Equality Ombudsman in conjunction with the Work Environment Authority have developed a joint digital platform to provide information to support employers in preventing and hindering sexual harassment in the workplace. These two government agencies have since been tasked with producing the information and communicating it on the digital platform in 2019. The Equality Ombudsman has also been tasked with taking action in the form of communications efforts to increase knowledge among employers on what Sweden's Discrimination Act requires of them in terms of active measures.

*Ending sexual harassment – a precondition for gender equality: Nordic initiatives in the aftermath of #MeToo* highlights a sample of measures to combat sexual harassment, taken by the Nordic co-operation as well as on national level in the Nordic countries. The publication is produced by NIKK, Nordic Information on Gender, and is based on material collected from representatives for the Nordic co-operation as well as from the countries.

**Ending sexual harassment – a precondition for gender equality: Nordic initiatives in the aftermath of #MeToo**

This publication is produced by NIKK, Nordic Information on Gender, a Nordic cooperative body commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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