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The Young Academy  
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Association of  
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# Nordic and Baltic statement on gender equality in academia

**The purpose of this joint statement, developed at the initiative of the Nordic young academies and further reinforced with the support of the Baltic young academies, is to identify initiatives and strategies that may improve gender equality in academia. We take gender equality to be not only a matter of fairness, but also a powerful tool for greater diversity, leading to higher quality and excellence in science. This statement is aimed at universities, research councils and decision makers in the Nordic and Baltic countries.**

## Background

The Nordic countries are often referred to as the countries with the highest gender equality in the world. In such circumstances, explicit goals and initiatives for gender equality can be perceived as superfluous, as the current imbalance is expected to fix itself with time. However, if we want to achieve gender equality within a reasonable period of time, targeted initiatives should be introduced. Also, women may face specific obstacles at major points of career development preventing them from reaching the top (e.g. implicit bias<sup>1,2</sup>, stereotype-threat<sup>3</sup> and outright discrimination<sup>4</sup>). Such obstacles need to be addressed since they may not resolve themselves over time. According to a report by the Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>5</sup>, there is a loss of women across the academic career pipeline, and all the Nordic countries have a relative underrepresentation of women among professors and in top research leadership positions. Moreover, discrimination on the basis of gender may be compounded by discrimination on the basis of sexuality and ethnic background, which means that for instance ethnic minority women risk facing double discrimination. A recent survey by the Young Academy of Norway found that

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<sup>1</sup> Reuben E, Sapienza P and Zingales L, *How stereotypes impair women's careers in science*. PNAS, 2014 111(12) 4403-4408

<sup>2</sup> Banaji, M. A., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer SJ, Logel C and Davies PG, *Stereotype Threat*. Annu Rev Psychol, 2016 (67) 415-437

<sup>4</sup> Shen H, *Inequality quantified: Mind the gender gap*. Nature, 2013 (495) 22-24

<sup>5</sup> Bergman, Solveig and Linda M. Rustad (2013) *Norden – et steg nærmere kjønnsbalance i forskning?* Nordisk Ministerråd. Retrieved from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:700587/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

women are less certain than men that they will be working in research in the future and are less likely to recommend a research career to others.<sup>6</sup>

Academic institutions need to pay closer attention to these challenges and integrate gender equality goals within their overarching strategies, policies and culture, building on the important gender equality initiatives already undertaken by universities in the Nordic countries. We urge leaders and decision-makers at academic institutions, research funding agencies, and politicians to consider and adopt the following measures relating to recruitment, promotion and funding allocations; leadership and gender equality targets; working conditions; international mobility, and academic publishing and conferences.

## Recruitment, promotion, research funding:

We believe that visible and radical changes in gender equality can be obtained through changes to processes of recruitment, promotion and allocation of research funding. Institutions and committees involved in these processes should:

- Make evaluation criteria transparent.
- Subject hiring processes to quality control.
- Provide all committee members with explicit knowledge and awareness of implicit bias, and of techniques to keep it from wrongly disadvantaging candidates, following, for example, the Swedish Research Council's strategy.<sup>7</sup>
- Nominate both genders as representatives for scientific employees ("the committee of experts") in committees for hiring, promotion and research funding. Be aware of the division of responsibilities in such committees.
- Encourage gender diversity in the nomination of candidates for scientific prizes. Self-nomination may increase the number of female candidates.
- Consider the length of parental leave when evaluating applicants' merits and scientific performances

## Leadership

We see improvement of gender equality and a better balance of men and women in academia as a leadership responsibility. Leadership within academic institutions and funding bodies should use gender balance targets as a leadership tool, and:

- Provide explicit and ambitious goals for gender balance in academic positions, among project leaders and also among partners in large research projects.
- Provide publicly available statistics of gender balance among both applicants and holders of academic positions and among leaders at different levels, and

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<sup>6</sup> De Moor, K., Knutsen, C. H., Lind, G., Hølleland, H., Midtbøen, A., & Storeng, K. 2018. *Young Researchers in Norway. Career Paths and Ambitions*. Report published by the Young Academy of Norway.

<sup>7</sup> Swedish Research Council (2017) A gender-neutral process – Gender equality observations in the Swedish Research Council's review panels 2016. Retrieved from [https://www.vr.se/download/18.flbedda162d16aa53a2440f/1555334963573/A-Gender-Neutral-Process-Panels-2016\\_VR\\_2017.pdf](https://www.vr.se/download/18.flbedda162d16aa53a2440f/1555334963573/A-Gender-Neutral-Process-Panels-2016_VR_2017.pdf)

among applicants and recipients of research funding, unless anonymity of the candidates is compromised.

- Provide sufficient economical resources for initiatives needed to achieve goals of gender balance (e.g. extension of employment contract after parental leave, covering teaching and administrative tasks after parental leave).
- Explicitly state improvement of gender balance in the employment contract of leaders in research areas/departments with a heavy gender bias.
- Include experience with work on gender equality among the desired qualifications in announcements for senior leader positions (rectorate and faculty level).

## Temporary employees/parental leave/work-life balance

For young researchers, the period when they are most likely to start a family often coincides with holding temporary positions. This is difficult for both male and female researchers, but since the length of parental leave that women and men take tends to differ, women may face particular challenges. We urge academic employers to implement initiatives directed towards young researchers in temporary positions to prevent the loss of talent from this group, and advise the following actions, whenever legally possible:

- Extend the period of employment for temporary employees (men and women) with a parental leave exceeding six months<sup>8</sup> or with a long period(s) of sick leave due to parenthood (c.f. pregnancy or sick children).
- Provide more attractive working conditions and clearer career paths for young researchers, including career guidance with a clearer focus on career options and goals.
- Strive for a cultural change where fixed-term colleagues are seen as assets. This includes creating more inclusive working environments where researchers in temporary positions may take part in all aspects of academic life, including teaching and supervision, strategic discussions, and committee work.

## Mobility in a gender perspective

Internationalisation and mobility can increase the quality of research through, for example, the opportunity to collaborate with other researchers and experience different research environments. It is – and should be – a natural part of research and higher education. However, an increased focus on mobility and internationalisation in academia also raises several issues that should be taken into consideration when targeting gender equality. First, it may be difficult to take a family on a research stay abroad. Also, women often have a lower salary than men<sup>9,10</sup>, and may be more likely to give up their mobility

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<sup>8</sup> At NTNU in Norway, PhD and postdoctoral fellows with a parental leave exceeding six months can apply for a one-month extension of the period of employment.

<sup>9</sup> Swedish Higher Education Authority, (2018) *Higher education in Sweden 2018 status report*. Retrieved from <https://english.uka.se/download/18.7f89790216483fb85588e86/1534509947612/Report-2018-06-26-higher-education-in-Sweden-2018.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Finnish Union of University Professors (2019) *Palkkaselvitykset 2018*. Retrieved from [https://professoriliitto-fibin.directo.fi/@Bin/c080bb132cf990c0d9bd5d4498da2711/1557826079/application/pdf/836230/Professoriliitto\\_palkkaselvitys\\_2018.pdf](https://professoriliitto-fibin.directo.fi/@Bin/c080bb132cf990c0d9bd5d4498da2711/1557826079/application/pdf/836230/Professoriliitto_palkkaselvitys_2018.pdf)

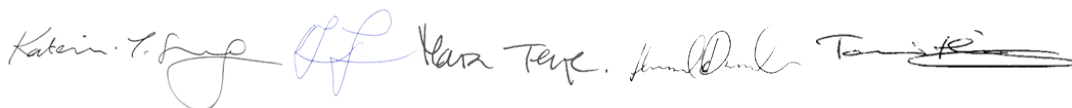
ambitions once they have a family than men. Matters may be even more complicated for families with double careers. Also, the hosting country may have less availability of child care, which may also be very expensive. Finally, a more traditional gender structure of the hosting country may also make a research stay abroad more difficult for women. To meet some of these challenges, we advise institutions or funding agencies to:

- Provide adequate funding for research stays abroad for young researchers with families to cover the actual costs of child care in the hosting country.
- Contribute to facilitating mobility for young researchers by assisting them with practical issues related to the moving process, both at their departure from and upon return to their home institutions.
- Offer dual career planning.
- Recognize and adopt alternative methods for assessing international experience, such as shorter research visits, international conferences and co-authorship and international project collaboration.

## Academic publishing and conferences

In many academic disciplines, women are less likely to publish in prestigious journals<sup>11</sup> and to be invited as plenary speakers at scientific meetings/conferences/workshops. We therefore urge organizing committees of conferences and journal editors to:

- Ensure gender balance among plenary/invited speakers and in discussion panels, round table discussions etc.
- Decrease the risk of implicit bias in peer review assessment, for example by using double blind reviews.
- Instruct reviewers on the topic of implicit bias when double blind review is not possible.
- Ensure gender balance among referees for journal/conference/workshop submissions.



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<sup>11</sup> Nature editorial, *Gender imbalance in science journals is still pervasive*. Nature 2017 **541**, 435–436