

Opposition to gender equality in the Nordic countries

Encounters with anti-gender
politics across civil society,
academia and government

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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://pub.norden.org/temanord2026-522>

Summary

Existing academic research and policy reports indicate that global pushback against gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) advocacy, and LGBTQI+ rights is increasing across Europe. Such pushback is often coordinated and strategically well-funded. However, the impact of this opposition on the daily work of gender equality practitioners remains under-researched.

This study provides an initial assessment of the extent and impact of opposition encountered in gender equality advancement work and LGBTQI+ rights advocacy in the Nordic countries. The aim of the study was to gather data on whether Nordic experts in gender equality advancement had encountered opposition to their work, and if so, to assess its extent, frequency and impact.

The study is based on an online survey distributed to government officials, civil society organisations and academics working as experts within the broad field of gender equality in all the Nordic countries. The survey was designed to examine whether opposition arises in the context of gender equality work carried out by civil society organisations, researchers and government officials. Where such opposition was reported, the survey also assessed its forms and impacts.

A total of 88 responses from organisations and individuals were received from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the Åland Islands, and Greenland. The response rate was 31%, which is typical for online surveys.

Based on the results of this survey, opposition to gender equality work is widespread and frequently takes the form of harassment and intimidation. Across the Nordic countries, reported incidents included threats of legal measures, doxing, and attempts to discredit gender equality expertise. The main trends reported by respondents were as follows:

- 52% had experienced threats or harassment directed at their organisation.
- 44% had experienced threats or harassment directed at an individual or employee.
- Of reported threats or harassments, 35% occurred face to face, 67% via phone calls and email and 93% via social media platforms.

Among those who reported having experienced threats or harassment, the forms included:

- 44% threats or harassment during events organised by the respondent or their organisation.
- 42% threats of legal measures against the respondent or their organisation.

- 25% unauthorised online distribution of personal or sensitive information with deliberate intent to harm (doxing).
- 19% stalking or persecution.
- 16% death threats.
- 12% threats to family members' health and safety.

These findings have both individual and systemic consequences. Respondents reported withdrawing from public engagements, engaging in self-censorship and, in some cases, taking sick leave due to stress and fatigue. Of all respondents, 48% reported that the opposition had a negative impact on their emotional safety and their mental and physical wellbeing. In addition, 26% reported withdrawing from work-related tasks such as public appearances and advocacy.

Beyond the personal impact, such forms of intimidation undermine democratic participation and academic freedom and may also constrain policy development in the field of gender equality advancement. Reflecting these concerns, 60% of respondents anticipated an increase in violent extremism in the Nordic region within the next two years, and 82% perceived gender equality to be under threat.

In order to avoid opposition, respondents reported completely avoiding or taking extra precautions when advocating for or speaking about LGBTQI+ rights (46%), gender equality issues in general (29%), sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education (19%), sexual and gender-based violence (18%), and violence against women and girls or migration (16%).

The findings of the study provide a preliminary picture indicating that this type of opposition is not simply an expression of differing values or political opinions. Rather, opposition to gender equality work, SRHR and LGBTQI+ rights restricts and slows progress in gender equality advancement work across the Nordic countries.

The findings also indicate that recurring online intimidation and discursive pushback in particular are associated with increased self-censorship and pressure to alter or avoid gender equality terminology, including among government officials.

Because gender equality experts maintain a strong online presence as part of their professional participation in public debate, their visibility also increases their exposure to hostility. As a result, digital harassment is not only a security concern but also affects the conditions for public participation. This pattern is consistent with existing Nordic research identifying online hostility as a factor that restricts public debate.

Based on the findings of this report, there is an urgent need to recognise discursive pushback not only as a potential safety threat but also as a substantive challenge

to the core values underpinning Nordic democratic institutions and gender equality policy cooperation, including equal participation in public debate and the right to work free from harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence. The report also provides insights into possible counter-strategies and preventive measures. According to survey respondents, the most important support mechanisms include stronger legal protections, public statements supporting targeted individuals, as well as psychological support and supervisor training.

Do experts in gender equality advancement encounter opposition to their work?

52% of respondents reported experiencing opposition directed at their organisation. 44% reported experiences of opposition directed at an individual or employee.

How frequent is the encountered opposition, and what are the main forms of it?

Opposition was reported to occur frequently and appeared to increase with the respondent's online visibility.

What is the concrete impact of encountered opposition on gender equality work?

48% reported that opposition had a negative effect on their emotional and physical wellbeing. As a result, 26% withdrew from work-related tasks, including public appearances and advocacy activities.

Best practices. What preventive foresight strategies and support mechanisms have been most beneficial?

The most valued support mechanisms were stronger legal protections (47%), public statements supporting targeted individuals (46%), and psychological support combined with supervisor training (44%).

1. Introduction

The Nordic countries are widely recognised as leaders in gender equality. For nearly two decades, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden have consistently ranked among the most gender-equal countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Reports. In 2025, Iceland ranked first for the 16th consecutive year.^[1] Similarly, for the past decade, the European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) Gender Equality Index has consistently placed Sweden, Finland, and Denmark among the top ten EU countries.

However, research on Nordic equality and anti-discrimination policies has highlighted barriers to achieving gender equality in practice. These include gender-based violence, sexual harassment, pay gaps, austerity measures, unequal distribution of care work, and the underrepresentation of women as CEOs in the information and communication technology sector. In addition, a growing amount of research pinpoints that prolonged structural gender inequality is often compounded by other factors such as age, education, race and minority status.^[2] Intersectional understandings of gender equality highlight how racism and bias against women with disabilities for instance place women from minority groups in a particularly precarious position in Nordic societies.^[3] There is also a recognised lack of long-term, population-level statistics on barriers encountered by gender minorities in the Nordic countries.

Although the Nordic countries rank highly in international gender equality assessments, public perceptions of the realisation of gender equality in practice provide a contrasting perspective.

In Finland, Statistics Finland conducts a Gender Equality Barometer (*Tasa-arvobarometri*) every 3–5 years on assignment from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The most recent survey from 2024 showed that Finnish people generally support the promotion of gender equality, but also believe that full gender equality has not yet been achieved in the country. Similar results have been reported in Norway, where the general public broadly supports gender equality advancement.^[4]

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1. World Economic Forum. (2025, June 20). *Global Gender Gap Report 2025: Key findings*.
 2. Kantola, J., Borchorst, A., Freidenvall, L., Reisel, L., & Teigen, M. (2012); Hellum, A., Ikdahl, I., Blaker Strand, V., & Svensson, E. M. (2024); Corneliussen, H. G. (2021); Lundqvist, M., Simonsson, A., & Widegren, K. (Eds.). (2023); Kjaer, U., Seggaard, S. B., & Shamshiri-Petersen, D. (2025). See also the EIGE statistics on violence against women in Finland and Sweden from 2025.
 3. See for instance: European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2025). *Sixth report on Finland* (adopted 1 July 2025; published 28 October 2025). Council of Europe; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2025). *Sixth report on Sweden* (adopted 19 March 2025; published 17 June 2025). Council of Europe; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). *Sixth Report on Denmark* (adopted 29 March 2022; published 9 June 2022). Council of Europe, Strasbourg.
 4. See Statistics Finland (2024); CORE – Centre for Research on Gender Equality (2024).

In Iceland, a Gallup poll conducted in October 2025 indicated that the population is divided over whether full gender equality has been achieved: 47% believed that full gender equality has been achieved, while 44% believed it has not.^[5]

These results from Finland, Norway and Iceland thus point to a discrepancy between international rankings and popular perceptions of gender equality in everyday life.

In 2021, the Nordic Council of Ministers published a survey report on hate crimes targeting LGBTQI+ people in the Nordic countries.^[6] The report highlighted a need for greater knowledge and policy responses concerning broader opposition to gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHS), and LGBTQI+ rights. In 2022, The Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality (MR-JÄM) launched a Nordic Roadmap (2022–2024) to outline their commitment and response to the pushback. The commitment to promoting gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights was reiterated by the ministers in the 'Pushing for progress' programme (2025–2027).^[7]

In the wider global and European context, a common strategy of discursive opposition involves rebranding gender equality, gender mainstreaming, SRHR, LGBTQI+ rights, intersectional anti-racist work, and academic gender studies as **gender ideology**.^[8] This framing is often presented as a threat to national unity and to the traditional heterosexual family. Such ideas are promoted in particular by certain conservative doctrines within Catholicism, Evangelical and revivalist movements, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various right-wing and far-right populist organisations.^[9] Researchers and policy experts increasingly refer to this phenomenon as anti-gender mobilisation or anti-gender politics. Academic scholars and policy experts have categorised various forms of pushback movements under the umbrella term **anti-gender politics**.^[10]

5. Gallup Iceland (2025).

6. See Nordic Council of Ministers. (2021). Hate crimes targeting LGBTI people in the Nordic countries.

7. For over half a decade, The Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI (MR-JÄM) have expressed concern about what they perceive as growing, organised resistance against gender equality, LGBTI rights and women's and girls' rights in the Nordic region. At their 2021 annual meeting, a Nordic roadmap for responding to pushback was adopted. The Nordic Roadmap on advancing gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and equal rights of LGBTI-persons was set for 2022–2024 (Pushing back the push-back: Nordic Roadmap 2022). The ministers wrote: "resistance to gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and equal rights for LGBTI people is well-organised, well-financed, and well-co-ordinated." (Norden.org 2022).

8. Debates over the meaning of "gender" and "sex," once primarily situated within academic fields such as the social sciences, humanities, psychology, and sexology, have increasingly shifted to social media and opinion-based platforms. This reflects broader dynamics of anti-gender mobilisation, where arguments often disengage from established scholarly frameworks and instead focus on the delegitimation of minority groups, particularly transgender people. See Paternotte, D. (2023); Saresma (2018) and Connell, R. W., & Pearse, R. (2020).

9. See Garbagnoli, S. (2016), Fassin, É. (2024); Stoeckl, K. (2020); Kahlina, K. (2024); Dick, H. (2021); Akkerman, T. (2015); Mascolo, G. L. (Ed.). (2023); Norocel, O. C., & Pettersson, K. (2022); Sigvaldason, G., & Ómarsdóttir, S. B. (2022). For Islamic anti-gender mobilisation in Europe, see for instance: Unal, D. (2025). For the complex anti-gender setting in the context of Ukraine, see: Shevtsova, M. (2025).

10. Growing, coordinated opposition to gender equality in Europe as well as the Nordic region has been documented in research from several academic disciplines for over ten years. See: Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (Eds.). (2017); Korolczuk, E., Graff, A., & Kantola, J. (2025); Kahlina, K., Ristivojevic, D., & Rundgren, H. (2025); Dietze, G., & Roth, J. (Eds.), (2020); Engebretsen, E. L. (2022), Norocel, O. C., & Pettersson, K. (2025); Karlberg, E., Korolczuk, E., & Sältenberg, H. (2025); Sältenberg, H., Díaz Fernández, S., & Caravantes, P. (2025); Beyer Gregersen, A., Meret, S., & Rolandsen Agustin, L. (2025). There are also several, ongoing, high level research projects on these thematic in the Nordic region and Europe. See for instance the Nordic research project "An ethnographic exploration of anti-genderism: ideas, identities and political practices in the Nordic region", at Uppsala University, funded by the Swedish Research Council (2021-2026) and "Anti-Gender Trouble: Concepts of Democracy in Conflict", at University of Helsinki, funded by the Research Council of Finland (2024-2028), as well as the European research consortiums CCINDLE: <https://ccindle.org/about-us-consortium/>; RESIST <https://theresistproject.eu/what-we-have-found/#Map> and Pushback lash: <https://pushbacklash.eu/>

Definition of anti-gender politics

In this report, *anti-gender politics* refers to coordinated and often transnational efforts that seek to contest and undermine gender equality. These efforts typically frame gender equality advocacy and related policies as forms of ideological propaganda or indoctrination. The term *politics* is used here in the broadest sense. It refers to the collective practices through which individuals, grassroots movements, civil society organisations, and political parties mobilise supporters, articulate interests, contest power, and seek to shape public norms and institutions. In this context, politics does not refer only to formal government action, legislation, or public policy, but to the wider field of social and political activity in which ideas, values, and power relations are publicly negotiated and contested.^[11]

This report joins the critical intervention to pushback against gender equality work. The report was commissioned by the Council for Gender Equality in Finland (Tane) as part of the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2025. The project was carried out in partnership with the Coalition of Women's Associations in Finland (NYTKIS).

The survey results presented and discussed in this report provide a preliminary snapshot of encounters with opposition to gender equality work and its impact. The report serves as a starting point for discussion and highlights the urgent need for follow-up research on the manifestation of anti-gender politics in the Nordic countries. Further research is also urgently needed on the strategic, foreign influence and funding networks behind coordinated opposition to gender equality in the Nordic countries. The results and discussion presented in this report are not intended to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon and cannot be generalised.

1.1 Previous research on opposition to gender equality in Europe

Numerous academic studies, policy reports and briefings have documented the growth of coordinated and heavily funded opposition to gender equality in Europe over the past decade.^[12] The undermining and rollback of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), LGBTQI+ rights, and attempts to defund academic institutions have become common features of political campaigning to the extent that this opposition is widely

11. For a specific use of the term "anti-gender politics", see for instance Norocel, O. C., & Petterson, K. (2025). For the broad sense of politics, see Urbinati, N. (2006) and (2019).
12. Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (Eds.). (2017); Korolczuk, E., Graff, A., & Kantola, J. (2025); Lavizzari, A. (2025); Unal, D. (2025).

perceived as a threat to European democracy.^[13] Examples of such campaigning over the past decade include the 2013 mass protests and referenda against same-sex marriage in France and Croatia, as well as the 2025 mobilisation in Latvia to withdraw from the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention.

According to a 2025 report by the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF), between 2019 and 2023, funding for hybrid forms of organised opposition to SRHR in Europe was estimated at USD 1.18 billion. This funding supported litigation, referenda, and lobbying of the European Parliament, among other activities. Multidisciplinary research projects funded by the European Research Council indicate that anti-gender actors also target independent media outlets, academic research funding institutions and civil society organisations.^[14] Numerous other coordinated efforts aim to permanently reshape equality, diversity and human rights legislation, policies and institutions within the EU. Research backed evidence suggests that the broader objective is to bypass institutional checks on government power, including human rights commissions altogether.^[15]

The politics of anti-gender mobilisation in Europe has been well researched and documented. Several studies have shown that the organised opposition to gender equality, SRHR, CSE and LGBTQI+ rights is closely connected to the rise of authoritarian populism and far-right extremism. Recent counter-terrorism studies and policy reports also highlight a concerning trend of the use of opposition to gender equality as a key tool for violent, far-right extremist organising.^[16] Research also indicates that this organising is simultaneously an opposition movement against representative, constitutional democracy and its institutionalised, intermediary systems for monitoring political power, such as the independence of the judiciary, media, academic institutions and the pluralism of civil society. The consequences are far-reaching. When opposition to gender equality operates through political parties, not only conservative third sector organisations, it gains momentum to push for institutional changes at both national and international levels.

Recent comparative research based on representative surveys of the general population's attitude towards gender equality in Denmark and Norway point to a new trend: opposition to gender mainstreaming. In both countries, affiliation with right-wing political parties is associated with the perception that gender equality has already been achieved. This perception is linked to support for covert pushback policy measures, such as funding cuts, departmental reorganisations or closures as well as postponement of gender equality advancement and gender mainstreaming.^[17] Similar trends have been observed in Sweden and Iceland.^[18]

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13. Gilby, L., & Koivusalo, M. (2024); Santos, F. G., & Geva, D. (2022); Ahrens, P., Gaweda, B., & Kantola, J. (2022); Alonso, A., & Espinosa, J. (2022); Kováts, E. (2016).
 14. See the European research consortiums RESIST <https://theresistproject.eu/what-we-have-found/#Map> and Pushback lash: <https://pushbacklash.eu/>
 15. Suteu, S. (2025); Götz, J. (2025); Segers, I. B. (2025).
 16. Stenger, H., & True, J. (2024); Ingram, K. M. (2024).
 17. Kjaer, U., Segard, S. B., & Shamshiri-Petersen, D. (2025).
 18. Karlberg, E., Korolczuk, E., & Sältenberg, H. (2025); Sigvaldason, G., & Ómarsdóttir, S. B. (2022).

Existing research indicates that some conservative, populist and far-right parties in Europe and the Nordic region deliberately frame intersectional approaches to gender equality as overly expansive. According to this type of rhetoric, intersectional feminism prioritises the rights of gender minorities and migrants in ways that disadvantage men and boys.^[19] Within this type of discursive opposition, gender equality and human rights are increasingly framed in nationalist terms. Rather than a universal right, equality is presented as part of a Nordic project centred on protecting women and girls from perceived risks associated with migrant men, particularly Muslim men. In this framing, migrant men are constructed as a central challenge to Nordic commitments to equality and diversity, while structural gender inequalities within Nordic societies receive comparatively less emphasis.^[20]

According to existing research, discursive opposition in the Nordic countries takes place, for instance, through public political rhetoric, media debates, blog posts, and newspaper opinion pieces and columns.^[21] Although direct challenges to formal equality legislation may also occur, these forms of discursive pushback primarily aim to reshape public debate so that resistance to gender equality is gradually viewed as reasonable and legitimate. This happens even when formal equality policies remain in place and continue to align with international agreements that commit the Nordic countries to developing and implementing gender equality measures.^[22] For example, gender mainstreaming and academic gender studies programmes are delegitimised as unnecessary, elitist, overly bureaucratic, or too costly. The rhetoric of opposition to gender equality in the Nordic region is therefore sometimes less overt than the high-profile legislative actions and attempts observed in countries such as Hungary, Croatia and Latvia.^[23]

Nevertheless, the Nordic countries are not immune to ideologically motivated forms of violence or even violent extremism. Notable incidents include the 2022 nightclub shooting in Oslo during Pride celebrations. In October 2025, Anna-Karin Hatt, leader of the Centre Party in Sweden, resigned after receiving hate and death threats. According to representatives of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, young women report self-censorship or leaving public office positions altogether for similar reasons.^[24]

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19. According to several academic studies, this trend is partly due to the fact that since the 2000s, new far-right and right-wing populist parties have gradually secured a place in mainstream Nordic parliamentary politics. Norocel, O. C., Saresma, T., Lähdesmäki, T., & Ruotsalainen, M. (2018); Norocel, O. C., & Petterson, K. (2022); Kjaer, U., Seggaard, S. B., & Shamshiri-Petersen, D. (2025). For a broader understanding of counter-extremism work and far-right framings of gender, see: Agius, C., Edney-Browne A., Nicholas L. and Cook, K. (2023).
 20. These dynamics have been theorized as femonationalism (Farris, 2017) and homonationalism (Puar 2007). Femonationalism (Farris, 2017) and homonationalism (Puar, 2007) describe how nationalist and far-right actors use feminist and LGBTQ+ discourses to justify exclusionary or restrictive policies targeting Muslim and racialized communities. See Madsen Evang, J. A. (2022) and Hansen, M. B. (2021).
 21. Askanius, T. et al. (2024); Berg, A., Eriksson, Å., Gemzöe, L. & Malmén, S. (2025); Gunnarsson Payne, J., and Korolczuk, E. (2021); Kantola, J. (2024).
 22. Kjaer, U., Seggaard, S. B., & Shamshiri-Petersen, D. (2025), Sigvaldason, G., & Ómarsdóttir, S. B. (2022).
 23. See Kahlina, K. (2015), for instance.
 24. See: "Rising levels of hate forcing women out of Swedish public life, says equality agency", *The Guardian*, 1.12.2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/01/harassment-and-hate-forcing-women-out-of-swedish-politics>
For global and European trends of this development, see: Tabbush, C., Howell, B., & Turquet, L. (Eds.). (2025); Hunklinger, M. (2025).

Countering anti-gender pushback requires coordinated societal and institutional strategies. It is important to recognise that anti-gender groups often frame opposition as common-sense or grounded in family values, free speech, or religious freedom for instance, while portraying intersectional gender equality advocacy as radical, and develop alternative narratives to challenge these misrepresentations. Effective counter-strategies also include cross-movement coalitions, strategic litigation, policy advocacy, and grassroots initiatives, such as community networks, education, and public awareness campaigns. Furthermore, intersectional approaches must continue to engage men and boys across institutional practices in order to strengthen societal resilience. This, in turn, contributes to Nordic security by embedding inclusive principles within legal, cultural, and governance frameworks.^[25]

25. See Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2024); Zeynep G. G., and Çelik, A. B. (2025); Lewin, T. (2021). For research on Nordic, strategic engaging of men and boys in equality work as well as the importance of challenging essentializing narratives of masculinity as inherently negative, see: Hearn (2007); Berggren, K. (2025); Hearn (2024); Heikkilä, M. (2020). For international context on men and boys, see Meads, D., Lawrence, K. A., Melvin, G., Clark, A., Chondros, P., & King, K. (2025). On how to counter push-back, see the Horizon Europe research project: <https://pushbacklash.eu/> and the Icelandic "Safer Queer Cities" report: <https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2024-12/utsatthet-svenska-hogskolor-universitet-tg.pdf>

2. Aim and method

The aim of this study was to gather survey data on whether Nordic gender equality professionals had encountered opposition to their work and, if so, to examine the extent, occurrence and impact of such opposition. The report is based on an online survey distributed to civil society organisations, academics and government officials working as experts within the broad field of gender equality in the Nordic countries.

The study focuses on the following questions:

- Do experts in gender equality advancement encounter opposition in their work?
- If so, how frequent is it, and what are the main forms of opposition?
- What is the concrete impact of encountered opposition on gender equality work?
- Best practices. What preventive foresight strategies and support mechanisms have been most beneficial?

2.1 Structure and implementation of the survey

The study is based on data gathered from an online survey that was conducted in May–June 2025. The survey was designed to capture potential differences between three sectors of gender equality work and between individual Nordic countries. The target groups of the survey were:

- Civil society organisations
- Academics
- Government officials

The survey questionnaire form was piloted with test respondents from each sector, who provided feedback on its structure and questions. An expert group of six Nordic professors also provided feedback on the questions and structure of the questionnaire. The role of this academic expert group is explained in Appendix II.

Potential respondents were identified through purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. In total, 281 potential participants were contacted: 126 civil society organisations (CSOs)/non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 43 government officials and 112 academics in the Nordic countries. Participants received a personalised link to the survey questionnaire via email with a cover letter containing instructions. To avoid bias towards familiar or value-aligned organisations, the email invited all respondents to refer other relevant participants through a

snowball sampling approach to capture a broader range of perspectives. The communications and questionnaire were in English. Reminders were sent in both May and June.

A total of 88 responses were received, resulting in a 31% response rate, which is typical for online surveys.^[26]

All responses were anonymous. Respondents from civil society organisations could choose whether to respond either as an individual or on behalf of their organisation. Academics could respond as individuals only, not as representatives of an entire institution. Government officials and public sector respondents could only respond as representatives of their institution, not as individuals.

This design reflects the different fields of gender equality work. Civil society organisation participants could answer either as individuals or on behalf of their organisation, as this reflects the overlap between personal engagement and organisational roles. Academic respondents provided individual answers based on their expertise, rather than representing their departments or universities. Government officials responded exclusively as institutional representatives, as this reflects their professional responsibilities within formal policy and administrative tasks.

To ensure respondent objectivity and avoid conflicts of interest, the Council for Gender Equality of Finland (Tane), the Coalition of Women's Associations in Finland (NYTKIS), the six professors in the study's expert group, and the author of this report were excluded from participation in the survey.

Respondents' answers were anonymised to ensure that individual respondents cannot be identified in the reporting of results. Questions about minority status were optional. Government officials were not asked to report minority status, as they represented the entire institution/organisation. An aspect of uncertainty is whether some respondents with a minority background, particularly in smaller geographic regions such as the Faroe Islands, may have been hesitant to respond due to fear of being recognised.

2.2 Theoretical framework and methodology

The study uses descriptive statistics to examine the prevalence and variation of opposition to gender equality work, as well as its impacts. Open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis to identify shared frames and interpretations of what opposition to gender equality entails.

26. Wu, M-J., Zhao, K. and Fils-Aime, F. (2022). There is no reason to assume that the general findings of this report had significantly changed had the response rate been larger.

The theoretical background presumption underlying the analysis and discussion in this report is a discursive and constructive approach to social and political reality that draws on critical frame analysis and discourse theory.^[27] Within the theoretical context of this study, policy actors, civil society organisations and academic experts in gender equality are understood as actively contributing to the interpretation and reframing of gender equality as a contested concept.

An example is the way in which intersectional gender equality advancement reinterprets and reframes gender equality to accommodate structural disadvantage, anti-racism, anti-ableism and transgender rights, for instance. The survey was designed to provide the respondents with a possibility to choose which definition of gender equality best described their work.

The theoretical approach draws and builds on extensive research on anti-gender mobilisation in Europe and the Nordic region, compiled by the author of this report for the purpose of this study.

Against the theoretical background of this study, open-ended survey responses are interpreted as sites contributing to how gender equality is defined and framed, as well as to how opposition to gender equality is understood and experienced by respondents.

Existing research also shows that anti-gender actors and other opponents of gender equality advancement actively reframe existing notions of gender equality, portraying intersectional gender equality advocacy and policy in particular as 'harmful' gender ideology.

Distinguishing between the two different framing processes of 1) advancing gender equality, and 2) discursive opposition to gender equality is essential for the purpose of this study, as treating them as equivalent risks creating false balance. For this reason, the report analyses discursive forms of opposition, characteristic of covert pushback strategies, in a separate chapter on encountered opposition ([chapter 3.6](#)).

2.3 Respondent background characteristics

Of the 88 survey respondents, the largest group consisted of representatives from civil society and NGOs (n = 38), followed by academics (n = 30). Among the academic respondents, 25 were professors, associate professors, or senior lecturers. The remaining respondents represented public sector and government institutions (n = 20). The participation of public sector and government officials is notable, given the relatively small number of gender equality positions in these institutions compared with civil society organisations, NGOs, and academic institutions.

27. See Lombardo, E., Meier, P. eds., (2009); Connell, R. W., & Pearse, R. (2020).

In terms of geographic distribution, the highest number of responses came from Finland (n = 20), followed by Iceland (n = 18) and Norway (n = 18), Sweden (n = 17), and Denmark (n = 11). Greenland and the Åland Islands together provided 4 responses, which are reported collectively. Relative to population size, Iceland, followed by Greenland and the Åland Islands combined, had the highest engagement.

No responses were received from the Faroe Islands, despite attempts to reach gender equality experts there. Previous research from the Faroe Islands, however, indicates that rhetorical opposition to gender equality may be present in this region.^[28]

Respondent distribution by sector

- Civil society/non-governmental organisations: 43.2% (n = 38).
- Academia, research and teaching: 34.1% (n = 30).
- Public sector /government: 22.7% (n = 20).

Respondents by country

- Finland: 22.7% (n = 20).
- Norway: 20.5% (n = 18).
- Iceland: 20.4 % (n = 18)
- Sweden: 19.3% (n = 17).
- Denmark: 12.5% (n = 11).
- Greenland and Åland Islands: 4.6% (n = 4).
- Faroe Islands: 0.0% (n = 0).

Total respondents: 88. Response rate: 31%.

Individual respondents were invited to provide information about minority status, gender, and sexual orientation. Among the civil society/NGO respondents and the academic respondents, 32 chose to provide information about their gender and minority background. Of these, the majority identified as women (72%, n = 23), with a significantly smaller number identifying as men (15.6%, n = 5) and non-binary (9.4%, n = 3) or other (1%, n = 1).

28. Hayfield, E. A., & Vágshøy, J. (2024).

Minority background was included to examine possible correlations between minority status and experiences of opposition to gender equality work. Of the 32 respondents who chose to provide information on their minority status, 56.2% (n =18) identified as belonging to one or more minority groups. 16 respondents provided more detailed information about their minority status in a response option where respondents could provide more details about their intersecting minority identities.

To ensure the respondents' anonymity, only generalised descriptions of minority statuses are provided in this report, when relevant for understanding forms of opposition and impact of opposition on respondents. Responses included various sexual and gender identities, indigenous and religious backgrounds, and non-heterosexual marital status.

2.4 Areas of gender equality work among respondents

To capture the scope and variety of professional experience and expertise in gender equality advancement work across civil society, academia and government in the Nordic region, all respondents were asked about their specific focus areas. Government officials and academics were also asked additional questions about their areas of gender equality expertise.

The majority of respondents specialised in gender equality in the broad sense, followed by LGBTIQ+ rights, human rights, minority rights, trans/intersex issues and women's and girls' rights. Across all three sectors, one third (33%, n = 29) focused on men and masculinities. This proportion is nearly as high as those working on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and/or comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) (35.6%, n = 31), gender mainstreaming (35.6%, n = 31), or anti-racism (36.8%, n = 32). These figures clearly indicate that work and advocacy relating to boys and men constitutes a substantial component of gender equality advancement in the Nordic region.

Other focus areas reported in the open-ended responses (11.5%, n = 10) included social services and social rights, gender-based violence, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence, public health, access to legal assistance, LGBTIQ+ family-related children's rights and gendered power. Figure 1 below illustrates the focus areas among all respondents.

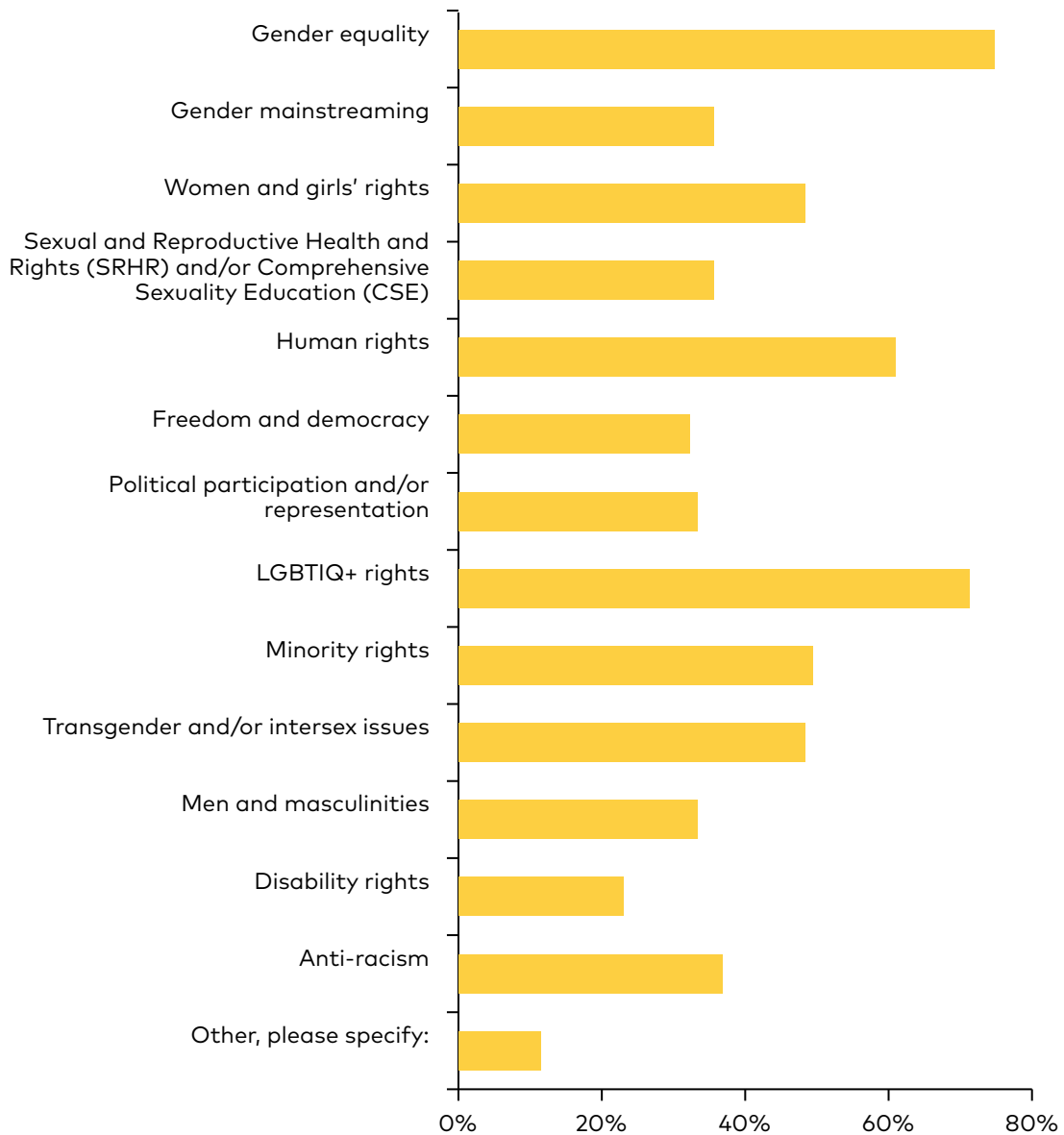


Figure 1: In my everyday work, I/my organization mainly focuses on issues related to [choose all that apply]

Number of respondents: 87

Among government officials, the majority reported working in public policy or foreign policy. Open-ended responses also included equality, equal treatment and human rights. See Figure 2 below.

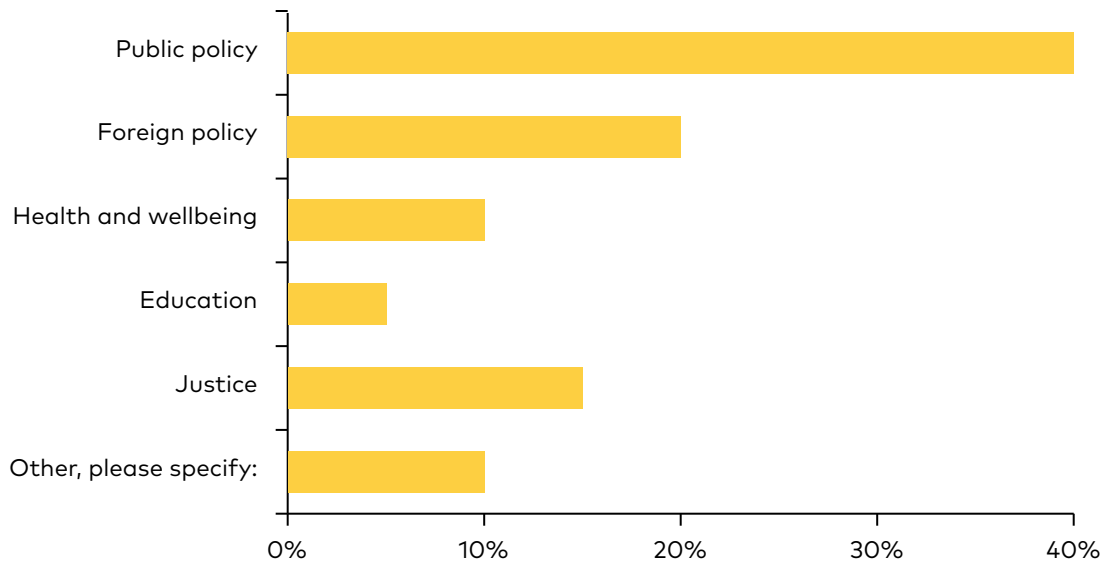


Figure 2: Select the option that best describes your organization's work.

Number of respondents: 20

Figure 3 below shows the range of academic disciplines represented in the survey responses. The majority of academics who responded specialised in gender studies (nearly 70%). This high proportion partly reflects the purposeful and snowball sampling of gender studies scholars, as the survey targeted those academics in particular who conduct research on themes related to gender equality. Other academic disciplines represented included sociology, political science, history, and cultural studies. Open-ended responses also mentioned social work, management and organisational studies, social work and child protection, working life studies and leadership.

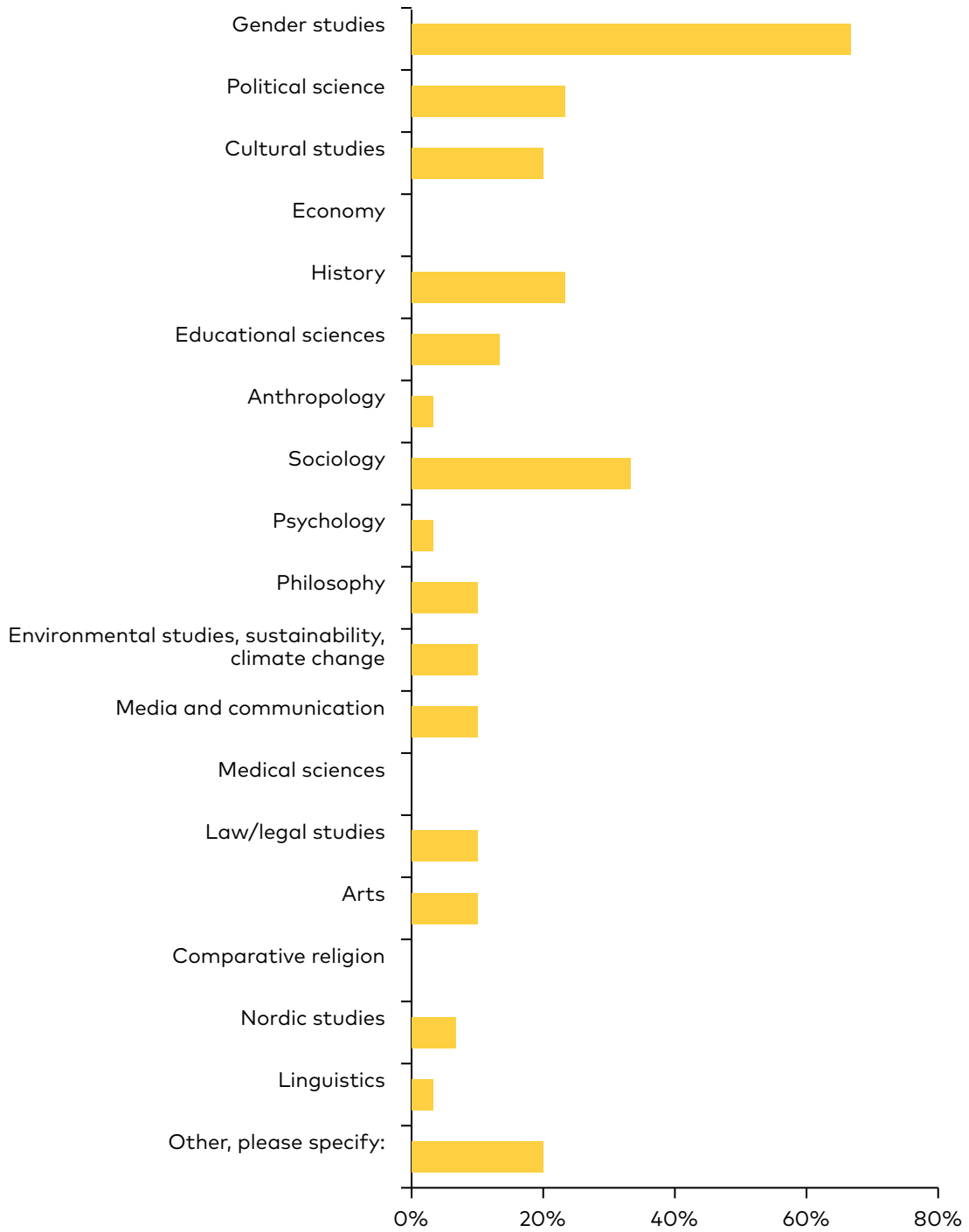


Figure 3: In my academic research and teaching, my main discipline or field is [choose all that apply]

Number of respondents: 30

A substantial majority of respondents (82%, n = 69) from all three sectors reported actively creating content on social media regarding their gender equality work. See Figure 4. This background information is significant, as the study finds a correlation between online presence and the risk of encountering threats or harassment. This pattern has been observed in previous Nordic studies.^[29]

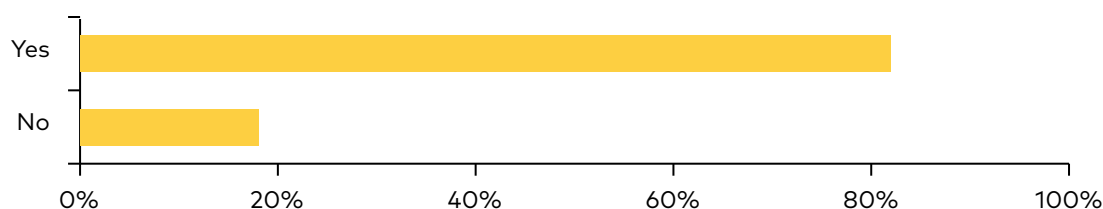


Figure 4: Are you or is your organization actively creating content on social media regarding the work you do for gender equality?

Number of respondents: 84

2.5 Multiple understandings of gender equality

The interpretation of the survey data is grounded in the theoretical premise that respondents actively shape how gender equality is framed, including how opposition to gender equality is defined. Existing research shows that gender equality is a concept with multiple institutional interpretations and definitions, depending on the context, such as public policy, academic research, and civil society advocacy work. Professionals working in different areas of gender equality advancement are also generally aware that there are multiple, and sometimes competing, interpretations of what gender equality entails.^[30]

Different understandings of gender equality, as well as potential shifts in the meaning of the term, are important to consider. These interpretations shape public debate, influence policy development, and guide state funding for the implementation and advancement of gender equality measures across different levels of society in the Nordic countries. For this reason, the survey included background questions that allowed respondents to select from multiple definitions of gender equality work, rather than simply assuming that all respondents have a shared understanding of what gender equality means and consequently, what opposition to gender equality work means.

29. See for instance: "Safer Queer Cities: Understanding Online Safety for LGBTQ+ Individuals in Reykjavik."
30. Verloo, M. (2007).

When respondents were asked which statement best described gender equality in their organisational or individual line of work, the vast majority (87.5%) defined gender equality work as intersectional. This means that they perceived gender equality work to include issues related to gender diversity, men and masculinities, anti-racism and anti-ableism.

A small proportion of respondents defined gender equality more narrowly, either as equality strictly between men and women (3.4%, n = 3) or as work focused exclusively on the rights, health, and advocacy of women and girls (5.7%, n = 5). Three of these responses came from the civil society organisation group and two from the government sector. Further analysis of these respondents' areas of specialisation indicates that they mainly worked on violence against women and girls or identified their work as men's rights advocacy. In contrast, all academic respondents defined gender equality as intersectional. See Figure 5 below.



Figure 5: Please select the statement that best describes gender equality in your line of work [please select one]

Number of respondents: 88

Because government officials responded as representatives of their institutions rather than as individuals, their definitions of gender equality are likely shaped by national legislation and policy decisions, including those informed by international agreements. Their definitions should therefore be interpreted as context-dependent and reflective of both legal and institutional frameworks rather than personal views. Nevertheless, in all Nordic countries and regions represented in the survey, most government respondents also defined gender equality as intersectional. Only two respondents, who were from two different countries, in this group defined gender equality strictly as equality between men and women.

In the open-ended response section (3.4%, n = 3), additional definitions of gender equality work included work related to domestic violence, issues concerning trans women who identify as lesbians, and intersectional work addressing men and boys belonging to minority groups.

3. Manifestations of opposition to gender equality

3.1 Encountered forms of opposition

When asked whether they had experienced threats or harassment related to their own work or that of their organisation, over half of respondents (52%, n = 46) reported having experienced threats or harassment directed at their organisation. Nearly as many (44%, n = 39) reported having personally experienced, or knowing of an individual employee who had experienced, threats or harassment. Just over a third (35%, n = 31) reported no such experiences.

According to the results, most professionals working in gender equality in the Nordic countries have, therefore, experienced opposition to their work, such as threats or harassment directed at themselves, a colleague, or their organisation.

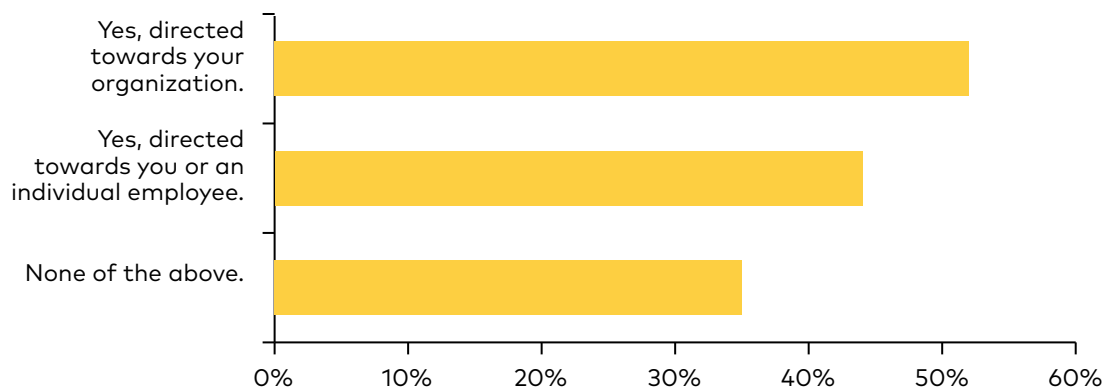


Figure 6: Have you experienced threats or harassment related to your work or your organization's work for gender equality? [Select all that apply.]

Number of respondents: 88

Among respondents who had experienced threats or harassment, 42% reported threats of legal measures directed at themselves or their organisation. One-quarter (25%) had experienced online distribution of personal or sensitive information without their consent, often with deliberate intent to harm (doxing). Other forms of harassment included stalking or persecution (19%), death threats (16%), and threats to the health or safety of family members (12%).

Harassment occurred through multiple channels: 67% via text messages and/or emails, and 35% in in-person encounters. Just under half (44%) reported experiencing threats or harassment during events organised by their own gender equality organisation. See Figure 7 below.

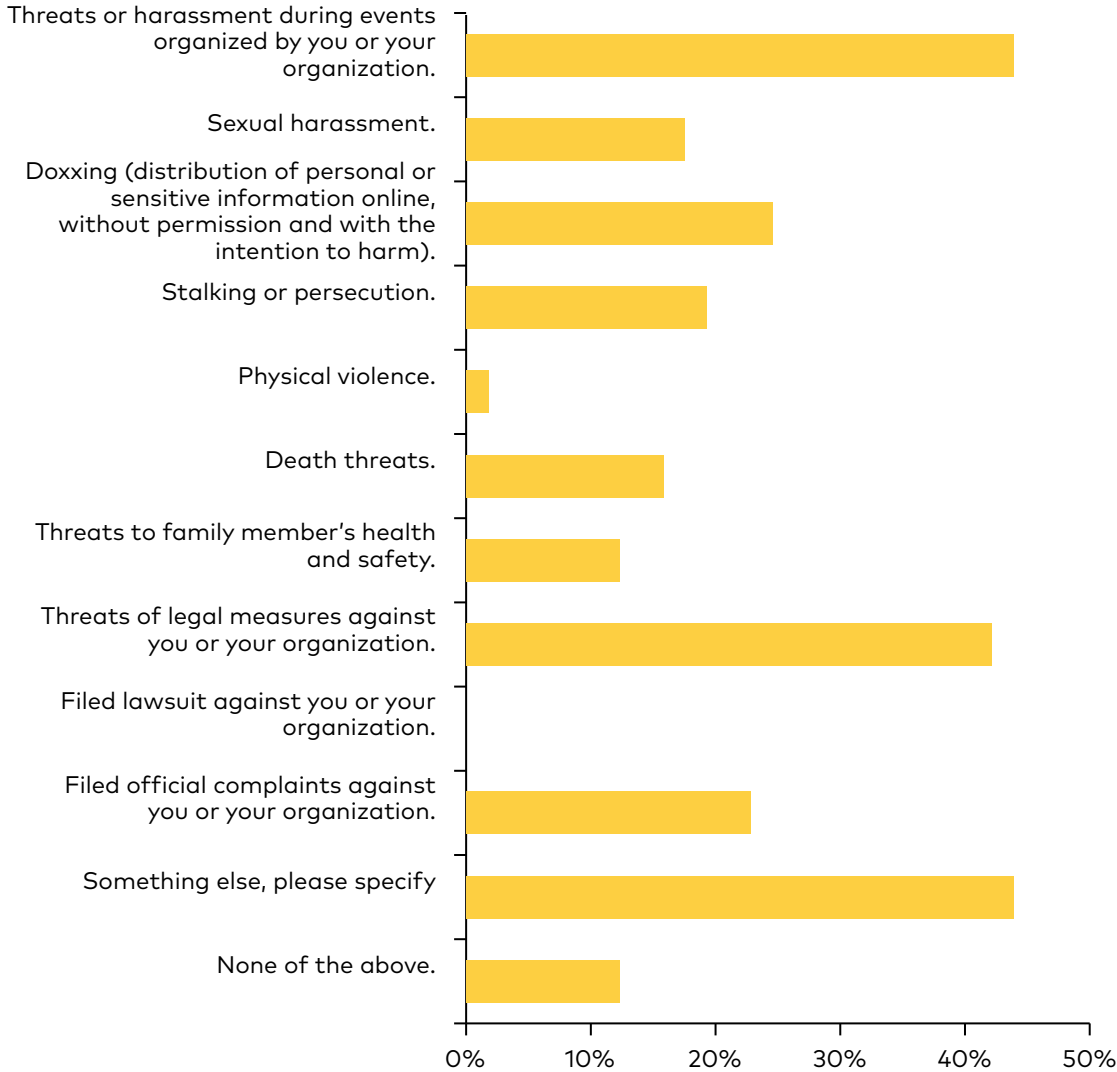


Figure 7: Select the experienced forms of threats or harassment. [Select all that apply.]

Number of respondents: 57

Open-ended responses described severe forms of intimidation and opposition, including witnessing the burning of Pride flags, a threat involving a fake explosive device (bomb), and attempts to delegitimise or discredit the target's employer or funding agency. Sector-specific analysis of the results in the following sections suggests that some forms of opposition may be coordinated and bear similarities to anti-gender campaigns.

Some notable differences can be observed among respondent groups: civil society organisations primarily faced legal pressure; government officials encountered discursive pushback; and academics experienced pressure to self-censor, undermining academic freedom. The following sections provide an overview of these sector-specific forms of opposition.

3.2 Opposition encountered by civil society organisations

The survey asked participants if they had experienced threats or harassment in relation to their work or that of their organisation in promoting gender equality. Out of 38 civil society organisations responding across all Nordic countries (including Greenland and the Åland Islands):

- 68% (n = 26) reported threats or harassment directed at their organisation, and
- 50% (n = 19) reported threats or harassment directed at themselves or an employee.
- 37% (n = 14) experienced threats or harassment both on an organisational and individual level.
- 21% (n = 8) reported no incidents.

Most respondents (84%, n = 32) completed the survey as representatives of their organisation; the remainder (16%, n = 6) responded as individuals.

The responses differ slightly between individual countries and regions. For instance:

- **Denmark:** All three organisations reported threats or harassment directed at their organisation. All responded as representatives of their organisation.
- **Norway:** Four out of seven organisations reported threats or harassments directed at their organisation (n = 4), the respondent or an employee (n = 4), or both (n = 1). All responded as representatives of their organisation.
- **Finland:** Five out of nine respondents reported threats or harassment where both forms (organisational and individual) occurred. Three reported no occurrence of threats or harassment. Seven respondents represented their organisation and two were individuals.

- **Sweden:** Seven out of eight respondents reported threats or harassment. Seven respondents represented an organisation, and one responded as an individual.
- **Iceland:** Four out of eight respondents reported threats or harassment. Three reported no occurrence of threats or harassment on an organisational or individual level. Seven respondents represented their organisation, and one responded as an individual.
- **Greenland & the Åland Islands:** Two of three respondents reported that both forms occurred in conjunction, and one reported no occurrence. Two responded as individuals and one represented an organisation.

These findings show that the majority of the responding civil society organisations in the Nordic region had faced opposition to their work on an individual or organisational level or both.

For comparison, Figure 7 shows encountered forms of threats or harassment among all respondent groups. When extracting and analysing the civil society organisations as a separate group, the most common forms of opposition and intimidation experienced by these respondents were the following:

- Threats or harassment during events organised by the individual or organisation: 34%.
- Legal measures against the individual or organisation: 34%.
- Sexual harassment: 21%.
- Doxing (unauthorised online distribution of personal or sensitive information): 18%.
- Stalking: 16%.
- Filed official complaints against the individual or organisation: 13%.
- Death threats: 13%.
- Threats to family members' health and safety: 10%.

The findings are concerning and indicate that the civil society sector is experiencing multifaceted opposition: in-person interruption during events, intimidation in the form of sexual harassment and other forms of criminal activity as well as cyber intimidation.

The majority reported that opposition occurred at least once or twice per month, with peaks during specific campaigns or periods, often linked to increased social media activity with regard to intersectional gender equality advocacy and advancement. The extent and frequency of opposition raises the possibility that some of the forms of opposition are coordinated.

In the survey, respondents were given the option of providing open-ended responses where they could report 'something else'. In this section, forms of opposition or harassment most frequently reported were attempts at discrediting the organisation's work, either on social media or direct encounters of harassment experienced in person. What is evident from the responses is a mistrust towards government entities in their safeguarding of gender equality advancement work of civil society organisations. In some of the open-ended responses, government entities are seen as hindering gender equality work through funding cuts and covert pushback measures. In such framings, civil society organisations stand out as the parties safeguarding gender equality work in the midst of pressure which is felt to be coming from both external agents and internal state institutions. Below are some examples from the open-ended response section.

Civil society organisation (**Denmark**):

"We are constantly faced with the Scandinavian/Danish paradox, where Denmark is in reality continuously falling behind with equality and at the same time the public opinion is that we have achieved perfect equality in contradiction to data."

Another civil society organisation (**Denmark**):

"Jokes on how the organisation feminises men through its activities + continuously questioning the organisation's decision-making on types of activities as well as questioning our arguments in dialogues and chronicles."

Civil society organisation (**Iceland**):

"The main opposition comes online. Comments on posts on social media or contacting us through our messenger. Distribution of photos that have been changed. Writing articles about me to undermine the work I do and stand for and my organisation."

Civil society organisation (**Finland**):

"Mainly the opposition is coming from the right-wing government, which is taking steps back in gender equality and not taking action against discrimination of gender minorities. Also, government is cutting the funding of universities, NGOs and other organisations that promote non-biased information about gender."

Civil society organisation (**Norway**):

"Extensive spreading of false and damaging information about the organisation"

Civil society organisation (**Sweden**):

"There is also a growing opposition from state actors. It takes on many different forms such as (but not limited to) funding cuts; policy changes where explicit gender equality goals are taken away; an increased focus on GBV [gender based violence] perpetrated by immigrants/children of immigrants, hence turning gender equality and GBV into a problem of 'the others' which will be resolved by assimilation and/or limited immigration; a growing rhetoric that gender equality is already embedded in the 'Swedish culture' which makes it something that does not need further action; less opportunities for dialogue with authorities and politicians; widespread critique of the civil society as either 'ideologically biased' and/or fraudulent."

In summary, a majority of respondents in this group reported that their organisation had experienced both harassment and legal forms of opposition. Notably, one in five respondents reported sexual harassment, and 16% reported stalking. The findings suggest that, in a context of constrained or declining funding, hybrid forms of opposition occurring both in person and through online intimidation may reduce organisational capacity to carry out core initiatives and advocacy. A further significant finding is the prevalence of legal measures and formally filed complaints against civil society organisations (47% combined, representing slightly less than half of all respondents in this group). One potential consequence of legal opposition is reputational damage, which may in turn negatively affect public perceptions of gender equality advocacy by civil society organisations, with possible implications for public trust and support.

3.3 Opposition encountered by academics

Academics across the Nordic countries reported encountering opposition. As with the civil society organisations, a broad spectrum of opposition was reported, ranging from doxing and other forms of online harassment and stalking to emails and phone calls, threats of legal measures and intimidation during live events. Opposition also occurred in cumulative forms, with multiple types occurring simultaneously.

In this group, all (n = 30) responded as individuals. When asked to provide their main field of research and teaching, with the option to select multiple fields, 67% (n = 20) selected gender studies as their main field of research and teaching. The second largest group selected sociology as their primary field of research and teaching (33%, n = 10), followed by political science (23%, n = 7). See Figure 3.

Nearly all of the thirty respondents from research and academia reported working in interdisciplinary fields. Only three indicated that they focused on a single discipline in their research and teaching. This implies the interdisciplinary nature of senior level academic experts working on gender equality themes and issues.

When asked if they had experienced threats or harassment related to their work or their organisation's work for gender equality,

- 47% (n = 18) reported threats or harassment directed at themselves or an individual employee.
- 37% (n = 14) reported threats or harassment directed at their organisation, and
- 26% (n = 10) reported threats or harassment both on an organisational and individual level.
- 21% (n = 8) reported no incidents.

When asked to indicate the setting in which threats had occurred, all survey respondents were given the following options: social media platforms; phone calls; text messages and/or emails; in-person encounters; and other/please specify.

Across the total respondent group from academia and research (n = 30), overall, 63% (n = 19) reported experiencing threats or harassment on social media platforms. In addition, 43% (n = 13) reported incidents via phone calls, text messages and/or emails, and 20% (n = 6) reported incidents during in-person encounters. These findings indicate that, as was the case with the civil society organisation respondent group, threats or harassment occur across multiple channels, with both digital and in-person encounters reportedly taking place. When compared with the civil society organisation respondent group, the forms of opposition encountered by academics represent a similar pattern in terms of general trends of both legal and in-person targeting:

- Threats or harassment during events organised by the individual or organisation: 33%.
- Threats of legal measures against the individual or organisation: 27%.
- Doxing (unauthorised online distribution of personal or sensitive information): 23%.
- Stalking or persecution: 17%.
- Filed official complaints against the individual or organisation: 17%.
- Death threats: 13%.
- Threats to family members' health and safety: 10%.
- Sexual harassment: 7%.

However, there are also differences, which raises the question whether opponents of gender equality advancement use hybrid and tailored strategies of opposition, depending on the target group. For instance, the reported incidences of doxing were slightly higher among academic respondents (23%) than among respondents from the civil society organisation respondent group (18%). This difference may indicate that academics, especially professors whose professional responsibilities include societal engagement and public expert commentary in news media, may be exposed to a comparatively higher risk of doxing.

One notable difference between civil society organisations and academics concerns sexual harassment. Civil society organisations reported a higher incidence (21%) compared with academics (7%). There is an element of uncertainty as to what extent academic institutions are able to understand sexual harassment as a form of opposition specifically linked to gender equality-related academic work, as opposed to a broader workplace issue. The question is relevant since existing research indicates that sexual harassment remains prevalent also within Nordic academic institutions.^[31] Yet, institutional support may be insufficient. An open-ended response comment from one professor supports this hypothesis. It is also possible that as civil society organisations often engage with gender equality work directly and in person, there may be a lower threshold for reporting sexual harassment in the survey question responses.

Out of those who selected gender studies (n = 20) as their main discipline of academic research and teaching:

- 65% (n = 13) reported threats or harassment directed at themselves or an individual employee.
- 55% (n = 11) reported threats or harassment directed at their organisation, and
- 40% (n = 8) reported threats or harassment both on an organisational and individual level.
- 20% (n = 4) reported no incidents.

Among academics in the field of gender studies, 75% (n = 15) reported incidents occurring on social media platforms. A further 60% (n = 12) reported receiving threats via phone calls, text messages and/or emails. In addition, 30% (n = 6) reported experiencing intimidation during in-person encounters. The findings imply that gender studies scholars are at a high risk of being targeted on social media.

In the open-ended responses academic respondents also reported encountering smear-campaigns, discrediting of their academic research in a derogatory way, being put on an online hate-list, being threatened near home and being accused of

31. Lundqvist, M., Simonsson, A., & Widegren, K. (Eds.). (2023).

being a paedophile or harmful to children. Some of the respondents who had not encountered any form of opposition themselves reported that they were aware of opposition, particularly with respect to certain topics such as transgender themes and anti-racism. There were no notable country-specific differences, which indicates that gender studies as an academic discipline is being targeted, rather than particular universities in specific Nordic countries. If this is the case, then the findings correlate with existing research on anti-gender campaigning in Europe and the emergence of anti-intellectualism in connection with authoritarian movements and far-right politics.^[32]

Respondent reporting gender studies and sociology as their main academic discipline:

"Smearing campaigns on various platforms: Letters to employer, politicians, funders. Oral attacks on my credibility as a researcher in public meetings where I am not present. Op-eds in major newspapers as well as social media and alt-right platforms."

Respondent reporting philosophy as their main academic discipline:

"I'm in academia, and I answer partly on behalf of myself and partly on behalf of an organisation to include women and gender diverse people in my male dominated field. For us, the pushback is often that feminist or gender perspectives are not 'real', worthy or canonical academic contributions. Another very popular pushback is that gender equality is already achieved, so there is no need to make any changes. Following this argument, they say that the reason there are more men in the field is that women are less predisposed to the nature of the field itself. In other words, they deny there is a problem at all."

Academic respondent from Iceland:

"Not directly felt in the organisation but surveys continue to show that younger generations in Iceland hold more negative views towards feminism and trans people, especially among young boys/men. Therefore, the sense is an undercurrent of negative attitudes but that has not explicitly surfaced in relation to my work."

32. Fassin (2024).

Regarding sexual harassment, one academic respondent reported the following:

“Also, when reporting harassment, I was told that I had to a) make a personal report to the police rather than get support from the organisation and b) even WORSE, I was encouraged to take a victim position and tell the email harasser that I felt violated and hurt by their actions. I think such advice is detrimental and it resulted in me not reporting it. Me and colleagues are also told to tone it down, to grow thicker skin, to 'see the other person's point of view', that freedom of expression is more important – this especially relates to racism.”

Overall, the survey indicates that Nordic countries are not immune to attacks on academic freedom, particularly scholars working on intersectional gender equality and anti-racism. Researchers, teaching staff, and research funding agencies were all reported as targets. Consistent with existing research on anti-gender campaigning in Europe, these findings suggest a growing pattern of anti-intellectualism linked to authoritarian ideological movements.^[33] The results of this survey indicate that such targeting and intimidation is becoming more common also in the Nordic context. Academics across multiple disciplines – not just gender studies – reported threats, harassment, and formal complaints intended to limit their ability to write, teach, speak and publish on certain topics. Academic freedom is thus threatened not only through direct, in-person intimidation but also via covert unjustified attacks that aim to discredit and delegitimise expertise or reputation. The pattern correlates with findings from previous surveys conducted in the context of academic freedom in Finland and Sweden.^[34] These indirect pressures can produce a significant 'chilling effect' with serious consequences for academic freedom, knowledge production, research and the quality of public debate, as academic experts no longer want to comment publicly.

3.4 Opposition encountered by government officials and civil servants

Across all Nordic countries, 70% (n = 14) of government officials reported that they had not experienced opposition to their gender equality work and advocacy in the form of threats or harassment on an individual or organisational level. Government officials responded on behalf of their organisation.

Although the majority (70%) had not encountered threats or harassment, one third did report encountered opposition. Opposition was reported in all Nordic countries except for **Denmark**.

33. See Väliavironen E (2026); Tikka, M. & Saresma, T. (2025); Tovatt, C., Bergman, M., Braunerhielm, C., Ejsing, C., Hellberg, L., & Sundberg, K. (2024) and Institutet för mänskliga rättigheter (2026).

34. *ibid.*

Six (30%) government respondents reported having encountered opposition directed at their organisation. Two out of these six respondents also reported threats or harassment directed at themselves or an individual employee.

Threats or harassment on an individual level (n = 2) included threats or harassment during events organised by the respondent or their organisation, threats of legal measures against the respondent or their organisation and official complaints filed against the respondent or their organisation.

Organisational-level threats and harassment were predominantly concentrated on social media platforms. Incidence rates increased in relation to higher levels of online visibility and campaign activity. Respondents also reported phone calls, text messages, and email as additional channels of intimidation. One respondent reported experiencing in-person harassment.

All government official respondents (n =20) were asked the following follow-up question:

“Does your organisation face opposition to advancing gender equality in the following areas [choose all that apply]?”. The respondents from the government sector who had encountered opposition on an individual level had also encountered opposition in the following areas:

- Implementation of gender equality
- Development of gender equality analysis and measures
- Planning of budgeting and funding for gender equality research and policy

The predominant forms of opposition on an organisational level were threats or harassment during events organised by the respondent or their organisation; threats of legal measures against the respondent or their organisation; and filed official complaints against the respondent or their organisation. A majority of the forms of threats or harassment on an organisational level occurred on social media platforms, with an increase in correlation to increased social media presence or campaigning as well as via phone calls, text messages and/or emails. One respondent also reported in-person threats and harassment.

The incidents took place approximately once or twice a month or less frequently than once a month. One respondent from **Iceland** reported that it occurs on a weekly basis. In all instances (n=6) respondents knew in some of the cases the identity or organisation of the person/s who harassed, intimidated or threatened them.

When asked: "Does your organisation face opposition to advancing gender equality in the following areas [choose all that apply]?" the respondents (n = 6) from the government sector had encountered opposition in:

- Implementation of gender equality
- International cooperation on gender equality
- Development of gender equality analysis and measures
- Planning of budgeting and funding gender equality research and policy
- Development of gender equality analysis and measures
- Nordic collaboration on gender equality
- Planning of budgeting and funding gender equality research and policy
- Development of gender equality analysis and measures

When the government sector respondent group was asked more detailed, follow-up survey questions regarding possible encounters with opposition to gender equality work, nearly half of all the twenty respondents who participated in the survey had encountered opposition in the areas of:

- Implementation of gender equality (50%)
- International cooperation on gender equality (44%)

Furthermore, about one third had encountered opposition in the following areas:

- development of gender equality analysis and measures; and
- planning, budgeting and funding of gender equality research and policy.

The government respondents who had reported these forms of opposition were also asked to answer a follow-up question on how the opposition to gender equality had manifested in their work. See Figure 8 below.

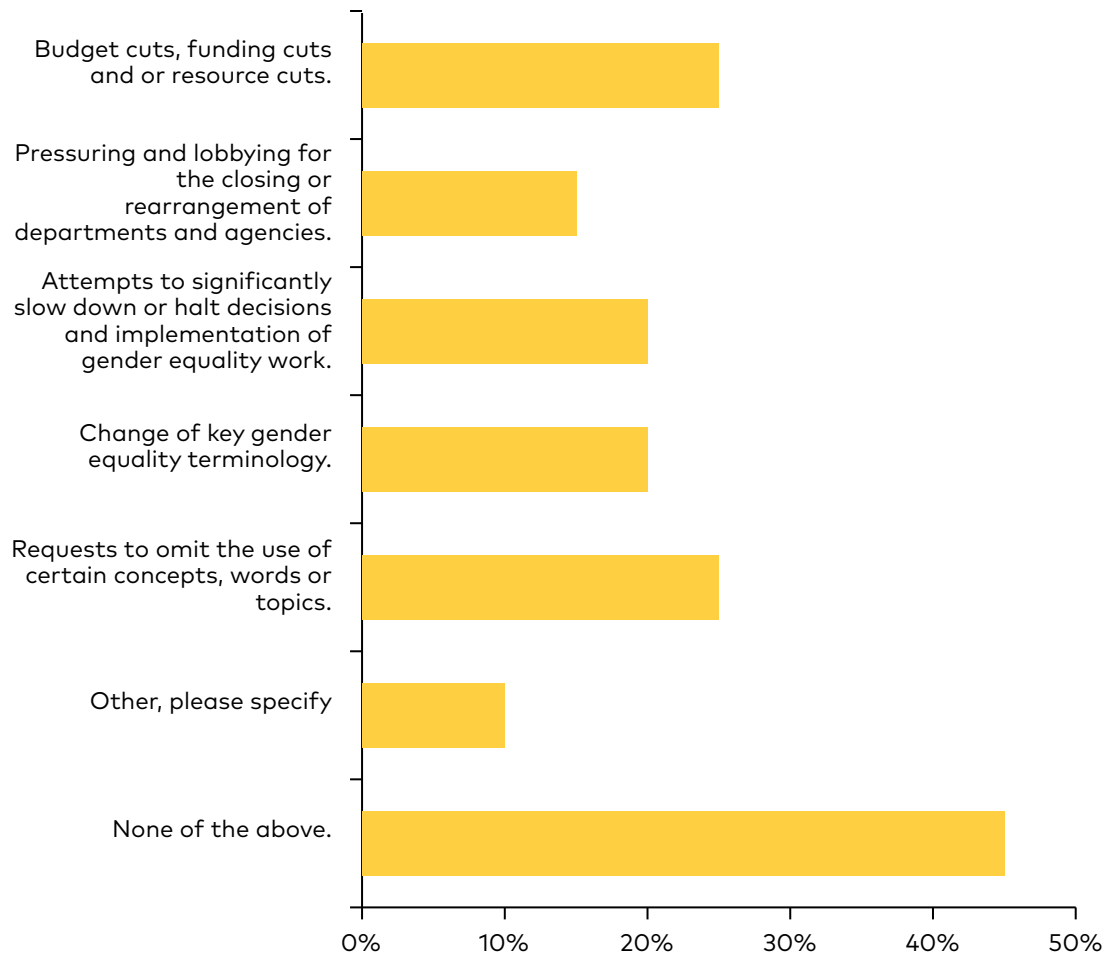


Figure 8: Government officials, please answer the follow-up question: How has the opposition to gender equality manifested in your work? [choose all that apply]

Number of respondents: 20

Those responding to the follow-up question reported having encountered budget cuts, funding cuts and resource cuts (25%). They also reported having encountered requests to omit the use of certain concepts, words and topics (25%) or change key gender equality terminology (20%), attempts to significantly slow down or halt decisions and implementation of gender equality work (20%), and pressure to close or rearrange departments and agencies (15%).

In this respondent group, Denmark stood out as there was no reported opposition to gender equality work as such.

However, in the more detailed follow-up questions, two out of the three Danish governmental representatives responded that they had encountered discursive opposition to their work in the following areas:

- International cooperation on gender equality.
- Requests to omit the use of certain concepts, words or topics related to LGBTQI+ rights.

In contrast to the responses provided by the government respondents, all Danish civil society organisations (n = 3) and all Danish academic respondents (n = 5) reported opposition to their gender equality work either on an individual or organisational level or both. Denmark thus provides a snapshot into the ways in which institutionalised gender equality work in the Nordic societies may be more insulated from opposition than civil society organisations and academics who may be under strategic targeting and opposition.

There was a similar pattern in the responses from the Åland Islands and Greenland combined.

- Budget cuts, funding cuts and or resource cuts.
- Pressuring and lobbying for the closing or rearrangement of departments and agencies.
- Attempts to significantly slow down or halt decisions and implementation of gender equality work.

In the open-ended response section, some respondents provided more examples of how opposition manifested in their work. A government sector respondent from **Sweden** stated:

"Some believe that we focus too much on gender and exclude trans people. Others believe that we focus too much on trans people, which hinders gender equality work."

And a respondent from **Norway** stated:

"We are cautious in our contact with certain organisations that work on minority issues that wish to limit the rights and promote alternate understandings of equality."

The impacts of opposition will be analysed and discussed in the following chapters. The findings show that government officials, like the civil society organisation respondents and academics, adjusted their participation and avoided certain topics or took extra precautions when addressing these topics.

In light of the findings concerning opposition encountered by government officials, this respondent group appears to face targeted pressure against specific policies and, more concerningly, attempts to reframe the conceptual foundations of gender

equality policy work. Threats and harassment targeting both individuals and organisations within the government sector primarily occurred through legal measures, such as formally filed complaints. At the organisational level, most incidents occurred on social media, with a clear increase associated with higher levels of social media presence or campaigning. Threats and harassment were also reported via phone calls, text messages, and emails, with one respondent reporting in-person harassment. The frequency of such incidents was generally one to two times per month or less, although one respondent reported weekly occurrences. In nearly all cases, respondents were at least partially able to identify the individuals or organisations responsible for the harassment, intimidation, or threats. There were no significant differences between individual countries, except for Denmark.

3.5 Frequency of opposition

Alongside questions on whether or not opposition was experienced, the survey also included a question on the frequency of opposition.

Figure 9 shows that, among respondents who reported experiencing opposition to their gender equality work, nearly a quarter reported encountering such opposition on at least a weekly basis. Furthermore, when the three highest frequency categories are combined, the proportion increases to more than half of respondents who experience opposition at least once or twice per month or more frequently.

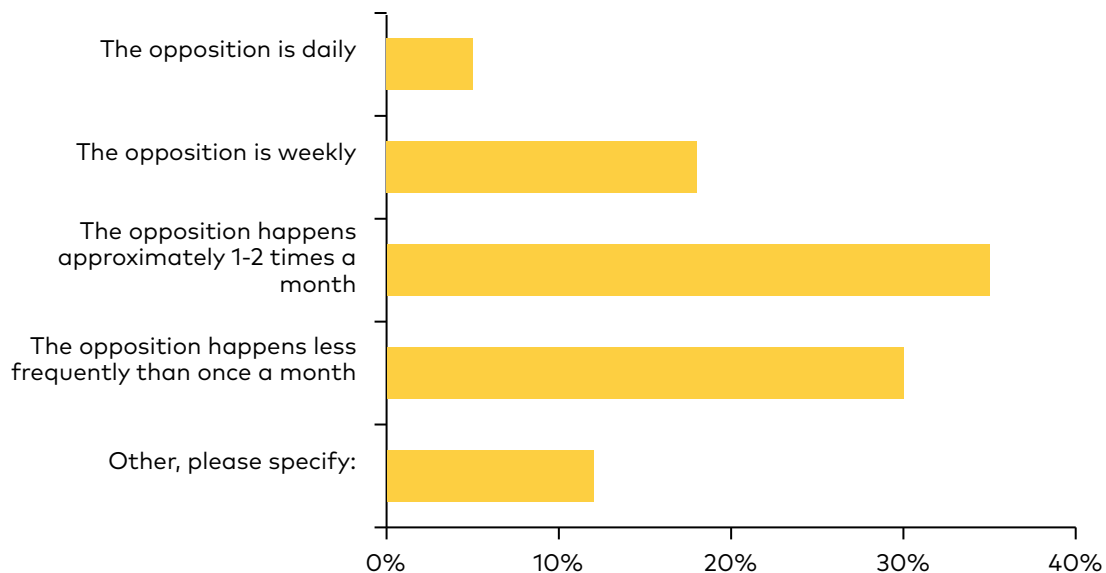


Figure 9: Which of the following best describe the frequency of the opposition towards your work? [select one]

Number of respondents: 57

In the open-ended response sections, respondents reported that opposition occurs more frequently depending on the topic being discussed in public, such as during interviews, when writing op eds, or when maintaining a presence on social media. Opposition was also connected to specific events, such as Pride. One civil society respondent reported receiving emails on a weekly basis, and there was also one reported incident of physical violence.

When asked whether visibility in media or social media affects the magnitude and frequency of the opposition, nearly all respondents (94.6%) reported that the magnitude and frequency of the opposition increased in parallel with the visibility of their gender equality work on social media. This is a significant finding, as a substantial majority (82%, n = 69) of respondents across all groups reported actively creating social media content related to their gender equality work. This includes government officials, who responded as representatives of their institutions.

For example, all **Swedish** and **Norwegian** government representatives who responded to the survey reported actively creating social media content related to gender equality work. Two out of three representatives from **Finland** and two out of four representatives from **Iceland** responded the same. In **Denmark**, online presence was slightly lower, with only one out of three representatives responding affirmatively. In comparison, civil society organisations and academics generally maintain a high presence and high engagement on both social media and news media due to the public communication requirements of their work. These two groups therefore appear to be at particularly high risk of cyber intimidation.

The survey findings and open-ended responses indicate a clear connection between producing gender equality-related content online and experiencing harassment, threats, discrediting, stalking and silencing. A further concern arising from these findings, and which requires further research, is that online targeting of gender equality experts often falls into legal grey areas where it is unclear whether the behaviour meets the threshold for criminal activity.^[35]

3.6 Discursive opposition

The survey included questions designed to assess whether respondents had encountered discursive opposition or covert pushback in connection with their gender equality work. All respondent groups were asked the question illustrated in Figure 10: "Have you or has your organisation experienced any of the following accusations?".

35. See Husso, M., Piippo, S., Houtsonen, J., Mela, M., Tihveräinen, S., Haapanen, J., Hakkarainen, L., & Knihtilä, A. (2024) and Brax, D. (2024).

According to the survey responses, a considerable number of respondents reported encountering discursive allegations in connection with their gender equality advancement work, even if they did not classify their experiences as threats or harassment in the sections asking whether they had faced opposition. The most commonly reported allegations aimed at diminishing or delegitimising gender equality advancement work included the following:

- The concept of gender is ideological and should be replaced with the concept of sex, understood as strictly binary (male/female).
- Gender equality work is unjust for privileging women and girls.
- Gender equality researchers and experts are biased or not legitimate.
- Gender equality work dismisses key issues faced by boys and men.

Among the 88 survey respondents, more than a half (61%) reported having faced pressure to replace the concept of gender with the binary notion of sex. This pressure was reported by civil society organisations, government officials and academics alike. Additionally, women's and girls' rights advocacy work faced claims that equality efforts are unjust, either for privileging women and girls or for overlooking key issues affecting boys and men.

Notably, only five respondents (5.7 %) reported that they had not encountered any of the listed forms of discursive opposition or delegitimising of gender equality work



Figure 10: Have you or has your organization experienced any of the following accusations [select all that apply.]

Number of respondents: 88

The sections below provide a detailed breakdown of the most common forms of discursive opposition.

In the **civil society organisation respondent group**, 68% (26 of 38) reported encountering the allegation that:

- Gender equality work is unjust for privileging women and girls.

These 26 respondents represent more than half of all respondents across the three groups who reported encountering this form of insinuation (49 of 88). In comparison, across all groups, 49 respondents reported facing this allegation, including 15 from academia and 8 from the government sector. Since the total number of government respondents was smaller (n = 20), this means that 40% of government officials reported encountering this allegation diminishing the importance of their gender equality work.

The second most commonly reported allegation by this respondent group was the following:

- The state should not fund civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations that are advancing gender equality.

58% (22 out of 38) reported that they had encountered the allegation. When the responses from all respondent groups were analysed together, 39 respondents from all three groups reported having encountered this allegation in connection with their gender equality work. In total, 9 came from academia and 8 from the government sector.

The third most commonly faced insinuation by civil society organisations was the statement according to which:

- The concept of gender is ideological and should be replaced with the concept of sex, understood as strictly binary (male/female).

53% (20 of 38) reported encountering the allegation. Across all respondent groups, 54 respondents reported having encountered this allegation, with 20 coming from academia and 14 coming from the government sector. Again, as the total amount of government sector responses was 20, this means 70% of respondents from this sector had encountered this allegation and 67% of academics (20 out of 30).

In the respondent group consisting of **academics**, the most frequently encountered insinuation of potential discursive opposition was that:

- Gender equality researchers and experts are biased or not legitimate. (83%, 25 of 30).

These 25 responses represent nearly half of all affirmative answers across the three respondent groups, of which 18 came from civil society organisations and 9 from the government sector.

The next common type of allegation faced by academics was the following:

- Gender equality work dismisses key issues faced by boys and men.

70% (21 out of 30) of this respondent group had encountered the allegation. In comparison, 50% (19 of 38) from the civil society organisation respondents and 70% (14 of 20) out of the government official respondents had encountered the allegation.

Of all academics, 67% (20 out of 30) had encountered the following allegation:

- The concept of gender is ideological and should be replaced with the concept of sex, understood as strictly binary (male/female).

In the **government sector** respondent group, the most frequently encountered allegation in connection with gender equality work was the following:

- Gender equality work dismisses key issues faced by boys and men (70%, 14 out of 20).

An equal proportion of respondents who responded affirmatively to this question (70%, 14 out of 20) stated that they had encountered the following allegation:

- The concept of gender is ideological and should be replaced with the concept of sex, understood as strictly binary (male/female).

The third most commonly reported allegations were the following, each with a rate of 55% (11 out of 20):

- Gay rights and other minority issues should not become a political issue that restricts majority rights.
- Other issues are more urgent than gender equality (gender equality issues must be postponed until later or indefinitely).

Even in the country-specific case of Denmark, where government respondents reported not having experienced threats or harassment – either personally or at the organisational level – all reported encountering the following allegation:

- Gay rights and other minority issues should not become a political issue that restricts majority rights.

Other common allegations reported by Danish government organisation representatives were: "The concept of gender is ideological and should be replaced with the concept of sex, understood as strictly binary (male/female)" and "Gender equality work dismisses key issues faced by boys and men." Other allegations encountered by Danish government sector respondents were related to opposing the role of state institutions in safeguarding gender equality.

Taken together, these developments in discursive pushback point to a broader international trend involving attempts to reframe and restrict how gender is defined and understood in policy, research, and public debate.

This type of opposition was reported by government officials, across the whole Nordic region. Given that adequate funding, resources, and institutional infrastructure are preconditions for effective implementation, such patterns may indicate that discursive opposition can also operate through state institutions. Existing research from Denmark and Norway, for example, suggests that austerity measures targeting gender equality policy and its implementation may function as covert forms of pushback against gender equality.^[36]

A further point to consider is that a substantial body of academic research and policy analysis indicates that anti-gender actors seek to influence gender equality advancement by co-opting the language of rights and freedoms and reframing public and political discourse.^[37] This may involve efforts to shift the conceptual basis of gender equality work – for example, by prioritising 'sex' over 'gender', portraying certain equality measures as radical, or presenting opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as 'pro-family' and anti-trans advocacy as 'protecting children'. Such strategies often draw on misleading, exaggerated or selective interpretations of research related to gender diversity or gender mainstreaming, as has been shown in studies from Norway and Finland.^[38] Over time, these developments may influence public understanding of equality policies and may have significant pushback implications for legal protections.^[39]

36. Hellum, A., Ikdahl, I., Blaker Strand, V., & Svensson, E. M. (2024); Corneliussen, H. G. (2021); Kjaer, U., Seggaard, S. B., & Shamshiri-Petersen, D. (2025).

37. Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (Eds.). (2017); Lewin, T. (2021).

38. Engebretsen, E. L. (2022); Järviö, N. & Pihlajamaa, M. (2025).

39. Kjaer, U., Seggaard, S. B., & Shamshiri-Petersen, D. (2025).

4. Impact of opposition to gender equality

A significant finding of this report is that across all respondents, nearly half (48%) reported that opposition to gender equality work negatively affects their sense of emotional safety as well as their mental and physical wellbeing. As a result, 26% of participants reported withdrawing from work-related tasks, including public appearances and advocacy activities.

In order to avoid intimidation, respondents described taking precautionary measures or limiting their engagement, particularly on specific issues: 29% in relation to gender equality issues in general, 19% concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights or comprehensive sexuality education, 18% regarding sexual and gender-based violence, and 16% in relation to violence against women and girls.

Self-censorship therefore does not occur only in relation to topics such as LGBTQ+ rights and anti-racism, but also in connection with mainstream gender equality issues more broadly. However, the survey results indicate that there are specific high-risk areas within gender equality advancement work. Precautionary measures and self-censorship were even higher for advocacy related to LGBTQ+ rights, cited by 46% of respondents, while 16% indicated similar caution regarding migration-related topics.

Across the surveyed Nordic countries, 60% of respondents expressed the belief that violent extremism is likely to increase within the next two years.

All respondents were given the opportunity to report further types of impact in an open-ended question at the end of the survey: "If you wish to add something or describe more specifically the impact of the opposition towards gender equality work, please write it here."

Open-ended responses provided further reflections on the impacts experienced. To protect the anonymity of respondents, details about institution and country affiliation cannot be provided in this report.

Civil society organisation respondent working on men and masculinities:

"It is clear that the political slide into more racist policy and speaking also makes individuals more prone to express their opposition to gender equality and equity. We think that it is important to analyse these trends as one and explore how the political shift creates a more threatening environment for people and organisations working on social justice issues."

Academic, philosophy:

"It makes you very unpopular at work. A lot of social sanctions that hit individuals personally, like social exclusion, not being asked to contribute in departmental academic projects, excluded from teaching (because they think I will 'indoctrinate' the students)."

Government sector respondent (foreign affairs):

"As a Ministry of [anonymised], we face the opposition daily in multilateral fora and also in certain country contexts."

Figure 11 illustrates the most common impact of opposition to gender equality work based on the survey. As the figure indicates, out of the total amount of survey respondents (n = 88), a substantial proportion reported self-censoring expression, participation, communication and teaching in one or multiple ways.

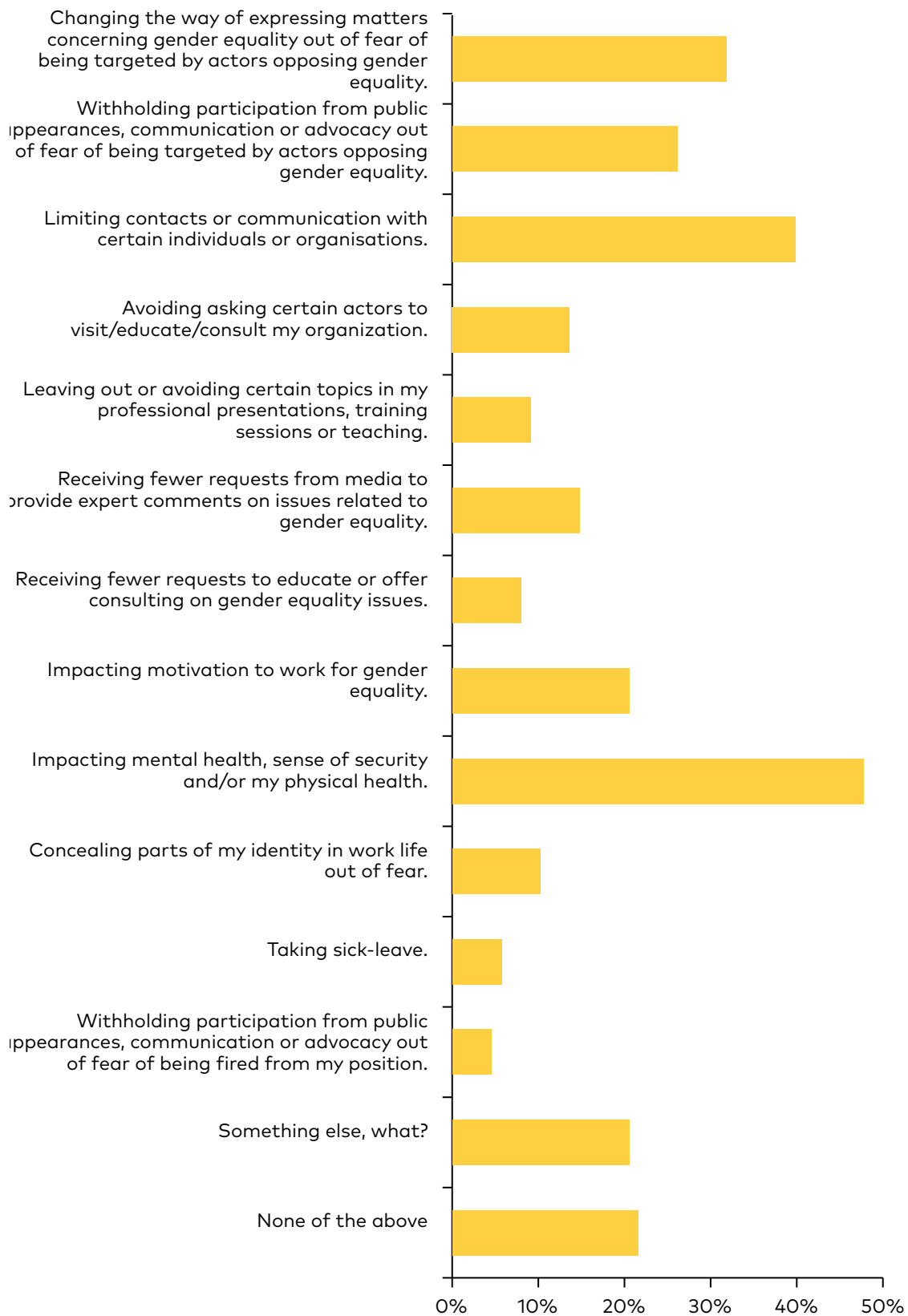


Figure 11: How does the opposition to gender equality work impact your everyday work? [Choose all that apply]

Number of respondents: 88

The findings of this report point to multiple personal and professional risks faced by gender equality practitioners across all respondent sectors. In the following sections, a more detailed breakdown and further analysis of impacts is provided. The table below shows various impacts experienced by civil society organisations, academics, and government officials in relation to gender equality advancement work. Notably, the most commonly reported impacts were related to mental and physical health and wellbeing, especially among civil society organisations (50%) and academics (47%), with 13% of academics having taken sick leave.

Additionally, a majority of respondents indicated that they had limited their communication in more than one way, changed how they express issues related to gender equality advocacy work, and withdrawn from public events due to fear of being targeted or even losing their employment. Less common but still significant effects included reduced media engagement, concealing aspects of identity, and taking sick leave. Taken together, these survey findings highlight the broad and multifaceted consequences of harassment and intimidation faced by those working on gender equality advancement across all respondent groups. The percentages in the infographic below represent the share of the total respondent group in question.

Table 1: Impact of opposition

Impact	Civil society organisations (n = 38)	Academics (n = 30)	Government officials (n = 20)	Total out of all 88 respondents
Impacting mental health, sense of security and/or my physical health.	19 (50%)	14 (47%)	3 (15%)	42
Limiting contacts or communication with certain individuals or organisations.	15 (39%)	15 (50%)	5 (25%)	35
Changing the way of expressing matters concerning gender equality out of fear of being targeted by actors opposing gender equality.	11 (29%)	13 (43%)	4 (20%)	28
Withholding participation from public appearances, communication or advocacy out of fear of being targeted by actors opposing gender equality.	9 (24%)	8 (27%)	5 (25%)	23
Impacting motivation to work for gender equality.	6 (16%)	9 (30%)	3 (15%)	18
Receiving fewer requests from media to provide expert comments on issues related to gender equality.	6 (16%)	7 (23%)	0	13
Avoiding asking certain actors to visit/educate/consult my organisation.	3 (8%)	6 (20%)	3 (15%)	12
Concealing parts of my identity in work life out of fear.	5 (13%)	4 (13%)	0	9
Leaving out or avoiding certain topics in my professional presentations, training sessions or teaching.	2 (5%)	5 (17%)	10 (50%)	8
Receiving fewer requests to educate or offer consulting on gender equality issues.	3 (8%)	2 (7%)	2 (10%)	7
Taking sick-leave.	1 (3%)	4 (13%)	0	5
Withholding participation from public appearances, communication or advocacy out of fear of being fired from my position.	2 (5%)	2 (7%)	0	4
None of the above.	7 (18%)	2 (7%)	10 (50%)	19

4.1 Barriers to civil society engagement: a risk of democratic backsliding

Taken together, the survey data analysed in this report implies that the magnitude, frequency and forms of harassment and intimidation encountered discourage a significant proportion of gender equality experts from participating in public debate and advocacy work.

Building further on these findings, it is relevant to ask whether opposition to gender equality work has a restrictive impact on the exercise of freedom of expression in Nordic societies. This question is of particular concern in relation to civil society, as a functioning and active civil society is a cornerstone of Nordic democracies. In all Nordic countries, civil society organisations provide governments with grassroots knowledge that supports improved legislation and policymaking in the fields of equality and diversity.

In the context of opposition to gender equality work, it is important to emphasise that open debate and diverse perspectives on gender equality fall within the scope of constitutionally protected freedom of speech in Nordic democratic systems. As part of Nordic multi-party representative democracies, individuals and groups are free to express disagreement with gender equality policies. However, as the findings of this survey indicate, certain forms of possibly coordinated action – such as misuse of legal processes to generate smear campaigns, doxing, stalking, and hybrid forms of threats or harassment – go beyond the legitimate expression of disagreement. For this reason, Nordic countries, in line with EU legal frameworks, have legal protections for victims of hate crimes and hate speech.

In the instances reported by respondents across all respondent groups and across the Nordic region, actors opposing gender equality work do not only advance alternative viewpoints. They may also seek to systematically reframe the conceptual foundations of gender equality work and thereby limit the ability of others to participate in public debate and advocacy. When coordinated opposition operates in this way, it can generate barriers to civil society engagement. This trend, which is implied in the findings of this survey, aligns with existing research on broader trends in anti-gender politics across Europe.

In the final open-ended response section ("Do you have anything else to add to the topics of this survey?") one academic respondent criticised the Nordic approach to gender equality for its lack of understanding of intersecting power-structures:

"If you ask me, the romanticised model of gender equality in the Nordics (for decades cast as 'a Swedish ideal', 'everybody wins', 'beneficial for profit', 'making a healthier work environment' and so on) and its depoliticised strategies for implementation have rendered the whole model very open for co-optation and quite useless in many ways. As it is a model that doesn't really question class hierarchy or

racism, but rather thinks we have a great society if women and minorities can fight for the armed forces, if there is gender equality across class hierarchies, and that it is sexism in so called immigrant families rather than structural racism in society that causes, for instance, migrant women from being 'locked out of the labour market'. I also think that many gender equality advocates are anti-gender, willing to throw intersectional analyses and critiques under the bus in order to save their own work. So, it's a multifaceted problem and unless you take an intersectional approach in this study, you will end up with some really bizarre results..."

When examining responses from all respondent groups, [Figure 12](#) below indicates that the restrictive impact on freedom of expression and participation in an active civil society is not limited to specific minority groups. The survey results show that nearly 30% of all respondents avoid speaking about gender equality in general, and more than 15% avoid discussing gender-based violence and violence against women.

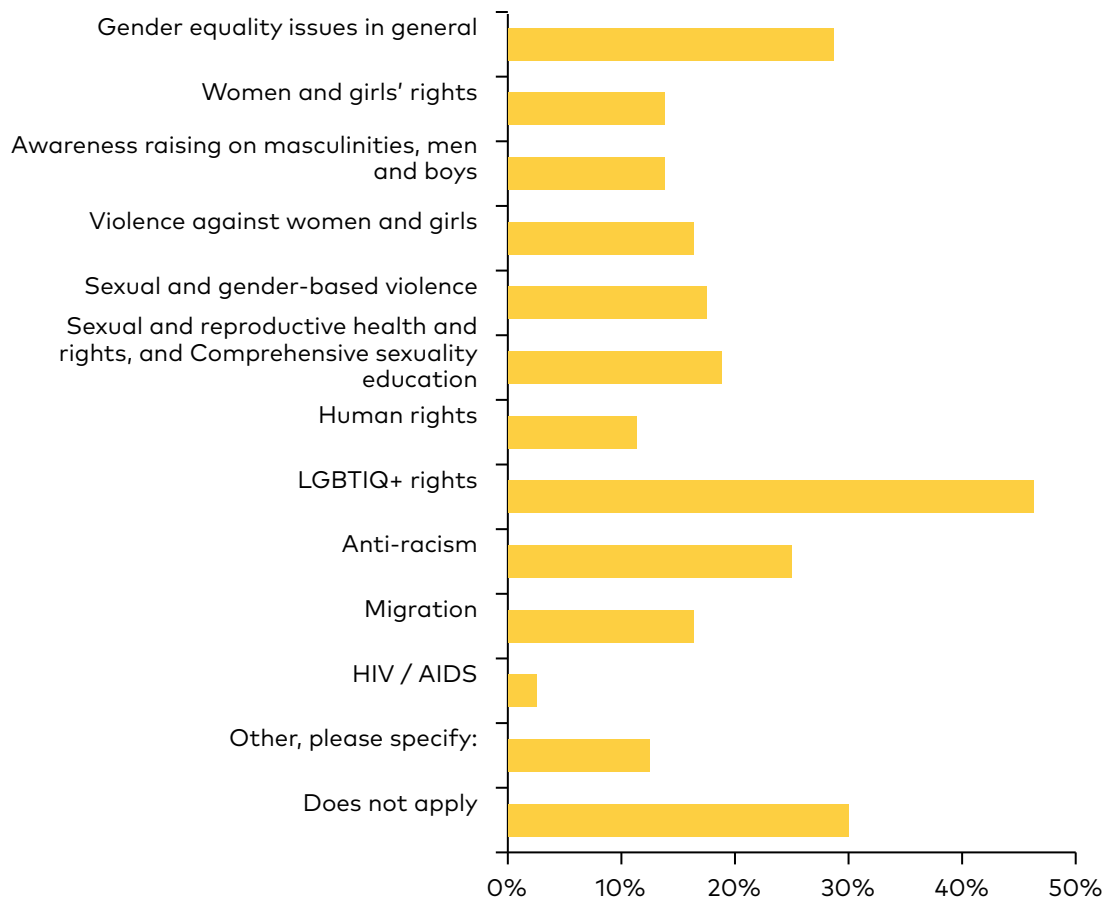


Figure 12: In order to avoid opposition do you avoid or take extra precautions when advocating for or speaking about issues related to [choose all that apply]

Number of respondents: 80

The response percentages from 80 respondents presented in the figure also show the frequency of extra precautions when gender equality experts speak about specific issues, such as gender equality in the broad sense (28.7%, n = 23). Both the advocacy of women and girls' rights (13.8%, n = 11) as well as raising awareness of men and boys (13.8%, n = 11) were issues where extra precautions were taken. The highest response rate was to LGBTIQ+ rights (46.3%, n = 37). A quarter (25%, n = 20) responded affirmatively to taking extra precautions when advocating for or speaking about anti-racism, and 16.3% (n = 13) when advocating for or speaking about migration.

The survey results show that opposition to gender equality affects the work of non-governmental organisations, academics and civil servants alike. These effects vary, ranging from individual psychological and physical consequences to disruptions in organisational operations and, ultimately, influence the broader public discourse. Over time, such developments may undermine the functioning of an active civil society and democratic participation.

In the open-ended response section, some of the respondents perceived a connection between weakening of intersectional gender equality at policy level and right-wing governments. According to the responses below, which have been cited before in the context of civil society organisation responses:

"Mainly the opposition is coming from the right-wing government, which is taking steps back in gender equality and not taking action against discrimination of gender minorities. Also, government is cutting the funding of universities, NGO's and other organisations that promote non-biased information about gender."

"There is also a growing opposition from state actors. It takes on many different forms such as (but not limited to) funding cuts; policy changes where explicit gender equality goals are taken away; an increased focus on GBV perpetrated by immigrants/children of immigrants hence turning gender equality and GBV into a problem of 'the others' which will be resolved by assimilation and/or limited immigration; a growing rhetoric that gender equality is already embedded in the 'Swedish culture' which makes it something that does not need further action; less opportunities for dialogue with authorities and politicians; widespread critique of the civil society as either 'ideologically biased' and/or fraudulent."

Taken together, the responses suggest that opposition to gender equality in the Nordic countries may be an early signal of democratic backsliding. This issue warrants further research.

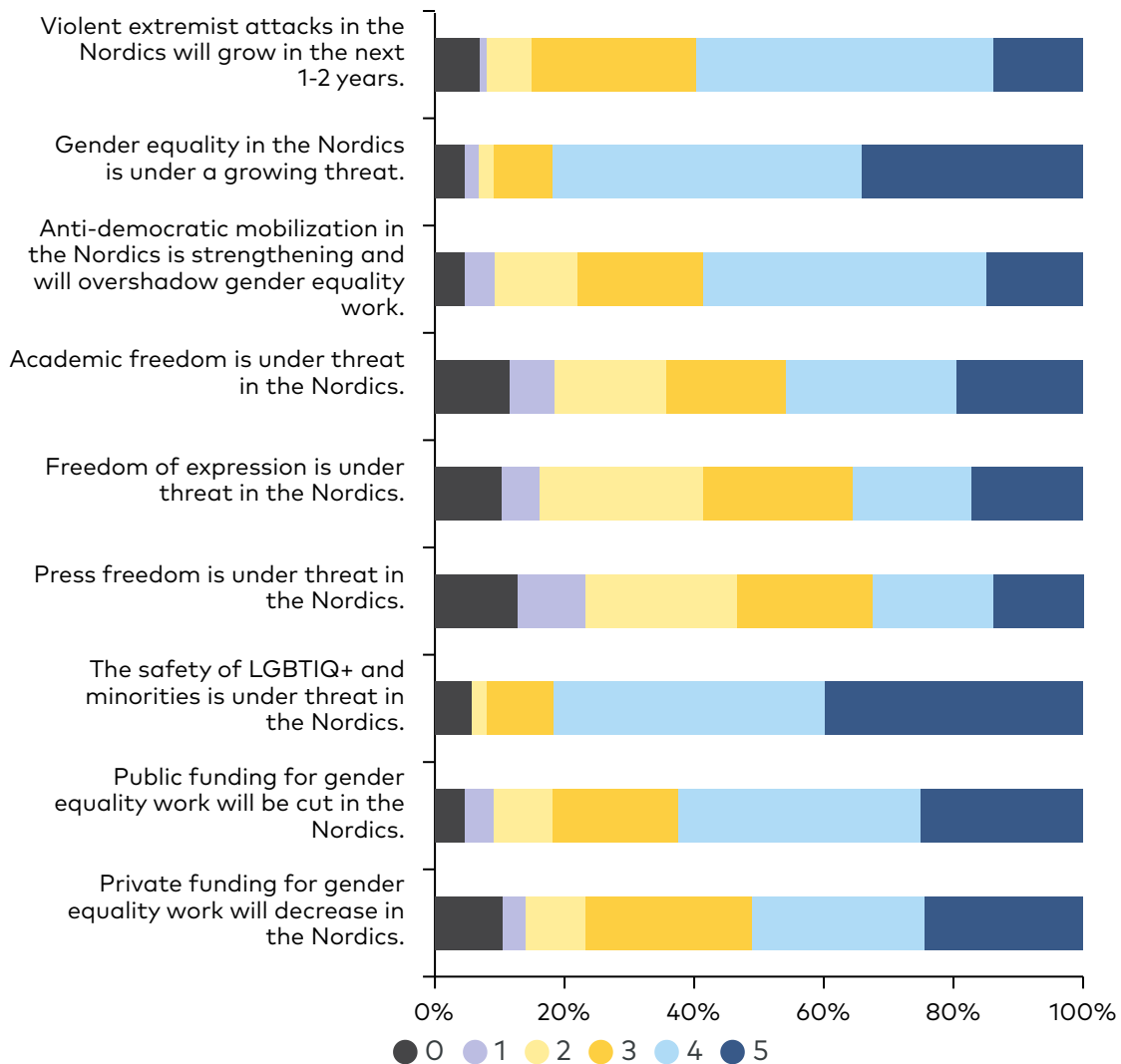


Figure 13: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements[5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neutral, 2 disagree, 1 strongly disagree, 0 I don't want to respond]

Number of respondents: 88

4.2 Risks to academic freedom

When asked, nearly half of all 88 respondents across all sectors (government and civil society included) reported having encountered the following types of delegitimising claims about gender equality work:

- Researchers and experts in gender equality are biased/not legitimate. 59% (n = 52).
- Publicly funded gender equality units/officials/gender studies programmes should be abolished. 43% (n = 38).

In several open-ended responses, self-censorship emerges as both an impact and a coping mechanism, particularly among academics. The open-ended responses also recount experiences of degradation, defamation, and even bomb threats targeting academics. Based on the survey responses, the targeting and intimidation of researchers also discourages academic experts from engaging with the media.^[40]

"Smearing campaigns on various platforms: Letters to employer, politicians, funders. Oral attacks on my credibility as a researcher in public meetings where I am not present. Op-eds in major newspapers as well as social media and alt-right platforms."

"Through false accusations against the organisation through the university's HR."

"Physical bomb, turned out to be a fake one afterwards."

"I have changed the syllabus of my courses to include directly addressing the opposition and understanding its ideological and conservative underpinnings. I have also begun to study this phenomenon."

Repeated harassment of teachers and researchers, while not necessarily meeting the criteria of incitement to violence or other types of criminal activity, nevertheless imposes a significant burden and may lead to experiences of isolation, as the following respondent describes:

"I am tired. I am tired of pushing for change without departmental backing. I have done a lot of extra mental labour to help female students in my department, and help them in my male dominated field. I am tired of trying to convince people who disagree that there is a gender equality problem at all."

As described above, harassment of teachers and researchers includes smear campaigns, false allegations of research bias, hate speech, and even physical threats. This type of harassment aims to silence academics. As can be seen from the open-ended responses, these efforts appear to follow a similar logic to the targeting of politicians and journalists who speak about topics framed by

40. Norocel, O.C., and Segers, I.B. (2025).

opponents as 'heated' or 'controversial'. Academic researchers often become the focus of coordinated attacks, particularly on social media.^[41] As a consequence, individuals – politicians, academics, journalists, and civil society actors – may refrain from certain actions – such as speaking, writing, or researching specific topics – due to fear of consequences, such as harassment, legal action, physical violence, or reputational damage. Below is an example of one of the open-ended responses:

"[Opposition to gender equality work is][s]topping me from popular dissemination of my work and research in mainstream media. I used to write several popular articles yearly, disseminating research and ideas. Have not been able to write anything for one year after the last round of attacks in media."

The open-ended responses above can be interpreted by framing and analysing them in a wider context of anti-gender politics, in which actors question the legitimacy of gender equality advancement and the rights of LGBTQI+ people, for instance.^[42]

Over the past decade, serious legal and funding restrictions affecting academic freedom have emerged globally, particularly in authoritarian and populist political contexts in Europe, Latin America, and more recently also in the United States and France.^[43] Because the Nordic countries rank highly on gender equality indexes, the region has long been regarded as relatively immune to such developments. With extensive compulsory education systems, a highly educated population, and high levels of public trust in research, the Nordic region has historically provided favourable conditions that support and institutionally safeguard free academic inquiry.

However, with the rise of anti-intellectual populist movements globally, the Nordic region also shows signs of similar developments. Attacks on researchers and academic institutions have increased across the Nordic countries, accompanied by growing instances of harassment in both research and teaching environments. A comprehensive study from Sweden (Akademisk frihet i Sverige: Regeringsuppdrag om läroämnets arbete med främja och värna akademisk frihet) from 2024 found that restriction of academic freedom in the context of free speech was a high concern.^[44] A recent report from Finland (Akateemisen vapauden tila Suomessa: tutkijoiden ja opettajien näkemyksiä, 2026) and a Nordic report (Akademisk frihet så in i Norden, 2025) showed similar patterns.

41. Knuutila, A., Kosonen H., Saresma T., Haara P., & Pöyhtäri, R. (2019); Saresma T., Pöyhtäri R., Kosonen H., Haara P. & Knuutila A. (2020).

42. Kuhar, R. & Patternotte, D. (2017).

43. Husu, L. (2019); Fassin, É. (2024).

44. Tovatt, C., Bergman, M., Braunerhielm, C., Ejsing, C., Hellberg, L., & Sundberg, K. (2024); Tikka, M. & Saresma T. (2025).

Public targeting and ridicule of funding decisions and funding organisations has also become common. The survey respondents representing academics and research, are predominantly professors and associate professors with extensive experience in their academic fields. As indicated in the respondent background section of this survey, the main fields of study are gender studies, political science, cultural studies, history, educational sciences and anthropology.

The delegitimisation of the objectivity and scientific credibility of gender studies is a common trope in anti-gender politics. Efforts to undermine gender studies research directly threaten academic debate on gender inequality and may hinder progress in the field. Critics often dismiss its findings as purely normative rather than valid, objective knowledge, a perception that persists partly due to longstanding stereotypes that feminist theory, philosophy and gender studies are purely normative academic fields.^[45]

Research from the past decade also shows that although gender studies is often at the forefront of opposition, coordinated attacks are not limited to this field. Academic disciplines such as migration studies, climate change research, and medical research with an emphasis on the benefits of trans healthcare have also faced opposition.^[46]

4.3 Restrictive impact on international government collaboration

As mentioned earlier in this report, a vast majority (70%) of government officials reported not having experienced opposition in the form of threats or harassment directed at themselves, their colleagues, or their organisations. The high proportion may indicate that the Nordic countries' long-standing institutionalisation of gender equality provides robust structural support, which continues to protect government officials working in this area. Nordic countries have strong institutional frameworks for gender equality, including gender mainstreaming, comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, and dedicated bodies such as equality units and ombudsmen. Policy tools such as gender budgeting and individualised parental leave institutionalise equality across governance structures. Their effectiveness depends on coordinated implementation, legal safeguards, and monitoring systems that ensure equal participation in both paid work and caregiving.

At the same time, while this respondent group may be relatively well-protected against coordinated attacks, it is possible that this group frames gender equality in ways that make certain discursive and covert forms of pushback to gender equality work go unnoticed.

45. Dahl, U., and Kennedy-Macfoy, M. (2020); Paternotte, D. and Verloo, M. (2021).
46. Paternotte and Verloo (2021); Engbretsen (2022).

As the following open-ended response describes, there are forms of opposition that occur in the context of international collaboration:

"The opposition we face in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is mainly in multilateral fora and in embassies abroad. The answers above are drawn from these experiences; however, there are examples internationally on most of the issues listed. Again, this does not apply to our internal policy/work, but we face it with many of our partners so all boxes could be ticked. Opposition from [country redacted due to anonymity] actors is more limited, and in general not directed at Ministry of Foreign Affairs but at other Ministries and in the [country redacted due to anonymity] public debate. [...] We primarily receive negative feedback and opposition to our work in non-threatening manner."

The question of international cooperation is beyond the scope of this study and requires further research, particularly regarding security concerns related to foreign influence in Nordic societies and foreign funding streams of anti-gender politics in the Nordic region.

4.4 Barriers to engaging men and boys

As shown in the chapter on discursive opposition, the survey sought to examine whether, and in what ways, such opposition manifests. All respondents were asked if they had encountered specific allegations that prior research has identified as typical examples of pushback rhetoric. For clarity, the question is repeated here:

"Have you or has your organisation experienced any of the following allegations?"

Among the responses, one prominent form of delegitimation stands out: the claim that gender equality efforts dismiss men and boys. Of the 88 survey respondents, more than half reported encountering allegations that a focus on women and girls comes at the expense of men and boys. Open-ended responses indicate a discursive shift in which gender equality is not rejected outright but reframed as failing men and boys. The most frequently reported form of opposition was:

- Gender equality work dismisses key issues faced by boys and men. (61.4%, n = 54).
- Gender equality work is unjust for privileging women and girls. (55.7%, n = 49).

In light of the survey responses, a common claim made against gender equality experts is that their work dismisses key issues faced by boys and men. Therefore, it is important to repeat the survey's background statistic according to which one third of all respondents worked directly with men and masculinities.

Against this background, it is surprising that over 60% of the respondents reported having encountered this kind of rhetoric in the context of opposing and delegitimising gender equality work (see [Figure 10](#)).

This is significant particularly as Nordic societies have a long history of a shared understanding that gender equality is a mutually beneficial state of affairs. The gender-based division of roles and labour in Nordic societies has been developed with the practical aim that individuals can live the lives they choose – regardless of gender. Introducing paternity leave and encouraging fathers to use parental leave has also been a progressive step in advancing gender equality. Overall, parental leave aims to achieve a more equal division of responsibilities between caregivers. The system has been developed to promote fathers' involvement in family life and to support more gender-equal parenting, and it has been widely adopted across the Nordic countries.

The two-provider model, prevalent in the Nordic countries, in which women typically participate in paid employment, has advanced gender equality in a way that contrasts with the stay-at-home-mom model rooted in more conservative gender roles. This gender contract has been a cornerstone of the Nordic welfare state. In this context, anti-gender mobilisation – often framed as 'pro-family', and promoting rigid gender roles – is largely incompatible with established Nordic societal values.

Contemporary anti-gender opposition has gained momentum through the transnational social media ecosystem. For example, a niche of influential male figures with large followings promotes a patriarchal and often nationalist worldview. Their audiovisual content frequently centres on fitness, money-making and dating 'hacks' that position the heterosexual man as the head of the household and portray woman as sexually submissive caregivers, responsible for domestic work and childcare. This reactionary ideology has also found supporters in the Nordic countries, which have traditionally been recognised for their progressive stance on gender equality.^[47]

The phenomenon is visible in the open-ended responses as follows:

"As an educator I mostly feel the opposition from young students (I see kids aged 11–18). Their opposition is not threatening to me but sure is disheartening (this morning 12-year-old boys clapped when I told them being queer is illegal in many countries). These children will be adults soon, and we have a great responsibility to fight back and educate this age group while we still can."

47. Gottzén, L., & Areschoug, S. (2025); Gottzén, L. (2025); Lounela (2026).

"Not directly felt in the organisation but surveys continue to show that younger generations in Iceland hold more negative views towards feminism and trans people, especially among young boys/men. Therefore, the sense is an undercurrent of negative attitudes but that has not explicitly surfaced in relation to my work."

"The brutal backlash in young men's attitudes is the only thing calling for extra precautions since all education, discussion and correction can be like pouring oil on the fire. Which is the last thing we need, but we cannot give up on educating them. We need to find ways to get through to them. Education on equality, discrimination, abuse, sex, porn, toxic masculinities and such must start much earlier. We need more of a focus on emotional education, kids need training in empathy. There has to be a better cooperation (NGO's, government, schools, youth and sport centres, parents, social media moguls...) in fighting this opposition."

"The situation in Norway is that manospheric ideas of men as the true victims (of gender equality that has gone too far) has been mainstreamed and informs politics and media discourse."

The most recent Gender Equality Barometer (2024) from Finland identified a similar trend: some young Finnish men are becoming increasingly critical of gender equality initiatives and advocacy for LGBTQI+ rights. Although the group is relatively small, it represents a demographic that had not previously appeared in the Finnish Barometer.^[48] The open-ended responses above indicate concern that young men may be vulnerable to online radicalisation pipelines.

Whilst many respondents expressed worry about the potential consequences of young men's radicalisation, a few respondents took an entirely different view with regard to men's role in gender equality work. They argued that male-specific issues as such are not treated as legitimate gender equality issues:

"Some extreme feminists are quite hostile to men's participation in the work for gender equality as so often stating that men's issues are less important, or in direct opposition to women's. This also sometimes takes a personal and intimidating form, which makes it unpleasant for our staff to stand up in debates and official foras."

"We don't think there is opposition to gender equality work, as such, or gender equality. We think there is opposition to the way the work is defined and implemented. Men and their experiences of equality have been given significantly less attention than women. When talking about equality between women and men, both should be given equal attention. This would lead to the weakening of the 'resistance' to the margins."

48. However, it is important to note that the general gap between young men and women is not substantial. A Finnish fact checking organization reported in 2025 that young men have remained the same in terms of their values, whereas young women have become more liberal (Faktabaari 2025).

One civil society organisation representative expressed receiving the following critique towards their work:

“Working for boys’ and men’s gender equality issues is not legitimate, and should not be prioritised. Boys’ and men’s gender equality issues are of less importance than girls and women’s equality issues.”

These emerging differences in the framing of gender equality point to the need for further research to better understand and contextualise the experiences of men and boys, particularly in relation to intersecting factors such as age, class, race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, existing research has highlighted gaps in knowledge regarding Nordic men’s experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, violence experienced by men – whether by other men or in the context of intimate partner violence – risks being overlooked due to societal norms around masculinity, shame, and victimhood.^[49]

Nevertheless, the discursive framing that constructs men and boys as positioned outside the scope of gender equality work is in direct contrast with the official Nordic gender equality policy, which explicitly includes men, boys, and masculinities as core components of gender equality.

4.5 LGBTQI+ rights advocacy experts as a risk group

With regard to questions regarding LGBTQI+ rights, open-ended responses indicate that advocacy on trans-specific gender equality issues places gender equality experts at a heightened risk of encountering multiple forms of intimidation and threats.

One **Swedish** civil society organisation noted that extra precautions are necessary when advocating for or speaking specifically about ‘trans experiences’. In other open-ended responses to survey questions on encountered opposition to gender equality work, a civil society organisation and an academic from **Norway** reported encountering trans-specific intimidation:

“Conspiracy theories and transphobia in comments.”

“Harassment in social media in the form of putting me on a hate-list of people working for trans-rights and posting it publicly on their webpage and Facebook wall.”

49. Swahnberg, K., Davidsson-Simmons, J., Hearn, J., & Wijma, B. (2012);

A **Finnish** civil society organisation reported encountering backlash, such as:

"Trans people are not real and promoting trans rights is ideological brainwashing of young people."

Another **Finnish** civil society organisation working with women's rights reported that their work is being delegitimised by statements such as:

"Our work for trans rights contradicts our aim to advance women and girls, as trans women are not women from the speaker's point of view."

A **Swedish** respondent from academia and research reported that racism and transphobia work together in arguments defending free speech:

"My organisation is crap at dealing with these issues. It does not understand that the very subject I teach and do research on, the very bodies of those of us in this field are under attack. [...] My institution thinks it is more important to defend white professors' right to use derogatory sexist, racist and transphobic language than to protect students and faculty who are affected. In general, the defence of freedom of expression always seems to focus on people's right to express racist, sexist, transphobic, Islamophobic and ableist views."

These responses above come from multiple different Nordic countries. The distribution of trans-specific derogatory comments and misinformation, often justified by appeals to freedom of expression, is a cross-sectoral and region-wide pattern across the responses.

Targeting of LGBTQI+ and trans issues has wider consequences: it leads to extra precautions or self-censorship when speaking about gender equality in general, reduces participation in public discussion and civil society engagement, and limits freedom of speech. As some respondents noted:

"Most of the time, risk of discrimination and hate speech on social media heightens when news outlets cover LGBTQIA+ rights or any sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, gender characteristics issues."

The survey indicates that pushback against trans rights constitutes a recurrent site of discursive contestation within Nordic gender equality contexts. It further suggests that gender equality practitioners without a trans-specific focus may struggle to navigate these tensions and maintain a balanced position, as illustrated in the following response:

“Some believe that we focus too much on gender and exclude trans people. Others believe that we focus too much on trans people, which hinders gender equality work.”

Based on the responses, a further question arises as to how transnational anti-transgender push-back^[50] – including misinformation on gender-affirming healthcare,^[51] – may align with broader anti-gender opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This includes investigating the linkages with anti-abortion rights campaigning and their wider implications for gender equality. More research is needed to explore these connections in depth.

50. Colliver, B., Healy, J. C., McBride, K., & Gwenffrewi, G. (Eds.). (2026).

51. Engebretsen, E. L. (2022); Wuest, J. (2025); Grönroos, M., Blomqvist, L., & Olakivi, O. (2026). See also Garcia Gutiérrez, J. M., Dusic, E., Bambilla, A. J. K., & Restar, A. J. (2024).

5. Counter-strategies

The survey demonstrates that pushback and opposition to gender equality in the Nordic region takes hybrid forms, targeting civil society practitioners and academic experts both online and in person, as well as through pressuring institutions to change terminology, restrict discourse, and cut funding. These findings also raise pressing questions about how gender equality experts in the Nordic region can be better protected.

In the context of research on anti-gender politics, a growing body of academic research, think tank studies, and policy reports have focused on best practices for countering opposition and pushback, both in digital spaces and in everyday work. [52] Reflecting this growing research trend and to gain further insight into effective preventive and support measures, all survey respondents were first asked whether they had reported any opposition they had encountered, and then asked to evaluate practices that they considered most helpful. The findings are presented below.

- 30% (n = 26) had not reported experienced opposition (civil society organisations: 13; academia: 7; government sector: 6).
- 29% (n = 25) had reported incidents on some occasions (civil society organisations: 13; academia: 10; government sector: 2).
- 13% (n = 11) had reported incidents (civil society organisations: 4; academia: 6; government sector: 1).
- 29% (n = 25) indicated 'does not apply', with one respondent from Iceland leaving the question unanswered. (civil society organisations: 7; academia: 7; government sector: 10).

Among the respondents who experienced opposition, the rate of reporting was highest in Finland (60%), as well as the Åland Island and Greenland combined (75%). Iceland had the lowest rate of reporting of incidents (13%). The country and region-specific reporting rates are presented in the infographic below. The number next to the country represents the total survey respondents from the particular country.

52. See for instance: "Safer Queer Cities: Understanding Online Safety for LGBTQ+ Individuals in Reykjavik" and Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2024); Zeynep G. G., and Çelik, A. B. (2025), Lewin, T. (2021); Korolczuk, E. (2020); Honkasalo, J. (2022).

Table 2: Reporting of opposition

If you/your organization has experienced opposition towards your work for gender equality, did you report it?	Yes (n)	On some occasions (n)	No (n)	Does not apply (n)	Did not respond (n)	Had reported the encountered opposition on all occasions or on some occasions. (%)
Denmark (n = 11)	2	4	3	2	-	54 %
Finland (n = 20)	5	7	3	5	-	60 %
Iceland (n = 18)	-	3	7	7	1	17 %
Norway (n = 18)	2	4	6	6	-	33 %
Sweden (n = 17)	2	5	6	4	-	41 %
Åland Islands and Greenland (n = 4)	3	-	1	-	-	75 %

These figures suggest that encountered opposition is underreported, which may be a reflection of insufficient legal and psychological protection mechanisms for targets of online harassment, violence and intimidation. It is likely that the results also align with more general tendencies of the underreporting of hate crimes, sexual harassment and violence in the general population. This issue requires further research.

To gain knowledge on the best preventive and supportive practices in the context of opposition to gender equality work, all respondents were asked: "Please indicate to what extent you would find the following measures helpful for the preparation for and coping with harassment, intimidation and/or threats."

Most respondents (60%) reported that their organisation has a response plan for dealing with threats and harassment, while 22% did not have a plan and 15% were unsure. The measures widely considered helpful were improved legal protections against cyber harassment (47%), public statements supporting targeted individuals (46%), and enhanced psychological support and supervisor training (44%). One-third of respondents (33%) emphasised the value of practical workshops for assessing risks and countering online opposition, including strategies for addressing false information and hate speech.

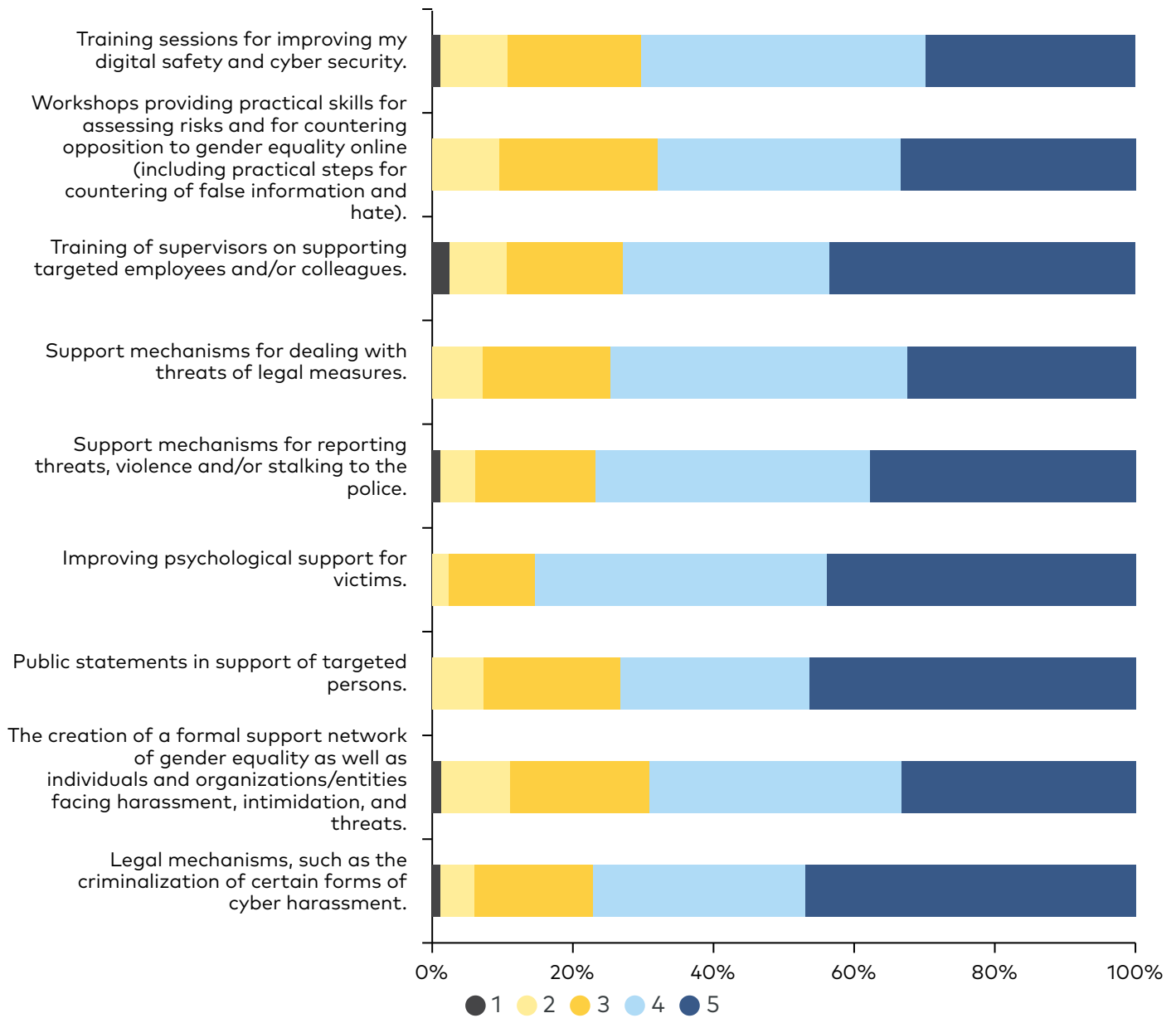


Figure 14: Please indicate to what extent you would find the following measures helpful for the preparation and coping with harassment, intimidation and/or threats [1= very unhelpful, 5 = very helpful]

Number of respondents: 85

In the open-ended response section, a civil society organisation from **Finland** wrote:

"The police need to take gendered harassment and other forms of cyberbullying seriously and forward when reported."

Another civil society organisation respondent from **Norway** wrote:

"Our organisation's problem, is that working with boys and men leaves us with very few allies when it comes to bullying and hateful speech against our staff and organisation."

A government representative from **Sweden** wrote:

"We have conducted a seminar on extremism and threats on social media as a prevention and awareness-raising measure."

An academic from **Norway** wrote that enhanced institutional support mechanisms were needed:

"Institutional support and competence are crucial. Therefore, leaders at all levels should be trained to recognise anti-gender and racist tactics, including subtle microaggressions. Current action plans often define gender equality too narrowly – and at times, they may even prove counterproductive. Additionally, there is a persistent tendency to view Nordic countries as exceptional ('it doesn't happen here'), which further reinforces institutional complacency."

An academic from **Iceland** also called for preventive measures:

"I would like my university to address this reality and take steps in creating a policy that protects us academics who are dealing with this BEFORE something more serious happens."

These findings highlight an urgent need for much clearer and much more systematic institutional preparedness for anti-gender politics and pushback, including strengthened legal, organisational, and psychosocial support mechanisms for targets. One positive example of such strategies already exists in Iceland, where the City of Reykjavik developed a digital self-defence tool based on a survey on online safety for LGBTQ+ individuals in particular.^[53] Existing research shows that co-optation occurs in contexts where preventive and proactive support mechanisms are not strong enough. Resistance to pushback is strategically insufficient, as it takes up time and funding that should be channelled to gender equality advancement.

53. Safer Queer Cities Capacity building, sensitivity training and digital self-defence tool <https://nikk.no/en/fundproject/safer-queer-cities/>

6. Nordic gender equality: resilience to pushback and emerging challenges

The countries constituting the Nordic region share several key characteristics. They all are multi-party democracies with strong constitutional, judicial and educational systems, alongside institutionalised public healthcare and social security structures. The Nordic states also share some key collaborative legal, political, and normative approaches with regard to gender equality policy and implementation, including family policies. On the other hand they share a common history of scientific development and policy implementation related to eugenic race theories.^[54]

The findings of this report indicate that opposition to gender equality work, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and LGBTQI+ rights, follows broadly similar patterns across the Nordic countries. This suggests that anti-gender politics in the region may not utilise substantially tailored strategies for individual countries, making the Nordic context somewhat unique.^[55] In contrast, research from other parts of Europe shows that opposition strategies vary considerably between post-communist countries, the UK and Catholic-majority countries for instance.

The Nordic region is also notable for its relatively secular culture, in contrast to Catholic or Orthodox countries where anti-gender mobilisation is often closely linked with ultra-conservative religious actors. Nevertheless, existing research indicates that religious groups can also influence opposition to gender equality work in the Nordics.^[56] For example, a 2022 Swedish study of free Churches found that LGBTQI+ individuals in these environments may experience silencing, exclusion, and even pressure to change their sexual orientation or gender identity in prayer and pastoral care.^[57]

This survey did not specifically attempt to assess the possible impact of Nordic Christian free church organisations (evangelical, Pentecostal, conservative Protestant, and independent congregations) on public policy, nor their potential lobbying against Nordic values of gender equality. The survey contained one question asking whether respondents had witnessed opposition to their work justified by appeals to religious freedom: 17% (n = 15) reported that they had.

54. Honkasalo, J. (2019) and (2020); Alaattinoğlu, D. (2023).

55. Some studies on anti-gender politics in the Scandinavian context have highlighted the foreign propaganda strategy of presenting Scandinavia as a dysfunctional region, where gender equality and anti-racism has gone too far. See Brock, M., & Askanius, T. (2023).

56. Norocel, O. C., & Pettersson, K. (2022).

57. Carlström, C. (2022).

Open-ended responses from two non-governmental organisations, one from **Norway** and one from **Finland**, also raised concerns about the role of Christian right groups.

"The situation in Norway (and the Nordics) is still quite stable, when it comes to DEI [Diversity Equality Inclusion]. However, there are latent threats, linked to the international situation, that also gives echoes to the Norwegian public debate. Today, the LGBTQ+ population (and especially trans and [non-]binary [sic]) people is facing the greatest challenges, not only from terrorists but also from some Christian right-wing political initiatives. Some women's rights may also be at stake, but the gender equality structure is quite robust to meet this threat."

"Democracy and equality are inseparable and corrosion of one affects the other. Far-right and Christian conservatives are the greatest threat to both, just like in the USA. Europe needs to take a stand against this development."

As this report is a preliminary attempt to assess the extent and impact of encountered opposition to gender equality, no substantial conclusions can be drawn from the responses concerning religious freedom. However, taken together, the open-ended responses do highlight a potential area of concern in the Nordic context. Further systematic, in-depth academic and policy research as well as collaboration with civil society organisations is needed to assess the extent to which internationally funded networks of conservative, evangelical or revivalist Christian groups lobby for pushback against Nordic policy on gender equality, SRHR and LGBTQI+ rights, transgender healthcare, as well as how the Evangelical Lutheran churches in the Nordic countries respond to this type of pushback. The survey findings indicate that civil society organisations and higher education institutions are particularly vulnerable to targeted pushback and silencing campaigns. This is particularly concerning given the central role of these sectors in the Nordic region in safeguarding open democratic participation, debate and dialogue as well as maintaining societal stability.

Academic freedom is another important dimension in the context of this survey. The Nordic countries have consistently ranked highly in the Academic Freedom Index and Freedom of Press Index compared with many other European countries, particularly those now with authoritarian leaders. However, in recent years, there has been an alarming decline in these rankings. This may partly be due to strategic anti-gender efforts to constrain academic freedom as well as press freedom.^[58] Despite the fact that there is by now an increasing amount of academic scholarship as well as EU-funded policy recommendation studies on anti-gender mobilisation,

58. Reporters Without Borders (2025) RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025: economic fragility a leading threat to press freedom"; Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Institute of Political Science, V Dem Institute.(2025) Academic Freedom Index. Update 2025.

there is very little research on the complex dynamics of online anti-gender social and political influencing and the ways in which this type of rhetoric utilises free speech to manipulate public discourse. When asked whether or not gender equality experts had witnessed opposition to their work by appeal to freedom of speech, 31% responded that they had (n = 31).

Based on the findings of this report, a further theme that characterises all the Nordic countries is the emphasis on men's and boys' rights. Although men's equality has been promoted as part of gender equality policy in this region for several decades, the divergent ways of defining and framing gender equality among the respondents indicates that more research is required to understand and contextualise how intersecting differences, such as age, class, race as well as gender and sexual identity shape experiences of men, boys, and masculinities. This requires that work with men, boys and masculinities is understood broadly, rather than being treated as men's work that is separate from intersectional gender equality work.

7. Conclusions

This survey, based on 88 responses from civil society organisations, academics, and government officials in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Åland Islands, and Greenland, demonstrates that opposition to gender equality work is prevalent across the Nordic region. The findings indicate that anti-gender politics is not limited to geopolitical contexts outside the Nordic region, despite the region's international reputation as a global leader in gender equality.

Respondents reported hybrid forms of opposition particularly directed at gender mainstreaming, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and LGBTQI+ rights. Reported forms of opposition included death threats, threats against family members, stalking, sexual harassment, physical violence, online harassment, smear campaigns, and threats or initiation of legal measures and formal complaints. Opposition was encountered across all three sectors examined: civil society organisations, academia, and government officials. Threats and harassment occurred both online and offline and varied in frequency and severity.

The findings indicate that these forms of intimidation have concrete and severe personal and professional consequences. Respondents reported reduced motivation, withdrawal from public engagement, avoidance of gender equality-related topics, concerns about personal safety, and, in some cases concealing parts of their identity or taking sick leave. At a structural level, opposition distracts and disrupts gender equality work. Reduced funding further compounds the negative impact of opposition directed at gender equality experts. The findings also suggest that discursive opposition to gender equality, SRHR, and LGBTQI+ rights may slow down or postpone the implementation of equality policies across the Nordic region.

The high frequency and cross-sectoral nature of reported opposition raise the question of coordinated anti-gender campaigning within the Nordic region. The absence of significant regional variation in response patterns, together with substantial similarities in the types and frequency of opposition reported across countries, may indicate that organised anti-gender politics have gained a foothold across the region. The findings further suggest that even countries widely regarded as global role models in gender equality are not immune to transnational anti-gender propaganda and politics. An important issue beyond the scope of this survey is the urgent need for additional mechanisms to monitor foreign funding to the Nordic region as a potential security threat.

Existing research, gathered to strengthen the theoretical background of this survey, shows that anti-gender movements often rely on discursive opposition in their pushback strategies, such as framing the concept of gender as ideological. The survey findings align with this claim and furthermore, also suggest overlap between

transnational anti-transgender push-back and broader opposition to gender equality. This highlights the need to better understand the role of gender-affirming healthcare within anti-gender rhetoric and politics. Further research and evidence-based policy are needed to assess these dynamics.

Finally, in the Nordic context, discursive opposition frequently frames men and boys as a neglected group within gender equality advancement policy, despite the fact that Nordic countries explicitly include men and boys as part of their official gender equality policies. Through this type of discursive pushback, the concept of equality itself is not rejected, but rather reframed by questioning the legitimacy of intersectional approaches to gender equality work.

Taken together, the reported hybrid forms of opposition to gender equality work pose risks to core democratic principles in Nordic societies, including academic freedom and the right to participate in civil society work without harassment, intimidation, or threats of violence.

The findings underline the need for both short-term protective measures and long-term strategic responses, including sustainable funding mechanisms for gender equality and human rights work. Political commitments and actions undertaken by the Nordic Council of Ministers and national governments are important steps; however, further research is needed on the potential role of transnational networks, foreign funding streams, information manipulation, and other forms of interference affecting not only gender equality work but also societal resilience and security in the Nordic region.

Strengthened and sustained Nordic cooperation is therefore essential to address the challenges posed by transnational anti-gender mobilisation, as well as to strengthen democratic decision-making and maintain open and inclusive public debate in the Nordic region.

8. Key takeaways

1. **Opposition to gender equality work is widespread across the Nordic region.**

The survey responses show clear patterns of opposition across civil society, academia and government. The majority of professionals working in gender equality reported having experienced one or more forms of opposition, threats, or harassment.

- Approximately two-thirds of respondents reported encountering threats or harassment either personally or at the organisational level.

2. **Harassment most commonly occurs online, but also in hybrid forms.**

There is a correlation between online visibility and the risk of being targeted. Social media platforms constitute the primary arena for harassment, with 93% of those who experienced harassment reporting that it took place online.

- Hybrid forms of harassment are also common, including threats or harassment at events (44%), legal threats (42%), and doxing (25%).

3. **Severe forms of threats occur in all Nordic countries.**

The survey findings indicate that serious forms of opposition are present across the Nordic region. Threats of legal measures and doxing were reported in every Nordic country included in the survey. Taken together and across the Nordic region, respondents reported the following forms of opposition to their gender equality work. Respondents reported for instance the following:

- Stalking or persecution (19%)
- Death threats (16%)
- Threats targeting the health or safety of family members (12%)

4. **Frequency of opposition is high and closely linked to visibility.**

Nearly one quarter of respondents reported experiencing opposition on a weekly basis, and over half reported experiencing opposition at least monthly.

- 94.6% reported that increased visibility in traditional or social media increases both the frequency and severity of opposition.

5. **Sector-specific patterns suggest different strategies of opposition.**

Civil society organisations (CSOs):

- 68.4% experienced threats or harassment at the organisational level; 50% at the individual level.
- Common forms included event-based harassment, legal threats, sexual harassment, and doxing.

Academia:

- High incidence of online harassment, smear campaigns, doxing, legal threats, and threats to academic freedom.
- Gender studies scholars were highly targeted.

Government officials:

- Lower rates of direct harassment, but higher incidence of discursive and covert pushback, including:
 - Budget and resource cuts.
 - Pressure to change terminology (e.g. replacing gender with sex in policy writing).
 - Attempts to delay or halt gender equality measures.

6. Discursive opposition is widespread and partly reflects patterns of anti-gender rhetoric identified in existing research.

Respondents across all sectors reported encountering recurring discursive arguments, including:

- Claims that "gender is ideological and should be replaced with biological sex" (61%).
- Claims that gender equality "privileges women and girls" or "dismisses men's issues" (over 55%).
- Narratives associated in existing research with nationalist, anti-LGBTQI+, or anti-feminist framing.

7. Impacts on individuals, institutions and Nordic democratic participation are significant.

Reported impacts of opposition to gender equality work include:

- Self-censorship in research, teaching and public engagement.
- Avoidance of certain topics (especially LGBTQI+ rights, anti-racism, and gender-based violence).
- Exhaustion, stress and sick leave.
- Withdrawal from public debate.
- Reduced organisational capacity and delays in equality measures.
- Restrictions on academic freedom and weakened civil society participation.

8. LGBTQI+ work, particularly transgender-related issues, is at heightened risk.

- Transgender-related topics triggered some of the strongest backlash across sectors.
- Respondents reported transphobic hate speech, misinformation, being put on hate lists, and accusations that trans rights contradict women's rights.

9. Respondents expressed concern about democratic backsliding.

- 82% believe gender equality is under threat.
- 60% anticipate rising violent extremism in the region.
- Several open-ended responses linked and framed encountered pushback to right-wing politics, anti-gender mobilisation, and structural attacks on civil society.

10. Many organisations have response plans, but preventive support systems remain insufficient.

60% reported having a response plan for dealing with threats, and the most valued support mechanisms were:

- Stronger legal protections (47%).
- Public statements supporting targeted individuals (46%).
- Psychological support and supervisor training (44%).
- Practical workshops on risk assessment and countering online hate (33%).

9. Appendixes

Appendix I: Key terms and definitions

Doxing

Doxing (from internet slang "dox" as in documents), refers to the deliberate collection, aggregation, and dissemination of an individual's personal information without consent and with harmful intent. This conduct can cause significant harm. The effects may be long-term for the affected individual. It may also give rise to legal liability for the person responsible for publishing the information.

(Source: Molas, B. 2024)

Hate speech

Under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, freedom of expression entails duties and responsibilities and may be subject to proportionate restrictions, including to protect public safety and the rights of others. Accordingly, EU law criminalises hate speech that incites violence or hatred based on protected characteristics. This approach differs from the broader free speech protections under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which can create challenges in regulating U.S.-based digital platforms operating within the EU.

(Source: Car, P. & Immenkamp, B. 2025)

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical approach that recognises how multiple factors simultaneously shape an individual's identity and position within societal power structures. According to this perspective, no single factor – such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation – can be understood in isolation. Promoting equality requires considering how these factors intersect. Intersectionality can be translated as "intersecting differences" or "intersecting inequalities."

(Source: Hietaharju, A-M. 2026)

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment refers to any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that intentionally or effectively violates a person's mental or physical integrity, especially by creating a threatening, hostile, degrading,

humiliating, or distressing environment. It is often linked to gender-based harassment and is considered a form of discrimination under Nordic equality law.

(Source: EIGE 2016a)

Stalking

A pattern of repeated threatening or intrusive behavior directed at a person, causing fear for their safety, including unwanted contact, surveillance, or harassment.

(Source: Merriam-Wester 2026; EIGE 2016b)

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality and reproduction, including the right to make informed decisions about one's body, relationships, and reproductive life, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.

(Source: WHO 2026)

Appendix II: Expert group

An expert group was established to support the project and to provide country-specific expertise on the topic. The group consisted of six professors from the Nordic countries with interdisciplinary expertise on anti-gender politics. The expert group was consulted on the design of the questionnaire and was given the opportunity to comment on draft versions of the report. A two-day workshop/research seminar was held in Copenhagen in September 2025 to discuss the preliminary results of the survey. The members of the expert group and the author of this report did not participate in the online survey as respondents. The expert group members are listed below. In addition to serving as a member of the expert group, Professor Tuija Saesma also acted as Senior Research Advisor to the author of the report.

Assoc. Prof. Emil Edenborg	Stockholm University, Sweden.
Prof. Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen	University of Stavanger, Norway.
Assoc. Prof. Ov Cristian Norocel	Lund University, Sweden.
Assoc. Prof. Michael Nebeling Petersen	University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
Prof. Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir	University of Iceland, Iceland.
Prof. Tuija Saesma	University of Eastern Finland, Finland.

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About this publication

Opposition to gender equality in the Nordic countries

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TemaNord 2026:522

ISBN 978-92-893-8481-0 (PDF)

ISBN 978-92-893-8482-7 (ONLINE)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/temanord2026-522>

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Cover photo: Natalia Blauth/Unsplash

Published: June 2026

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