



Studia i Materiały. Miscellanea Oeconomicae

Rok 18, Nr 2/2014

Wydział Zarządzania i Administracji

Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach

**The Arctic and Nordic
Countries in the World of Economy and Politics**

Joanna Aleksandra Radowicz¹

**EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN:
NORDIC SOLUTIONS**

Introduction

Scandinavian countries are among those with the highest gender equality indices in the world. Out of five Scandinavian countries, four were granted top positions in the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum, and were thus ranked as the Best Countries for Gender Equality². With a score of 0.8640 Iceland was ranked first, followed by Finland (0.8451), Norway (0.8403) and Sweden (0.8159), while Denmark with its score of 0.7777 was granted the 7th position and was therefore surpassed only by Ireland (0.7839) and New Zealand (0.7805)³.

The representation of women in parliament is also the highest in Nordic countries. Following the data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in 1995 the percentage of women in the parliaments of Nordic countries was the biggest in

¹ Joanna Aleksandra Radowicz, Ph.D., the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland.

² Based on 14 indicators the report ranks 135 countries with respect to the size of their gender gap in the following areas: 1) economic participation and opportunity; 2) educational attainment; 3) health and survival (in which female and male life expectancy and mortality rates are compared); and 4) political empowerment. Every country receives scores between 0 (total inequality) and 1 (total equality) for each of the 14 indicators. The final score is the average of all the 14 scores in the respective categories and it determines the country's rank in the report. From: *Global Gender Gap Report 2012: The Best and Worst Countries for Women*, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/24/global-gender-gap-report-2012-best-worst-countries-women_n_2006395.html#slide=1677327, web. December 13 13.12.2012.

³ *Global Gender Gap Report 2012: The Best and Worst Countries for Women*, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/24/global-gender-gap-report-2012-best-worst-countries-women_n_2006395.html#slide=1677327, web. December 13 2012.

the world and it amounted to 36.4%. In 2008, the female participation in the parliaments of the Northern European countries increased and it reached 41.4%⁴.

According to the statistics presented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as of 31 October 2012 Scandinavian countries were ranked at top positions in the global classification of the number of women present in parliament. On average, 41.6% of Nordic MPs are currently female⁵.

In this classification Sweden ranked 4th (the highest position among all the Nordic countries) with 44.7% of seats in the Riksdag, i.e. the Swedish parliament, taken by women. With the percentage of 42.5% of women in its parliament Finland came in 7th, while Iceland was 10th (39.7%), Norway 11th (39.6%) and Denmark 13th (39.1%)⁶.

Active participation of women in politics in Nordic countries, together with their significant representation in parliament (when compared to other countries in the world) are a consequence of certain social behavioural patterns and cultural standards. According to Karvonen and Selle, this generally common approval of female political activity among citizens of the Northern European countries results from actions undertaken by Scandinavian governments with the aim of promoting and advocating for social equality⁷.

Inglehart and Norris point out a correlation that exists between the views upon gender equality and the actual number of women in parliament. The social attitude represented by the citizens of the given country is therefore of great significance. Scandinavian countries rank highest both in terms of their egalitarian approach to the percentage of females in parliament and women entrusted with the most important public functions⁸.

This statement may be supported by the fact that the number of women occupying the highest state positions in Nordic countries is significant in comparison to other countries in the world. For instance, in 1980 in Iceland the world's first female head of state was democratically elected in the course of general elections⁹. In 2009, also in this country, the female prime minister was appointed and the first government with equal number of men and women was formed¹⁰. Furthermore, Gro Harlem Brundtland is known as one of the leading Norwegian politicians. She served three terms of office as Prime Minister of Norway in 1981, 1986-1989 and 1990-1996. Political activity of women is also

⁴ *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Reports and Documents Number 54, Geneva 2008, p. 15.

⁵ A. Żukowski, *Partycypacja wyborcza kobiet – wyzwania i dylematy*, Centrum Studiów Wyborczych/Centre of Electoral Studies, Toruń 2011, p. 29.

⁶ Women in national parliaments, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, web. December 17 2012

⁷ L. Karvonen, P. Selle, *Women in Nordic Politics*, Aldershot 1995.

⁸ R. Inglehart, P. Norris, *Wzbierająca fala*, Warsaw 2009, p. 161-162.

⁹ Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was elected president first in 1980, and after that also in 1984 and 1996.

¹⁰ From: *Gender Equality in Iceland – Information on Gender Equality Issues in Iceland* published by the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland and updated in 2012, http://eng.fjarmalaraduneyti.is/media/Gender_Equality_in_Iceland_012012.pdf, web. January 19 2013.

visible in Finland, where Tarja Halonen was elected president in 2000 and 2006¹¹. In spring 2003, together with Prime Minister Anneli Jäätteenmäki they were the first females in the world to serve as heads of state simultaneously in this globally unique duo – female president and female prime minister¹². Also, as early as in 1996 all the speakers of the Eduskunta, i.e. the Finnish parliament, were female¹³. Finally, Helle Thorning-Schmidt has served as the Prime Minister of Denmark since 3 October 2011.

Nordic countries were also the first in the world to grant women election rights. Among them Finland was first to give women both the passive and active right to vote already in 1906¹⁴. In Norway women were first granted the passive and after that the active suffrage (in 1907 and 1913, respectively). Denmark and Iceland allowed women to vote and take part in elections in 1915¹⁵. Sweden was the last of the Scandinavian countries to provide women with election rights; nevertheless, this was done also quite early, as it was already in 1919 that the Riksdag passed the respective act pursuant to which election rights became universal and equal for both men and women¹⁶.

Scandinavia is sometimes perceived as “sex equality’s Promised Land”¹⁷. This is how it is evaluated by the United Nations. In the Progress of the World’s Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report presented by UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), Nordic countries are ranked at the highest positions among all the countries in the world and are thus recognised as those that guarantee sex equality best. Factors taken into consideration in this analysis included as follows: education, employment, political participation and health¹⁸.

Scandinavian countries also regulate issues connected with access to work and working conditions in order to provide for equal opportunities for both men and women in terms of their functioning in the labour market, occupying high positions and receiving the same pay for their work. In comparison to other countries, the percentage of women present in the labour market in this region is the highest in Northern Europe. Employment rates of women are the highest in Sweden and Denmark while the discrepancies between the employment rates of women and men are the smallest. Sweden has nearly managed to provide for the

¹¹ Tarja Halonen served as president to 1 March 2012.

¹² M. Ostrowski, J. Winiecki, *Niech żyje mała różnica*, <http://www.polityka.pl/swiat/analizy/284024,1.prawa-kobiet-w-euroie.read>, web. December 12 2012

¹³ M. C. Kittilson, *Challenging parties, changing parliaments, Women and Elected Office in Contemporary Western Europe*, Ohio 2006, p.103.

¹⁴ J. Marszałek-Kawa, *Parlamenty jednoizbowe w państwach nordyckich*, Toruń 2003, p. 21.

¹⁵ A. Żukowski, *Partycypacja wyborcza kobiet – wyzwania i dylematy...* op.cit., p. 17, T. Cieślak, *Zarys historii najnowszej krajów skandynawskich*, Warsaw 1978, p. 208.

¹⁶ T. Cieślak, *Zarys historii najnowszej krajów skandynawskich...* op.cit., p. 241.

¹⁷ L. Roseberry, *Equal Rights and Discrimination Law In Scandinavia*, <http://www.scandinavianlaw.se/pdf/43-8.pdf>, web. January 22 2013.

¹⁸ UNIFEM, *Progress of the World’s Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report* (United Nations Development Fund for Women), http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/152_preface.pdf, web. December 12 2012

total equality when it comes to the number of working men and women. A high employment rate of women – exceeding the target specified in the Lisbon Strategy – has also been achieved in Finland¹⁹. Women’s active participation in the labour market to a large extent has been enabled by social policy adopted in the Scandinavian countries²⁰. As Lynn Roseberry points out, “Scandinavian social welfare policies include provision of basic services – such as education, health care, and childcare – that are a precondition for sex equality”²¹. In this part of the world equal rights for women are also guaranteed and regulated in the area of parental leaves, which provides women with an opportunity to resume work after maternity leave and to continue their professional career.

The aim of the parental leave policy in Sweden and Iceland is its gender neutrality. This means that all the laws and regulations passed in these countries must be formed in such a way that they remain neutral with respect to gender. Thus, instead of the terms “mother” or “father” the collective notion of “parents” is used in the discourse related to this topic. Finland, Denmark and Norway have implemented separate types of leave for mothers and fathers²². Moreover, legal regulations introduced by Nordic countries are also to prevent any forms of harassment, including sexual harassment.

In Scandinavian countries women’s rights and sex equality are guaranteed and protected by a variety of legal acts. All the countries in Northern Europe have passed their individual regulations granting women equal rights. The aim of this article is to present a brief overview of the most important legal acts and institutions which contribute to the protection of women’s rights and provide for the equal status of women and men in the most important areas of life in each of the five Nordic countries, respectively.

Sweden

In Sweden the respective regulations pertaining to women’s rights may be found in the Instrument of Government (*Regeringsformen*) of 28 February 1974 and its subsequent amendments²³. Article 13 of Chapter 2 “Fundamental rights and freedoms” of the Instrument has the following wording: “No act of law or other provision may imply the unfavourable treatment of anyone on grounds of gender, unless the provision forms part of efforts to promote equality between men and women or relates to compulsory military service or other equivalent official duties”²⁴.

¹⁹ G. Firlit-Fesnak, *Wspólnotowa polityka na rzecz równości kobiet i mężczyzn. Ewolucja celów i instrumentów działania*, Warsaw 2005, p. 139-140.

²⁰ J. Kantola, *Gender and the European Union*, Basingstoke 2010, p. 10.

²¹ L. Roseberry, *Equal Rights and Discrimination Law...op.cit.*, accessed on 15.01. 2013.

²² *Parental leave in: Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in Nordic countries*, ed. I. Gislason, G. B. Eydal, Copenhagen 2011, p. 32.

²³ *Prawa kobiet we współczesnym świecie*, ed. L. Kondratiewa-Bryzik, W. Sokolewicz, Warsaw 2011, p. 233-234.

²⁴ Instrument of Government of 1974 with subsequent amendments. The English version of the Instrument is available at the website of the Swedish parliament (Riksdag):

Sex equality is also guaranteed in Chapter 1 “Basic principles of the form of government” of the Instrument, Article 2 of which states as follows: “Public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the individual”²⁵.

The Equal Opportunities Act passed by the Riksdag entered into force in 1992 guaranteeing the equal treatment of women and men, while the 1995 Parental Leave Act regulates the issues connected with both maternity leave and paternity leave. It provides parents with the right to paid parental leave during which parents receive benefits funded under the social security system²⁶.

In 1998, the Swedish parliament passed an act imposing severe penalties for battering women and/or mental or sexual violence against women. In 2004, the Swedish government decided to launch actions aimed at promoting gender equality in offices. Three years later the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality was established with the task to protect the rights of women and representatives of minorities²⁷. After the general elections in 2010 the ministry was dissolved and now it is the Ministry of Education and Research that is responsible for the gender equality issues²⁸.

Moreover, on 5 June 2008 the Riksdag passed the Discrimination Act which became effective on 1 January 2009. The purpose of the Act is “to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age”²⁹.

The document contains provisions on what is considered an act of discrimination and is thus prohibited by the law. It addresses many different aspects of social life and presents specific cases and types of unlawful conduct with reference to the following areas: work, education and financial support for education, labour market policy, employment and professional career, membership in various organisations, goods and services, medical care and welfare, social insurance system, unemployment, military and civilian service, meetings and public events, and policy on reprisals. Regulations stipulated in the Act precisely specify both the areas of life that need to be protected and groups of people in risk

<http://www.riksdagen.se/en/How-the-Riksdag-works/Democracy/The-Constitution/The-Instrument-of-Government/>, web. December 15 2012.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ *Gender Equality Law in 33 European Countries*, Update 2011, ed. S. Prechal, S. Burri, European Commission, Directorate General for Justice, p. 167, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_equality_law_in_33_european_countries_update2011_en.pdf, web. December 13 2012.

²⁷ *Prawa kobiet we współczesnym świecie*, ed. L. Kondratiewa-Bryzik, W. Sokolewicz... *op.cit.*, p. 232.

²⁸ The respective information may be found at the official websites of the Government Offices of Sweden available at: <http://www.government.se/sb/d/2063#>, web. January 16 2013.

²⁹ From: Section 1 of the Discrimination Act of 5 June 2008. The English translation of the Act is available at: <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/11/59/03/b463d1e1.pdf>, web. December 20 2012.

of being discriminated against. The only issue not regulated by the Act is discrimination with respect to age³⁰.

Pursuant to the Act of 5 June 2008, the office of the Equality Ombudsman was established³¹. This new agency is responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Discrimination Act. The Ombudsman's role is to prevent and combat discrimination with respect to sex and all the other personal characteristics referred to in the Act³².

The Equality Ombudsman is entitled to address the respective courts whenever any of the provisions stipulated in the Discrimination Act are violated³³. The Ombudsman has also been granted specific instruments and possibilities in order to be able to offer counselling and assistance to people exposed to any acts of discrimination. The 2008 Discrimination Act also provided legal grounds for the functioning of the Board against Discrimination which deals with cases pertaining to discriminatory practices and issues its decisions and official statements in writing.

Thus, Sweden has adopted and implemented both institutional and legal guarantees which allow for gender equality standards to be respected and complied with. They are constantly present in the awareness of Swedish society and rules governing its functioning. The country has a long tradition of striving for gender equality and guaranteeing equal rights for women.

Also, in the recent years a greater participation of women has been observed in politics. Swedish regulations pertaining to elections and electoral rules do not enforce gender parities in general elections. Nevertheless, most political parties try to ensure the equal representation of both women and men in their electoral lists³⁴.

Norway

The Constitution of Norway does not contain any definite provisions guaranteeing gender equality. Neither does it offer specific regulations on prohibition of discrimination with respect to sex. Regulations pertaining to women's rights are included in the Gender Equality Act (GEA) which entered into force on 15 March 1979 and since then has been amended on a number of occasions, last time in 2005³⁵. The Gender Equality Act refers to gender equality in all areas of life, with the exclusion of internal regulations adopted by the church³⁶.

³⁰ *New anti-discrimination legislation and a new agency, The Equality Ombudsman*, Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, January 2009, Stockholm 2009, <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11503/a/118018/dictionary/true>, accessed on 19.12.2012.

³¹ The Equality Ombudsman replaced four previous offices of anti-discrimination ombudsmen.

³² *Prawa kobiet we współczesnym świecie*, ed. L. Kondratiewa-Bryzik, W. Sokolewicz... *op.cit.*, p. 240.

³³ The official website of the Equality Ombudsman in Sweden is available at: <http://www.do.se/en/>, accessed on 13.01.2013.

³⁴ *Prawa kobiet we współczesnym świecie*, ed. L. Kondratiewa-Bryzik, W. Sokolewicz... *op.cit.*, p. 240-241.

³⁵ Currently it is known as the Act relating to Gender Equality. Its title has been amended by the Act of 10 June 2005 No. 38.

³⁶ L. Roseberry, *Equal Rights and Discrimination Law...* *op.cit.*, web. December 19 2012.

The general aim of the Act is specified in Section 1 which has the following wording: “This Act shall promote gender equality and aims in particular at improving the position of women”³⁷. In accordance with the provisions stipulated in this section, “[w]omen and men shall be given equal opportunities in education, employment and cultural and professional advancement”.

Section 3 of the GEA specifically states that “direct or indirect differential treatment (discrimination) of women and men is not permitted”, after which it offers definitions and explanations of what may be perceived as an act of a “direct” or “indirect” differential treatment.

In its subsequent sections the Act lays down legal standards for gender equality in various areas of social life. For instance, provisions contained within Section 5 guarantee that women and men are entitled to “equal pay for work of equal value” (“Women and men in the same enterprise shall have equal pay for the same work or work of equal value”³⁸), whereby the term “pay” refers to every type of remuneration for the work delivered, including any benefits or supplements offered by the employer.

Compliance with the provisions of the Gender Equality Act is ensured and verified by the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, as well as the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal established for this very purpose. The Anti-Discrimination Ombud³⁹ is a part of executive power and is appointed by the king who also issues instructions for the Ombud⁴⁰.

In order to guarantee that all the gender equality standards are met, Norway has signed all the treaties and agreements dealing with combating any forms of sex discrimination. First of all, in 1979 it adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁴¹. Moreover, in 2004 the Norwegian parliament passed the law in accordance with which women and men are both guaranteed at least 40% of seats in management bodies of state-owned enterprises⁴².

³⁷ The Act relating to Gender Equality (previously: Gender Equality Act of 15 March 1979 with subsequent amendments) is available at the website of the Norwegian government: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/doc/laws/Acts/the-act-relating-to-gender-equality-the-.html?id=454568>, web. January 11 2013.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ More information about the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud may be found in: *Supplementary Report to the 8th Norwegian Report to the CEDAW Committee from the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud*, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/EADO_for_the_session_NorwayCEDAW51_en.pdf, web. January 15 2013.

⁴⁰ *Państwo i prawo wobec współczesnych wyzwań. Współczesne ustroje państwowe i rozwój demokracji w Polsce. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Jerzego Jaskierni Part II*, ed. R. M. Czarny, K. Spryszak, Toruń 2012, p. 283-284.

⁴¹ *Gender In Norway. Legislation*, <http://www.gender.no/Legislation>, web. December 12 2012.

⁴² M. Ostrowski, J. Winiecki, *Niech żyje mała różnica... op.cit.*, web. December 13 2012.

Finland

In Finland gender equality is assured both in the constitution and other legal acts. The Constitution of Finland of 11 June 1999 specifically refers to equality of the sexes. Women's rights are guaranteed under the provisions of Chapter 2 "Basic rights and liberties", which clearly state that no one shall be discriminated against "on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person"⁴³.

The Constitution promotes gender equality in social activity and professional life. In this respect, the need for equality of rights is particularly stressed when it comes to the determination of pay and other terms and conditions of employment⁴⁴.

Gender equality is discussed more broadly and in greater detail in the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Since its approval in 1987 the Act has been subject to a number of amendments (in 1992, 1995, 1997, 2001 and eventually in 2005). The purpose of the Act is to supervise all the mechanisms applied in order to ensure gender equality and prevent discrimination against women⁴⁵. More specifically, the Act aims „to prevent direct and indirect discrimination based on gender, to promote equality between women and men, and to improve the status of women, particularly in working life”⁴⁶.

While the prohibition of discrimination with respect to gender is ensured by the provisions of the Act on Equality between Women and Men, other types of unequal treatment, i.e. those based on age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics, are covered by the Non-Discrimination Act⁴⁷.

In Finland the observance of women's rights is supervised by the Ombudsman for Equality and the Equality Board. The Ombudsman for Equality is responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Act on Equality between Women and Men, among others those pertaining to prohibition of discrimination and discriminatory job advertising. Additionally, the Ombudsman's tasks include promotion of the objectives of the Act, raising awareness and dissemination of information about the Act and its applications, as well as monitoring that gender equality standards are respected in various areas of social life⁴⁸. The Finnish

⁴³ From: Chapter 2 "Basic rights and liberties", Section 6 "Equality of the Constitution of Finland" of the Constitution of Finland. The English translation of the Constitution is available at: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>, web. December 19 2012.

⁴⁴ M. Grzybowski, *Ustroje państw Europy Północnej*, Kraków 2006, p. 29.

⁴⁵ M. C. Kittilson, *Challenging parties, changing parliaments...* op.cit., p.117.

⁴⁶ Gender Equality Unit and the Ombudsman for Equality. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, *The Act on Equality Between Women and Men*, Gender Equality Publications 2005: 2, Helsinki 2005, p. 38-39, <http://pre20090115.stm.fi/aa1138615659042/passthru.pdf>, web. December 11 2012.

⁴⁷ Non-Discrimination Act of 2004 with subsequent amendments. The English translation of the Act is available at: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040021.pdf>, web. December 2012.

⁴⁸ Gender Equality Unit and the Ombudsman for Equality. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, *The Act on Equality Between Women and Men...* op.cit., p. 38-39, web. December 11 2012.

Equality Board has the power to issue the respective prohibitions in order to prevent any forms of discrimination from continuation or reoccurrence⁴⁹.

Finland takes active measures in its constant attempts towards achieving gender equality and promoting women's rights. In 1962, a law was passed which guaranteed equal pay for the same work. In 1972, the Finnish government established the Council for Equality composed of 13 members acting under the supervision of the Prime Minister. The Council for Equality is responsible for promoting equality between women and men, and it is obliged to submit reports on its activity to the Eduskunta⁵⁰.

Having implemented a number of laws and regulations pertaining to gender equality, Finnish authorities carry on with their active policy in this respect and take respective measures. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has recently published on its website the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2012-2015⁵¹. The Action Plan defines the objectives of the Finnish government and measures that need to be undertaken by the relevant bodies in the following key areas: legislation, working life, work-life balance, professional development, representation in decision-making, education, integration, economic policy, social inclusion, health and medical services, violence against women, domestic violence and sexual violence. The Action Plan has been drawn in order to organise and develop the actions and measures undertaken with the aim of promoting and mainstreaming gender equality.

Iceland

The Constitution of Iceland contains gender equality guarantees confirmed in Chapter 7, Article 65, which has the following wording: "Everyone shall be equal before the law and enjoy human rights irrespective of sex, religion, opinion, national origin, race, colour, property, birth or other status"⁵². Further, the same article states even stronger: "Men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all respects"⁵³.

Regulations pertaining to sex equality may also be found in the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men of 2008⁵⁴. The first gender

⁴⁹ Decisions issued by the Equality Board may be appealed against before the Supreme Administrative Court.

⁵⁰ M.C. Kittilson, *Challenging parties, changing parliaments... op.cit.*, p.115.

⁵¹ *Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2012-2015*, available at the official site of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland: http://www.stm.fi/en/publications/publication/_julkaisu/1821444#en, web. December 15 2012.

⁵² From: Chapter 7, Article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland. The English version of the Constitution is available at the website of the Government Offices of Iceland, <http://www.government.is/constitution/>, web. January 13 2013.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ The Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men of 2008 with subsequent amendments. The English version of the Act is available at the website of the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare: http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act-on-equal-status-and-equal-rights-of-women-and-men_no-10-2008.pdf, accessed on 17.01.2013.

equality act in Iceland was passed in 1975, after which it has been revised on a number of occasions, among others in 1985, 1991, 2000 and 2008⁵⁵.

Article 1 of the Act uses the following words to state its purpose: “The aim of this Act is to establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, and thus promote gender equality in all spheres of the society.”

Section III of the Act focuses on rights and obligations arising from and in connection with the Act which it clearly defines within its subsequent articles. Thus, rights and obligations related to the labour market are discussed in Article 18, and are followed by those pertaining to wage equality; vacancies, vocational training, retraining and continuing education (lifelong learning); reconciliation of work and family life; gender-based harassment and sexual harassment; as well as education and schooling (Articles 19-23, respectively). One of the sections of the Act (Section IV) is devoted entirely to issues connected with prohibition against discrimination on grounds of gender. Articles contained within this section (i.e. Articles 24-30) point out types of behaviour which are not allowed with reference to recruitment process, terms and conditions of employment, dismissals, education or advertising⁵⁶.

Having said that, it must be noticed that even though the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men deals with a very broad range of gender equality aspects, its actual aims and objectives remain very general. It does however provide for the legal grounds for the functioning of three important bodies, i.e. the Centre for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Council and Gender Equality Complaints.

In addition to that, each ministry in the Icelandic government is requested to appoint its own equality coordinator whose task is to promote gender equality and to coordinate actions undertaken in this area. Similar measures are implemented at the local level by special gender equality committees⁵⁷. Pursuant to Section II, Article 12 of the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men their task is to monitor whether the equal status and rights of women and men are observed within their municipality.

In 2000, Iceland passed the Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave which implemented the paternal quota in the form of three months of a non-transferable paternity leave⁵⁸. This is the longest paternal quota ever introduced by any of the Nordic countries. As T. Einarsdóttir points out, “[d]uring the last decade the father quota has become the special characteristic of the Icelandic gender equality policy”⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ T. Einarsdóttir, *The Policy on Gender Equality in Iceland*, Brussels 2010, p. 3, www.europarl.europa.eu/studies, web. December 15 2012.

⁵⁶ The English version of the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men is available at the website of the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare: http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act-on-equal-status-and-equal-rights-of-women-and-men_no-10-2008.pdf, web. January 15 2013.

⁵⁷ S. Sagan, *Ustrój polityczny Republiki Islandii*, Rzeszów 2005, p. 92.

⁵⁸ T. Einarsdóttir, *The Policy on Gender Equality in Iceland... op.cit.*, p. 3, web. December 14 2012.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

Denmark

In Denmark gender equality issues are regulated by a few acts. They include the Act on Gender Equality, Equal Treatment Act, Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Occupational Social Security Schemes, and Act on Equal Pay.

The purpose of the Act on Gender Equality is to generally promote gender equality in all areas of social life. The Act also contains provisions pertaining to the prohibition of gender-based discrimination with respect to those aspects of social life which are not referred to in other more specific laws or regulations⁶⁰.

As stated in Part 1 of the Act on Gender Equality, “[t]he purpose of this Act is to promote gender equality, including gender equal integration, equal influence and Gender Equality in all functions in society on the basis of women's and men's equal status. The purpose of the Act is also to counteract direct and indirect discrimination on the ground of gender and to counteract sexual harassment”⁶¹.

While the Act on Gender Equality deals with general issues, the Equal Treatment Act focuses on employment relations and working conditions, including dismissal⁶². It also contains provisions pertaining to pregnancy and maternity, maternity leave, parental leave, adoption leave and paternity leave, which are further discussed in greater detail in the 2006 Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave and Benefit Act (*Barseloven*)⁶³.

The Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Occupational Social Security Schemes with its subsequent amendments prohibits gender-based discrimination when determining or calculating insurance premiums and pension scheme contributions, as well as benefits to be paid⁶⁴.

The body responsible for the promotion and coordination of public policy on gender equality in Denmark is the Minister for Gender Equality. As the official website of the Ministry for Gender Equality informs, „gender equality between women and men is a general principle and objective of Danish policy”⁶⁵.

Finally, equal pay for men and women in Denmark is guaranteed by the Consolidation Act on Equal Pay to Men and Women in accordance with which men and women must be paid the same for the same work or work of equal value⁶⁶.

⁶⁰ *Gender Equality Law in 33 European Countries*, Update 2011, ed. S. Prechal, S. Burri... *op.cit.*, web. December 15 2012.

⁶¹ The Act on Gender Equality of 2000 with subsequent amendments, <http://www.wcwonline.org/pdf/lawcompilation/Denmark-genderequality.pdf>. web. December 17 2012.

⁶² *Gender Equality Law in 33 European Countries*, Update 2011, ed. S. Prechal, S. Burri... *op.cit.*, web, December 20 2012.

⁶³ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁴ In 2009, the Folketing, i.e. the Danish parliament, adopted the Act on equal treatment of men and women in connection with insurance, pensions and similar financial benefits, amending the Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Occupational Social Security Schemes.

⁶⁵ The official website of the Ministry for Gender Equality in Denmark is available at: <http://miliki.dk/english/?engelsk=>, web. January 17 2013.

⁶⁶ Consolidation Act on Equal Pay to Men and Women (2003), <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/6519>, web. January 2013.

Conclusions

Scandinavian countries are often perceived as “equality loving”, also in terms of gender equality⁶⁷. They are considered to be pioneers in the implementation of gender equality standards. Women enjoy a significantly stronger position there than in other states in the world. In Nordic societies a general trend may be observed for promoting and enhancing equality between women and men.

Nevertheless, even these countries need to deal with certain issues that still require special attention. As Inglehart and Norris point out, even in as liberal states as Sweden and Norway the traditional division into typically female and typically male professions clearly prevails⁶⁸. Moreover, in some sectors of the labour market certain differences may still be observed with respect to pay for men and women.

In spite of that one cannot underestimate the fact that all the Nordic countries have managed to draw and implement the respective legal regulations, as well as to establish and develop the necessary institutions which promote equal rights for women and men in all areas of life, and which at the same time monitor their observance.

Bibliography

1. Cieślak T., *Zarys historii najnowszej krajów skandynawskich*, Warsaw 1978.
2. Consolidation Act on Equal Pay to Men and Women (2003), <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/6519>.
3. Chapter 2 „Basic rights and liberties”, Section 6 „Equality of the Constitution of Finland” of the Constitution of Finland. The English translation of the Constitution is available at: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>.
4. Chapter 7, Article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland. The English version of the Constitution is available at the website of the Government Offices of Iceland, <http://www.government.is/constitution/>.
5. *Gender Equality in Iceland – Information on Gender Equality Issues in Iceland* published by the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland and updated in 2012.
6. *Gender Equality Law in 33 European Countries*, Update 2011, ed. S. Prechal, S. Burri, European Commission, Directorate General for Justice, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_equality_law_in_33_european_countries_update_2011_en.pdf.
7. Gender Equality Unit and the Ombudsman for Equality. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, *The Act on Equality Between Women and Men*, Gender Equality Publications 2005: 2, Helsinki 2005, <http://pre20090115.stm.fi/aa1138615659042/passthru.pdf>.
8. *Gender In Norway. Legislation*, <http://www.gender.no/Legislation>.
9. *Global Gender Gap Report 2012: The Best and Worst Countries for Women*, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/24/global-gender-gap-report-2012-best-worst-countries-women_n_2006395.html#slide=1677327.

⁶⁷ A.M. Holli, E. Magnusson, M. Rönnblom, *Critical Studies of Nordic Discourses on Gender and Gender Equality*, “Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies”, 2005, vol. 13, number 3, p. 148.

⁶⁸ R. Inglehart, P. Norris, *Wzbierająca fala...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

10. *Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2012-2015*, available at the official site of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland: <http://www.stm.fi/en/publications/publication/-/julkaisu/1821444#en>.
11. Grzybowski M., *Ustroje państw Europy Północnej*, Kraków 2006.
12. Holli A. M., E. Magnusson, M. Rönnblom, *Critical Studies of Nordic Discourses on Gender and Gender Equality*, "Nordic Journal of Women's Studies", 2005, vol. 13, number 3.
13. *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Reports and Documents Number 54, Geneva 2008.
14. Einarsdóttir T., *The Policy on Gender Equality in Iceland*, European Parliament, Brussels 2010, www.europarl.europa.eu/studies.
15. Firlit-Fesnak G., *Współnotowa polityka na rzecz równości kobiet i mężczyzn. Ewolucja celów i instrumentów działania*, Warsaw 2005.
16. Inglehart R., P. Norris, *Wzbierająca fala*, Warsaw 2009.
17. Instrument of Government of 1974 with subsequent amendments. The English version of the Instrument is available at the website of the Swedish parliament (Riksdag): <http://www.riksdagen.se/en/How-the-Riksdag-works/Democracy/The-Constitution/The-Instrument-of-Government/>.
18. Kantola J., *Gender and the European Union*, Basingstoke 2010.
19. Karvonen L., P. Selle, *Women in Nordic Politics*, Aldershot 1995.
20. Kittilson M.C., *Challenging parties, changing parliaments, Women and Elected Office in Contemporary Western Europe*, Ohio 2006.
21. Marszałek-Kawa J., *Parlamenty jednoizbowe w państwach nordyckich*, Toruń 2003.
22. Non-Discrimination Act of 2004 with subsequent amendments. The English translation of the Act is available at: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040021.pdf>.
23. *New anti-discrimination legislation and a new agency, The Equality Ombudsman*, Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, January 2009, Stockholm 2009, <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11503/a/118018/dictionary/true>.
24. Ostrowski M., J. Winiecki, *Niech żyje mała różnica*, <http://www.polityka.pl/swiat/analizy/284024,1,prawa-kobiet-w-euroie.read>.
25. *Państwo i prawo wobec współczesnych wyzwań. Współczesne ustroje państwowe i rozwój demokracji w Polsce. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Jerzego Jaskierni Part II*, ed. R. M. Czarny, K. Spryszak, Toruń 2012.
26. *Parental leave in: Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in Nordic countries*, ed. I. Gislason, G. B. Eydal, Copenhagen 2011.
27. *Prawa kobiet we współczesnym świecie*, ed. L. Kondratiewa-Bryzik, W. Sokolewicz, Warsaw 2011.
28. Roseberry L., *Equal Rights and Discrimination Law In Scandinavia*, <http://www.scandinavianlaw.se/pdf/43-8.pdf>.
29. Sagan S., *Ustrój polityczny Republiki Islandii*, Rzeszów 2005.
30. Section 1 of the Discrimination Act of 5 June 2008. The English translation of the Act is available at: <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/11/59/03/b463d1e1.pdf>.
31. *Supplementary Report to the 8th Norwegian Report to the CEDAW Committee from the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud* available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/EADO_for_the_session_NorwayCEDAW51_en.pdf.
32. The official website of the Equality Ombudsman in Sweden is available at: <http://www.do.se/en/>.

33. The Act relating to Gender Equality (previously: Gender Equality Act of 15 March 1979 with subsequent amendments) is available at the website of the Norwegian government: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/doc/laws/Acts/the-act-relating-to-gender-equality-the-.html?id=454568>.
34. The Act on Gender Equality of 2000 with subsequent amendments, <http://www.wcwonline.org/pdf/lawcompilation/Denmark-genderequality.pdf>.
35. The official website of the Ministry for Gender Equality in Denmark is available at: <http://miliki.dk/english/?engelsk=>.
36. The Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men of 2008 with subsequent amendments. The English version of the Act is available at the website of the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare: http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act-on-equal-status-and-equal-rights-of-women-and-men_no-10-2008.pdf.
37. The English version of the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men is available at the website of the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare: http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act-on-equal-status-and-equal-rights-of-women-and-men_no-10-2008.pdf.
38. UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report* (United Nations Development Fund for Women), http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/152_preface.pdf.
39. Women in national parliaments, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.
40. Żukowski A., *Partycypacja wyborcza kobiet – wyzwania i dylematy*, Centrum Studiów Wyborczych/Centre of Electoral Studies, Toruń 2011.
41. http://eng.fjarmaladaruneyti.is/media/Gender_Equality_in_Iceland_012012.pdf.
42. <http://www.government.se/sb/d/2063#>.

Abstract

According to the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report, Scandinavian countries were ranked as the Best Countries for Gender Equality. North European countries have implemented the respective legal regulations and institutions whose aim is to promote equal rights for women and men. There is a general social approval in Nordic countries for introducing mechanisms that remove any forms of inequality between women and men. Consequently, women play a significant role in the social and political life of these countries.

The main purpose of this article is to present the legal regulations and institutions established by these countries which are recognised as pioneers in the area of gender equality rights. Each of the five Scandinavian countries has implemented its own solutions and therefore has been discussed individually in the article.

Równe prawa dla kobiet: nordyckie rozwiązania

Według Global Gender Gap Report z 2012 roku kraje skandynawskie mają najwyższe współczynniki równości płci na świecie. Państwa Europy Północnej stworzyły szereg regulacji prawnych, a także instytucji, które mają na celu promowanie i wzmacnianie równości pomiędzy kobietami a mężczyznami.

Ponadto w państwach nordyckich istnieje ogólnospołeczna aprobata dla wdrażania wszelkich mechanizmów zapobiegających i usuwających nierówności pomiędzy płciami. Dzięki temu rola kobiet jest bardzo znacząca w życiu społecznym i politycznym tych państw.

Celem pracy jest ukazanie, jakie rozwiązania prawne i instytucjonalne wprowadziły państwa, które uznawane są za pionierów w realizacji równości płci. W każdym z pięciu krajów skandynawskich stworzone zostały odrębne rozwiązania, dlatego w pracy każdy z tych krajów został omówiony oddzielnie.

Joanna Aleksandra Radowicz, Ph.D., the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland.