

# Gender in Nordic Blue Economies

Initial networking results and  
future academic research







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## Foreword

The *Sisters in the Arctic Blue - Advancing a Gender Perspective in Arctic Marine and Coastal Social Science Research (SAB)* network was funded under the Nordic Council of Ministers Arctic Co-operation Program in 2021. The SAB network's main objective is to initiate, facilitate and expand a platform for marine and coastal social science researchers interested in emphasising and reinforcing a gender perspective into their work. The network contributes to connecting researchers with decision-makers, all genders alike. In doing so, SAB enables collective knowledge exchange and capacity development and creates a shared platform to collaboratively work towards raising gender equity issues in the maritime sector political and research agendas in Nordic countries. The SAB network seeks to rectify the gap left by outdated gender research networks, and to identify key gender research themes and questions related to the Arctic Blue Economy sectors.

The initiative to create a Nordic gender research network of social scientists emerged as a result of academic collaborations among Nordic researchers within several EU financed programmes. The awareness and shortage of an organised support- and collaboration network for early career researchers interested in and working with gender issues within Blue Economy sectors brought together a group of Nordic fisheries-, heritage-, and rural- researchers; Dr. Kristina Svelds (Finland), Dr. Kristen Ounanian (Denmark), Dr. Madeleine Gustavsson (Norway) and Dr. Milena Arias Schreiber (Sweden). With guidance from one of the leading gender fisheries researchers in Europe, Prof. Emerita Siri Gerrard at UiT (the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø) the need and the future of gender research in the Arctic context was thoroughly discussed and the proposal to establish a gender research network among the Nordic countries emerged.

This project report is produced based on the main activities carried out by the SAB network over the period 31.8.2021-31.10.2022. The report summarizes a preliminary analysis of Nordic academic literature on gender research within the Blue Economy, the identification of Nordic blue sector policies and the results from two webinars with SAB members exchanging experiences and emerging discussions.

*Gender in Nordic Blue Economies: initial networking results and future academic research* presents preliminary conclusions and emerging themes from the review work and discussions among the SAB network.





## Summary

The SAB network recognised two domains particularly relevant to countries in the Arctic and High North region: (1) coastal, maritime, and marine-based activities, livelihoods, and industries; and (2) gender equality and women's participation in the labour market, governance and decision making. Nonetheless, the convergence of these two domains seldom materialised in our first review of work advancing the gender dimension in Nordic Blue Economies. The SAB's initial analysis shows that there is still a clear need for Nordic countries to focus on gender issues in Blue Economy agendas, especially beyond a traditional focus on fisheries.

There are opportunities to learn from individual country contexts where gender research has been more prolific, e.g., Norway and Iceland, and a pressing need to reinforce gender research in e.g., Sweden, Finland, and Denmark. Other marine sectors in which to explore gender issues are aquaculture, offshore wind energy, shipping, marine tourism, blue foods and seabed mineral extraction. In the Nordic academic gender research sphere, a need for capacity building due to generational transition has been evidenced; early career researchers require the support and engagement from more senior peers. Consequently, since the Blue Economy highlights the great potential of an ocean economy that boosts innovation and employment, gender research needs to be strengthened and receive sustained support to ensure inclusiveness and equality across the maritime Nordic and Arctic regions.



## Gender issues in Nordic Blue Economies require more attention

The Nordic countries' approach to gender in the Blue Economy signals inconsistency with its history of comparatively early attention to gender equality and women's emancipation. On one hand, Nordic societies have demonstrated strong democratic principles with a deliberate attention to issues of gender equality and equity (Siim and Stolz, 2015). On the other hand, there is a marked absence of women's participation in many sectors associated with the Blue Economy. Coupled with continuous societal change in the Nordic and Arctic areas, studies that include findings and perspectives on gender and equality on the household, workplace, community, national and international levels become relevant. However, there is a shortage of contemporary scholarship or support for scholars taking gender into account in studies of Nordic-based Blue Economies. The SAB network experience shows that it is necessary and urgent to secure financing opportunities for new gender-focused projects and programmes





## The state of the Nordic Blue Economy gender research

The preliminary findings coming out of the literature review of Nordic-based research on gender issues within the Blue Economy reveal that Norway and Iceland have had comparatively more robust scholarship in this area than their Nordic counterparts. Moreover, where gender issues have been studied such research has primarily focused on fisheries and to a lesser extent on aquaculture and maritime transport industries, while neglecting other Blue Economy sectors. In other Nordic countries e.g., Sweden, Finland and Denmark, there has been piecemeal attention to gender issues in maritime sectors.

Similarly, maritime policies attend to gender to varying degrees within the Nordic countries. More importantly, not all Nordic countries have a Blue Economy or Blue Growth strategy, or policy tailored to their country context. In the instances where there are maritime sector strategies such as in Finland e.g., *Kasvua vesiosaamisesta ja vesiluonnonvarojen kestävästä hyödyntämisestä Sinisen biotalouden kansallinen kehittämissuunnitelma 2025*<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2016), *Maritime Transport Strategy for Finland 2014–2022* (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2014) and *Fisheries Administration Strategy 2008–2018* (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2014) the inclusion of 'gender' is clearly absent. Also, the Swedish Strategy<sup>2</sup> *Strategi för svenskt fiske och vattenbruk 2021–2026 – friska ekosystem och hållbart nyttjande* for commercial fisheries, aquaculture, recreational fisheries and fisheries tourism (Havs- och vattenmyndigheten och Jordbruksverket, 2021) does not include goals for attending to gender issues.

In contrast, Norway shows the most extensive gender strategy development. Beginning already in 2007, a Norwegian working group consisting of industry and government representatives produced an action plan (Fiskeri- og kystdepartementet, 2007) on how to increase the number of women in marine industries. Yet, in 2021, the Nofima *Bedre likestilling i fiskeriene*<sup>3</sup> report (Henriksen and Nyruud, 2021) recognised the failures in fulfilling the objectives developed in the 2007 report and measures for corrections were suggested. In 2019, the Norwegian

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1. Growth from water knowledge and sustainable utilisation of aquatic natural resources National Strategy for the Development of Blue Bioeconomy 2025
  2. Strategy for Swedish Fisheries and Aquaculture 2021–2026 – Healthy ecosystems and sustainable use
  3. Better gender equality in fisheries

Ocean Strategy recognised that "the ocean sector is an example of a labour market divided along gender lines and with few female workers" (Nærings- og fiskeridepartementet, 2019, p. 21). To address this, the Norwegian government formulated objectives around both expanding the Blue Economy and promoting gender equality, however, how this gender equality will be achieved in practice is not clearly specified. Norway also recognizes that achieving viable coastal communities along its long coastline o (needs the employment of more women in ocean related industries (Kommunal- og Moderniseringsdepartementet, 2021). As in the Ocean Strategy, the aim is to increase the number of women by encouraging women's participation in technical professions (through education for example) and to encourage women's entrepreneurship in the maritime sectors. Despite these gender mainstreaming developments, the Norwegian government's strategy for aquaculture *Et hav av muligheter*<sup>4</sup> (Nærings- og fiskeridepartementet, 2021) outlines the ambitions for growth in the aquaculture sector, however, it does not mention gender other than including it as one of the 17 SDG's that Norway is committed to achieving by 2030.





In Denmark, there are public-private initiatives to encourage more women to choose maritime transport educations namely Danske Rederier's *Flere Kvinder i Shipping*<sup>5</sup> initiative and *Flere Kvinder i Søs*<sup>6</sup> Taskforce (Danske Rederier, n.d.) and other activities (Danske Rederier, 2022a, 2022b). Other programs aim at retention and career advancement of women in the Danish merchant marine (Eisenberg, 2021). Nonetheless, there have been some reports on the poor conditions facing women in Denmark's shipping sector (Ritzau, 2021). Moreover, there is little impact-oriented scholarship evaluating these initiatives, although, it is perhaps too early to draw such insights. In Sweden, for example, research in the shipping sector supports new policies to reduce the gender gap and improve the working environment for women across this industry (see e.g., Forsell et al., 2017), while other ocean-based traditional industries, such as fisheries, remain dominated by men.

As stated, Nordic academic literature explicitly linking gender and one or more Blue Economy sectors is not prolific. However, there is an important body of scholarship within rural studies, namely on peripheries, mobilities, and higher educational opportunities and attainment that shows tangential impacts and implications in sectors like fisheries and gender-segregated rural labour markets (Faber, Nielsen and Bennike, 2015; Hansen, 2014, 2011; Pristed Nielsen, 2020). This scholarship is indeed an important contribution to gender studies and comparisons of Nordic neighbours on gender equality and societal composition, but the explicit connection between gender and maritime sectors is not attended to but rather is used to contextualise. Additionally, there is Nordic critical scholarship on Blue Growth (Bogadóttir, 2020a, 2020b; Arias Schreiber et al., 2020), as well as a tradition of investigating the social and cultural implications – including gender – of tradable fishing quotas (Gerrard, 2013, 2017; Munk-Madsen, 1998).

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5. More Women in Shipping

6. More Women at Sea



## Future Needs and suggested themes and directions for Nordic Blue Economy and gender research

Our developing review of the literature reveals how research has not sufficiently captured recent Blue Economy gender-relevant themes in Nordic countries. In fisheries for example, the constructed, spatial, and gendered labour division of men working at sea (i.e., catching fish) and women selling, processing, gleaning, and cleaning the catch onshore and alongshore provokes further examination and expansion into other Blue Economy sectors. Women's involvement in fisheries is portrayed as important, albeit both "visible" and "invisible" as labour efforts often remain without remuneration and achievements overlooked by authorities and academic research (Salmi and Sonck-Rautio, 2018). We propose the sea-shore activity-sphere to unpack and understand social, cultural, and economic values associated with the activities, i.e., paid and un(d)er)paid labour in these spaces, the associated gendering of these activities and implications on power and participation in governance systems.

Overlaying the gender lens helps recognize barriers related to mobility and work-home life needs and balance, which have implications for women's employment, their career decisions, and well-being. Women are central for bridging fishery households and communities (Kleiber et al., 2015; Frangoudes and Gerrard, 2018) and contribute to sustainable local development (Koralagama et al., 2017; Gissiet al., 2018). Furthermore, as new Blue Economy opportunities arise, we do not know whether there will be a crowding-out effect—both spatially (e.g., access to the foreshore to glean in the case of fisheries) and socioeconomically (e.g., the increasing prestige of an activity attracts more men)—within and among Blue Economy sectors. Thus, nascent (e.g., blue foods, offshore wind energy) and emergent sectors (e.g., marine/maritime futures and marine biomimetic design from deep-sea) also need attention (Blasiak et al., 2022). Furthermore, women's participation in leadership and management roles in Blue Economy sectors, companies and organisations would be a suggested avenue for deeper inquiry and analysis.



**For further research the SAB network calls attention to the following issues and themes:**

- *Learn from others with positive results.* To gain a wider understanding of gender issues in the Blue Economy there is a need to go beyond focusing on fisheries. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to move the discussions forward in other Blue Economy sectors by learning from accumulated knowledge on fisheries and gender research.
- *Openings for women in new Blue Economy sectors.* There may be new avenues for women in the Blue Economy, for example in, seaweed farming where it has been claimed there is more participation of women (McClenachan and Moulton, 2022). We should also explore tourism's role in the Blue Economy and women's participation—and perhaps dominance—in that sector.
- *Women onboard.* Even if women's employment in shipping sector has increased, women are mostly employed in the catering or trade services in cruise ships or ferries and are heavily underrepresented in more technical and high-ranking positions. Increasing numbers of automated remotely operated vessels may create more opportunities for women and thereby support gender equity within the shipping sector.
- *Education and equality within the Blue Economy.* The professionalisation of Blue Economy may open up more spaces for women to work in this field based on education trends in the region.
- *Acknowledge the gendered spatial divide of 'Sea and Shore'* and recognise activities of sectors over different Blue Economy spaces. Being able to better recognize opportunities and constraints for more equal gender representation should be highlighted and research results should be accessible for all given the opportunity to find a potential 'place' within maritime sectors.



## Embracing Nordic network on gender research in Blue Economy

The SAB project shows that there are capacity building needs due to generational transition within the Nordic academic context and hence a need of recruitment of early career researchers with interest in gender issues. Furthermore, the traction and interest in a network devoted to gender in the Blue Economy was demonstrated in the discussions of the gender seminar based in Tromsø in April 2022 and other dissemination, networking and activities Twitter.

The SAB network was introduced internationally at the 4th World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress on Malta in September 2022 where fisheries women and researchers shared the session "Imagine Gender Equity" discussing gender equity in fisheries. In October 2022 the SAB network exchanged updates with trans-Atlantic members from Canada and discussed gender issues mirroring a presentation by Anna Karlsdóttir, Nordregio, on their new gender project "Laks & Likestilling" funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The SAB network members are interested in connecting with one another, hearing about research efforts of its membership, and discussing the research needs and methodologies to understand the gender dimension in Blue Economy and other ocean and coastal activities in the Arctic and beyond.

The report recommends joint Nordic action across academic institutions to develop linkages among Nordic and Arctic institutions and to find long-term goals to fill the gaps in research.





Founding members of the SAB network. From the left – Siri Gerrard, Kristen Ounanian, Milena Arias Schreiber, Madeleine Gustavsson and Kristina Svelds.

**The SAB network recommends:**

- Make Nordic gender research and Blue Economy networks attractive and inviting for all genders.
- Connect and foster synergies between land-based (more traditional) and marine/ocean Blue Economy gender researchers.
- Apply transdisciplinary research to better understand the needs of Blue Economy sectors to advance gender equality.

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