

Gender inequality in the Nordic film industry

Exploring above-the-line positions in film production

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we explore the enduring barriers to gender equality in the Nordic film industry, with a focus on positions of power and structural biases. Despite considerable efforts over the past decades to highlight gender inequality – resulting in more women in creative positions in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland – a significant gap remains. Our analysis of 1,070 films produced and released theatrically between 2010 and 2020 in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden shows men dominating directing, writing, and producing roles in 75 per cent of the cases, with women slightly more present in producing. The study finds a negative correlation between the dominance of men in producing roles and the presence of women in directing and writing roles. Factors such as the size of the creative team and co-production had less impact on the proportion of women in key creative positions than expected, whereas a higher proportion of women in managerial roles is linked to an increased presence of women in positions of directing (Sweden) and writing (Finland). These results indicate that while some progress has been made, structural barriers still significantly hinder gender equality in the industry.

KEYWORDS: gender inequality, film production, producers, writers, directors, gender bias

Introduction

In this article, we draw on data collected in the context of the larger research project, “Gender Equity Policy (GEP) Analysis”, the goal of which is to understand the continued barriers and gender bias in the film industry. The GEP Analysis project looked at 34 Eurimages countries with a quantitative lens and discussed three countries as case studies – Germany, the UK, and Canada – from a policy and social network analysis angle (Loist et al., 2024). Our work builds on previous comparative research, such as the report of the European Women’s Audiovisual Network (Aylett, 2016), which was supported by Eurimages and helped to create a Recommendation on gender equality in the audiovisual sector by the Council of Europe (2017) and change Eurimages policies (Eurimages, 2019). The research presented here, however, takes a different focus, aiming to unfold a detailed analysis of quantitative findings and changes in gendered production cultures in the Nordic countries between 2010 and 2020.

The time period, 2010–2020, has seen a great shift in the number and quality of policies addressing gender inequality in the film industries. Gender equality is now recognised as a problem in need of addressing but is generally not regarded as “solved” (Liddy, 2020; Asardag & Komorowski, 2024; Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2022; Loist et al., 2024). Policies addressing gender equality have been implemented in many European countries in the late 2010s, even though only few have implemented policies with binding elements, such as BFI Diversity Standards in the UK (since 2016), the gender incentive in Austria (2016), and the French Film Fund (2018). In this period, several discussions and movements such as #metoo, #timesup, and #oscarssowhite gained recognition internationally and had a significant impact on changing discussions in relation to global markets. In the wake of these movements, we can trace varied local national uptake and a continuation of discussions of women’s discrimination, gendered harassment, and sexism and racism in the media industry (Alcalde & Villa, 2022; Brannon Donoghue, 2020; Cobb & Horeck, 2018; Loist & Verhoeven, 2019; Sørensen, 2018; Liddy, 2020).

In this article, we focus on the quantitative analysis and a comparative perspective, specifically looking at the Nordic countries. Having collected data from 2010–2020, we have grouped the data into two periods, 2010–2015 and 2016–2020, in order to ensure statistically robust comparability over time with a sufficient number of cases. In addition, these two periods roughly coincide with the shift in debates and policy.

Context and background

As the existing research on gender equality in the Nordic countries shows, they are often considered internationally – and consider themselves – as gender-equal societies. Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have ranked among the top-five most gender-equal countries in the *Global Gender Gap Report* by the World Economic Forum (2023) for several years, showing large representation of women in the overall workforce and in parliaments. The region is generally considered a frontrunner in terms of gender equality. With the exception of Iceland, they

all range well above average in terms of gender representation in key creative positions in the Eurimages comparison (see Appendix 2). Nevertheless, even in these countries, the film industries remain dominated by men (Bragadóttir, 2020; Edström & Mølster, 2014; Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020; Redvall & Sørensen, 2018; Savolainen, 2020; Skadegård Thorsen, 2020; Svane, 2020).

Research from a larger comparative perspective on film industries reveals that while patriarchal structures, gendered discrimination patterns, and sexual harassment are a ubiquitous problem in international film industries, there is no one solution universally applicable to address them. Instead, a more nuanced comparative approach reveals the differences and similarities between these countries (Loist & Verhoeven, 2019; Loist et al., 2024). This is also true for the Nordic film industries. When looking in more detail at the data and locally informed research on each national context, we see similar problems but different approaches. While there is a common understanding across the Nordic countries, there are still structural and discursive differences in the approaches to achieving cultural change.

In both Sweden and Norway, public conversations about gender equality in film industries started in the early 2000s, with their first gender-equality reports and formal initiatives dating back to 2006 (Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020; Svane, 2020). This might have contributed to their overall high ranking in international comparisons. Denmark, Finland, and Iceland have all reportedly arrived relatively late to the discourse on gender equality in the film industry (Bragadóttir, 2020; Redvall & Sørensen, 2018; Savolainen, 2020; Skadegård Thorsen, 2020). For the most part, the assumed achievement of gender equality in these countries prevented further engagement. By the mid-2010s, reports from all the Nordic countries revealed the underrepresentation of women in the sector, ranging between 10 and 40 per cent across different years and creative positions, with Iceland demonstrating exceptionally low figures. Consequently, new measures were either introduced for the first time or reinforced to address this disparity.

In all five countries, measures have met criticism or reluctance. In Sweden, the main argument was that gender equality is counterproductive to producing quality film (Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020: 165), an argument often challenged by Anna Serner, head of the Swedish Film Institut (SFI) during her tenure (2011–2021). In Denmark, the measures taken by Sweden to tackle gender inequality – effectively a target of reaching at least 40 per cent representation in key creative positions, which was not a fixed quota – have been framed as “extreme”, and industry representatives (usually men) feared “political correctness” and a threat to “creativity” (Skadegård Thorsen, 2020: 116–117). In Finland, though not as prominently known as Anna Serner, Irina Krohn, the managing director of the Finnish Film Foundation, the main funding agency, has been influential in changing the agency and structures, helping improve women’s opportunities to direct film (Savolainen, 2020: 136). However, the measures by “state feminism” (rather than activism) operate on bureaucratic logics of equality, which in an industry where decision-making positions are held overwhelmingly by men, can justify smaller shares of funds going to women if fewer women apply for funds (Savolainen, 2020: 139).

Looking at gains made in the Swedish film industry, Jansson and Wallenberg (2020) found that while the numbers of women behind the camera in key creative positions of director, scriptwriter, and producer have improved – especially for films with production support from the SFI – differences still exist, especially with regard to the size of budgets, marketing, and distribution (Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020: 165–166). The same findings are reported for all other Nordic countries as well. Furthermore, Jansson and Wallenberg, in an interview study with women in the industry, found that even when more women are involved behind the camera, the overall sexist work culture has not changed. They found that “gender equality efforts have so far not been able to change the norms in the industry regarding how gender should be portrayed in film, nor to change the macho culture on the set” (Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020: 175).

With this in mind, the strong impact that the #metoo revelations have had across all Nordic film industries comes as little surprise. Numerous researchers cite this event as a pivotal moment of increased attention to the topic of gender inequality and discrimination and the surge of measures, even if the concrete repercussions for harassers and sexual perpetrators have been limited and resistance in the industry remains palpable (Bragadóttir, 2020; Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020; Redvall & Sørensen, 2018; Savolainen, 2020; Skadegård Thorsen, 2020; Svane, 2020).

In Nordic comparisons, Iceland stands out. It is by far the smallest country and industry of the compared group. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between being ranked as the “world’s most gender-equal country” and the peripheral presence of women is stark (Bragadóttir, 2020: 179). Throughout Iceland’s film history, only 209 narrative feature films have been released since 1949, of which only 28 have been directed by women (Bragadóttir, 2020: 180, 186). The involvement of women in film production has been historically uneven, with the 1990s being the decade with the best representation of women in key creative positions, with 20 per cent (Bragadóttir, 2020: 186), while in the 2010s, only 6 per cent of feature films were directed by women. Guðrún Elsa Bragadóttir (2020: 187) attributed this historic low number to a sharp decline following the financial crisis in 2008, which left women generally more, and longer, unemployed than men. Additionally, reports have shed light on a deeply entrenched sexist production culture in Iceland, with the #metoo movement revealing a substantial body of testimonies supporting these claims (Bragadóttir, 2020: 189–190). Similar to other Nordic countries, Iceland has also actively acknowledged and addressed the lack of women in the film industry since the mid 2010s. In the funding agreement of the Icelandic Film Center (IFC) for 2016–2019, “a special emphasis has been made on increasing the participation of women in key roles of film making” (Bragadóttir, 2020: 190).

With this brief contextual overview in mind, we turn to the analysis of statistical data of films produced and released theatrically in the Nordic countries between 2010 and 2020.

Research questions

Our research focuses on the key creative positions of directing, writing, and producing, as these above-the-line positions wield significant decision-making

authority during the initial stages of production, including the initiation of the funding phase. This aligns with the prevailing trend in industry reports and policy initiatives, which typically prioritise addressing these three key creative positions.

As recent research shows, women remain underrepresented in above-the-line positions in most jurisdictions (Simone, 2023; Loist et al., 2024). Our first research question is, thus, whether women are also underrepresented in the three key creative positions in the Nordic Countries between 2010–2020. We assess this first research question through a descriptive analysis of the data.

We want to examine whether macro-level societal factors of gender equality in a specific country correlate with gender equality in its film industry. Macro-level societal factors carry the potential to alter the systemic basis of gender inequality in a country. This could have trickle-down effects onto meso- and micro-levels of a country. In this study, we focus on the trickle-down effects onto the meso-level, namely a country's film industry. Our second research question is, thus, about the extent to which macro-level factors of gender equality, namely the proportion of women in senior and middle management positions and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, correlate with the numerical proportion of women in the film industry.

Furthermore, we are interested in identifying industry-specific norms and practices, which might correlate with gender inequality pertaining to the Nordic film industries. For that purpose, our third research question is about the extent to which industry-specific factors, namely the share of men in producing positions, creative team size, and co-production status, correlate with gender (in)equality in key creative positions. In order to answer our latter two research questions, we run logistic regression on the data.

Industry studies indicate that women frequently experience tokenism, wherein a woman is included in larger teams to superficially fulfill gender equality quotas (Verhoeven, 2024). In these larger teams, individual voices may lack prominence. Moreover, teams predominantly composed of men could pose additional challenges for women attempting to assert influence in creative decision-making. Consequently, our objective in answering our third research question is to investigate whether women are more often part of larger rather than smaller key creative teams.

Co-produced films not only adhere to national film funding prerequisites, but also supranational ones, like EU-funding schemes such as MEDIA and the Eurimages co-production fund. The Eurimages fund, for instance, has introduced a number of specific measures to boost gender equality, such as raising the percentage of funding that a film can apply for when a woman director is attached to the film, along with schemes that promote residencies, sponsorships, and awards for women in the industry (Council of Europe & Eurimages, 2020; Castro Martinez, 2016; see also Council of Europe, n.d.). Co-produced films might therefore be better equipped to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to fill key creative positions. Our objective is to test whether co-produced films are more likely to include at least 50 per cent women in their key creative teams.

In the film industry, it is widely acknowledged that producers wield significant influence in film development, often being the decision-makers when it comes

to selecting directors and writers. Existing research has revealed a gender bias that tends to favour men (Hochfeld et al., 2017; Verhoeven et al., 2020), while women producers have been found to be more likely to include more women on their teams (Loist & Prommer, 2019: 107; Prommer & Loist, 2020). Consequently, our objective is to investigate whether creative teams led by a higher proportion of men in producing also exhibit a pattern of having fewer women than men in directing and writing.

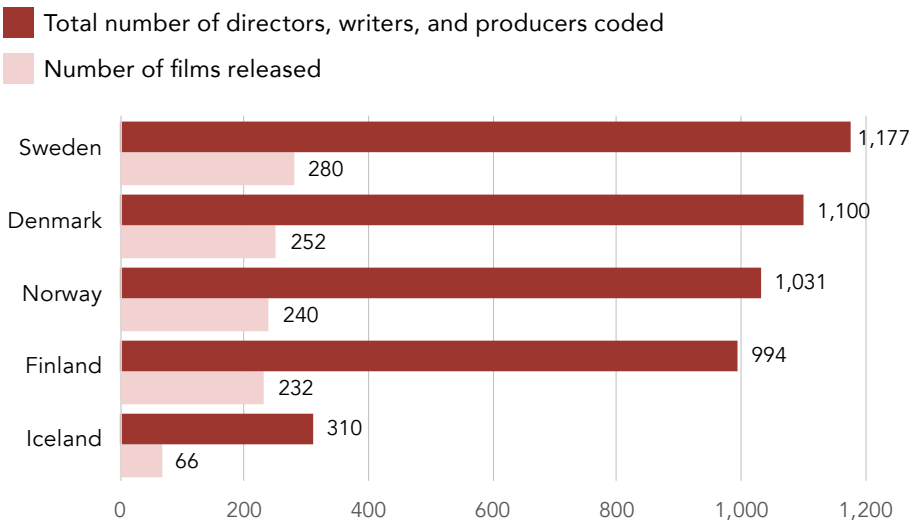
Methods

Data collection and sample

We collected a complete sample of all feature films (length of 75 minutes or more) with theatrical release between 2010 and 2020 (excluding TV series, TV shows, TV movies) in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It is crucial to acknowledge that the countries under scrutiny exhibit variations in their production scales, as indicated by the number of films released during the analysed time period (see Figure 1). As a result, they are classified into distinct EU categories based on industry size relative to budget. For example, Iceland is labeled as a small film industry, whereas Denmark and Sweden fall into the medium-sized category.

Figure 1 underscores the differences in the number of films released and the overall count of coded creative positions. Notably, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden display a degree of similarity in these aspects, whereas the figures are considerably lower for Iceland. Consequently, there is a significant difference in the actual number of men and women working in these industries across these countries. However, despite these discrepancies, it is still possible for the gender balance to be equitable in all five countries.

FIGURE 1 Number of films released and creative positions in the film industry by country, 2010–2020



The data of film characteristics stems from the European Audiovisual Observatory's Lumiere database and was coded for the following variables: the release year, co-production (yes/no), production country, and key creative team size (including writers, directors, and producers). Lumiere is the only database containing up-to-date and complete data on films in all European countries. We supplemented the key dataset with information from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), and various other digital sources, by manually researching the names of the key creatives in directing, writing, and producing positions. A team of coders manually assigned binary gender (man/woman) to each person based on their first name. The final film-based dataset consists of 1,070 films within eleven year units for all five countries (for further information on the data collection procedure and coding, see Prommer et al., 2024).

Additionally, we collected data on gender equitable macro-level factors per year and country. These data were obtained through DBnomics and include the following:

- the proportion of women in senior and middle management positions in percentage (original source: United Nations Global SDG Database; currently measured as the proportion of women in the total number of persons employed in senior and middle management positions in public and private sectors)
- the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (original source: the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; currently measured as the number of seats held by women members in single or lower chambers of national parliaments, expressed as a percentage of all occupied seats)

Overall, the collected data are multilevel (country and film level), longitudinal (2010–2020), and film-centred (variables are coded per film). Due to the time of data collection, the data does not cover the years affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Other studies have shown that existing inequalities, including gender inequality in the film industry, worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly impacting those with domestic care responsibilities (disproportionately women) (Eikhof, 2020; Wreyford et al., 2021; Noonan, 2022; Conor, 2024; Mayer et al., 2024).

Descriptive analysis

To analyse the changes in the numerical representation of women and men in the film industries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, we developed the variable “gender of positions”, based on the assigned gender of people working in the respective key creative positions of a film (see Table 1). This variable consists of the following dimensions:

- “woman/team women”, if the respective position is held exclusively by women,
- “mixed team”, if the respective position is held by women and men (for writing and producing teams, we also show the share of women and men within the mixed team),
- “man/team men”, if the respective position is held exclusively by men.

We particularly look at the change in gendered positions over time, meaning the proportion of films directed, written, or produced by one or more women (exclusively), one or more men (exclusively), mixed-gender teams made up of women and men, and the share of women and men in these mixed-gender teams. For all five countries, we grouped the years in two periods: 2010–2015 and 2016–2020.

Logistic regression analysis

To address our research questions, we also developed one variable per key creative position (directing, writing, producing), namely the “share of women and men in key creative positions” (see Table 1). To do so, we divided the total number of individuals coded as women and men in each position by the total number of individuals coded for each position.

To run a logistic regression model, we then dichotomised each of the three variables “share of women and men in key creative positions”: If the share of key creative position reached at least 50 per cent women, the film was coded as 1. If the share of key creative position did not reach at least 50 per cent women, the film was coded as 0 (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Variables to trace numerical representation of women and men in key creative positions

	Directing	Writing	Producing
Film A	M	W W	M M W
Gender of positions	Man	Team women	Mixed-gender team
Share of men in each key creative position (%)	100	0	66.7
At least 50% of each key creative position is held by women	0	1	0

Comments: Explanation of variables built to trace the numerical representation of women and men in directing, writing, and producing positions.

The data constitutes a full sample of time-series data for which we cannot assume independence of the regressors and residuals without reservation. In addition, we are dealing with multilevel data, meaning that the film-level data are nested in country data. Lastly, the data includes non-normally distributed residuals of our dependent variable. For these reasons, we chose to dichotomise the dependent variable as described above, run logistic regression models, and calculate the trend out of the macroeconomic factors by only including the residuals from the linear trendline per year as independent variables into the model. The model-building strategy was theoretically driven. The models are displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Regression models per dependent variable and country

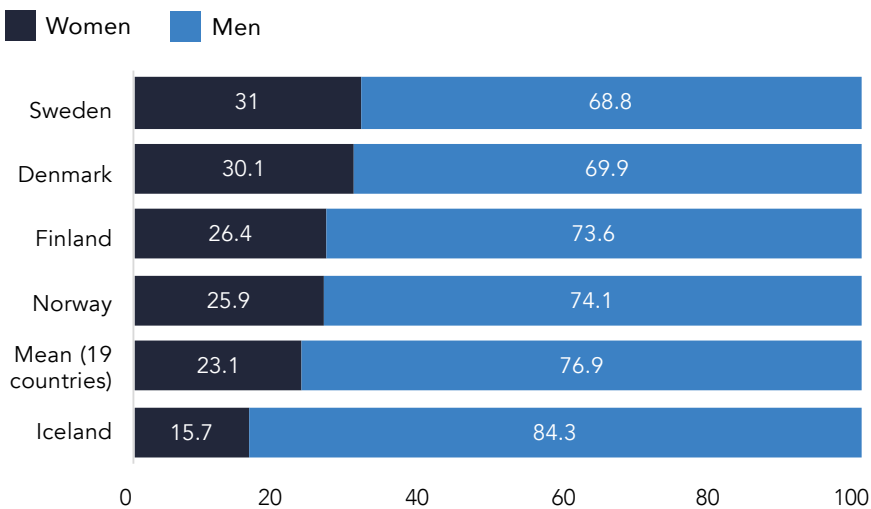
	Country	Dependent variable	Independent variables
Model 1	Denmark	At least 50% of directing positions held by women	• Macro-level variables • Co-production (binary) • Size team (categorised) • Share of men in producing positions
	Finland		
	Iceland		
	Norway		
	Sweden		
Model 2	Denmark	At least 50% of writing positions held by women	• Macro-level variables • Co-production (binary) • Size team (categorised) • Share of men in producing positions
	Finland		
	Iceland		
	Norway		
	Sweden		
Model 3	Denmark	At least 50% of producing positions held by women	• Macro-level variables • Co-production (binary) • Size team (categorised)
	Finland		
	Iceland		
	Norway		
	Sweden		

Comments: Logistic regression models were run per country and per dependent variable in SPSS. Models 1 and 2 include all four independent variables. Model 3 does not include the independent variable “share of men in producing positions”, as it is the exact equivalent to the “share of women in producing positions” and thus exhibits high intercorrelation with the independent variable.

Analysis

Our data show that the Nordic countries continue to witness structural barriers for gender equality and for women in positions of power. In comparison to the other Eurimages countries, all Nordic countries except Iceland lie above the mean (23.1%) share of women in key creative positions (see Figure 2). The share is highest for Sweden (31%), closely followed by Denmark (30.1%). In Finland and Norway, about a quarter of key creative positions are held by women. Iceland stands out with a comparably low share of women (15.7%), whereas men account for 84.3 per cent of key creative positions in Icelandic film productions.

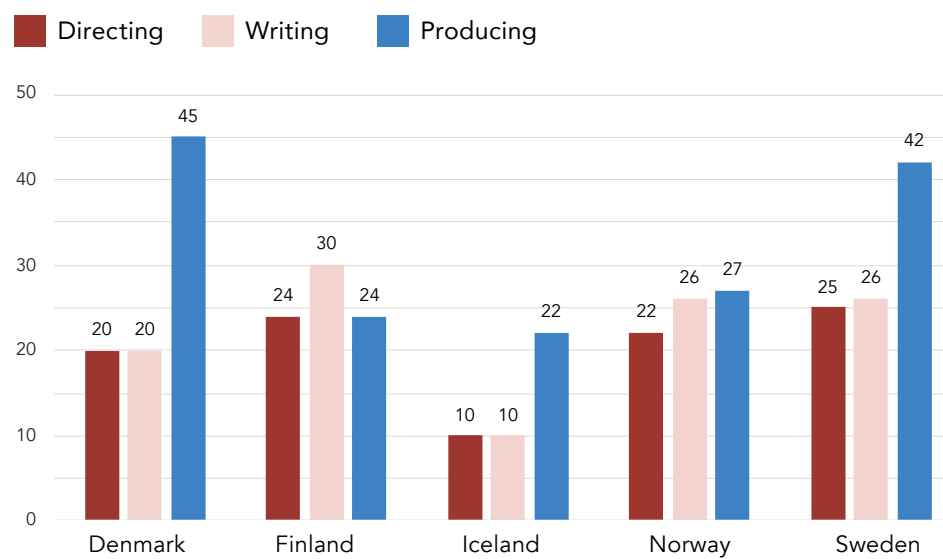
FIGURE 2 Share of women and men in key creative positions by country (per cent)



Comments: For comparative reasons, the calculated mean in share of women and men in directing, writing, and producing for 19 Eurimages countries was included from the GEP Analysis project (see Appendix 2). The first three people listed each as directors and writers were coded, and the first four people listed as producers. Average for release years between 2010 and 2020.

While the Nordic countries are often regarded as pioneers in fostering greater participation of women in film production, particularly in key creative positions, our analysis complicates these assumptions. When examining gender distribution in writing, producing, and directing separately (see Figure 3), cross-country differences in the distribution of these creative positions become evident. In three out of the five countries (Denmark, Iceland, Sweden), the share of women is highest for producing positions, with Denmark and Iceland showcasing more than double the number of women in producing compared to directing and writing roles. In Norway, the share of women across all three positions is relatively balanced, while in Finland, the share of women in writing (30%) is higher compared with directing and producing (24% each).

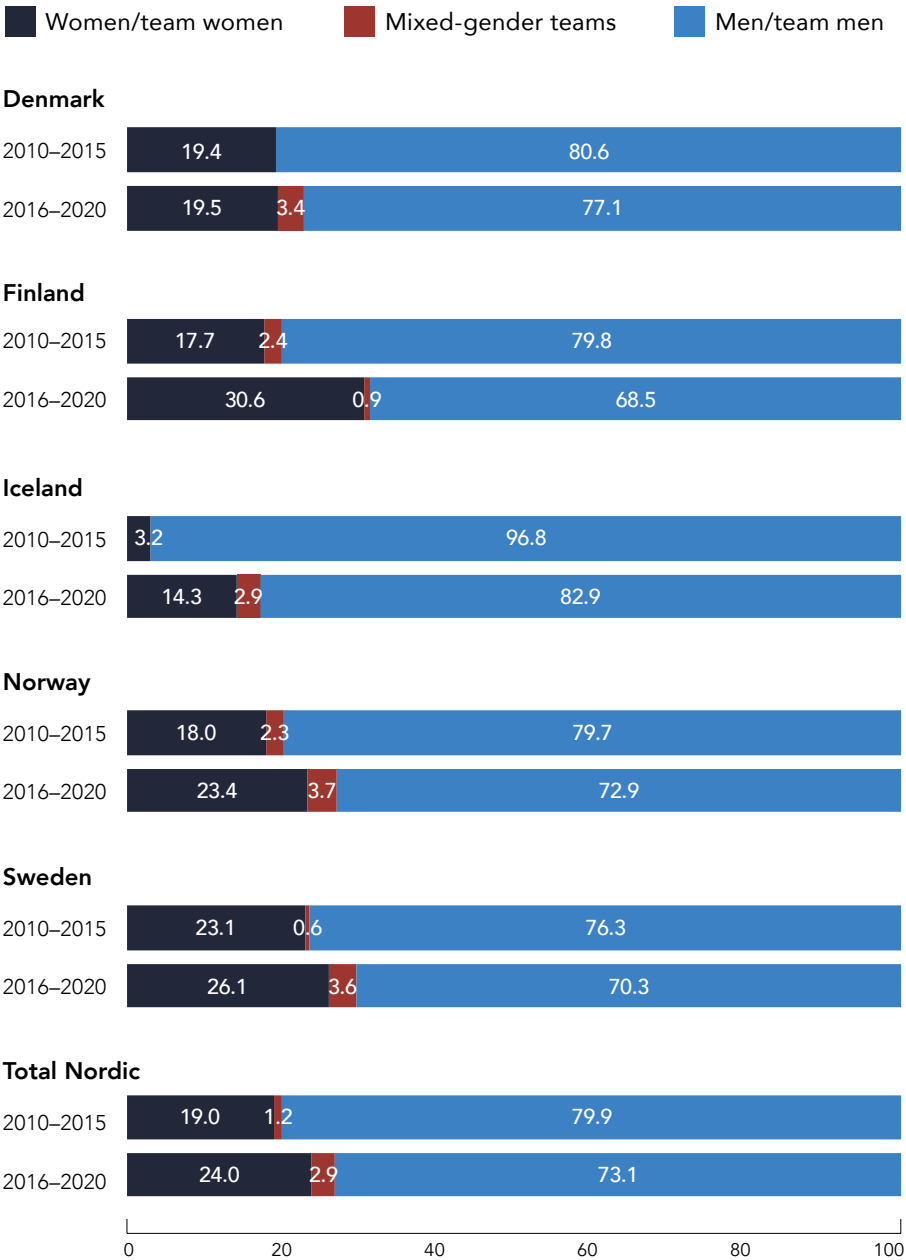
FIGURE 3 Share of women in directing, writing, and producing by country (per cent)



Comments: The share of women in directing, writing, and producing positions was calculated for all five Nordic countries. The first three people listed each as directors and writers were coded, and the first four people listed as producers. Average for release years between 2010 and 2020.

We examine the shifts over time in the share of women, men, and mixed-gender teams in key creative positions in greater detail, focusing on two periods: 2010–2015 and 2016–2020. Analysing directing positions, films led by mixed-gender teams are notably rare, constituting less than 4 per cent in both periods across all five countries (see Figure 4). Despite this, a positive trend emerges in women’s participation in directing roles throughout the Nordic countries. Significant advancements are notable in Finland (+12.9 percentage points) and Iceland (+11.1 percentage points). Except for Denmark, where the percentage hovers around 19 per cent, all countries experience an increase in women-directed films. The surge is particularly pronounced in Finland and Iceland; for instance, Iceland witnesses a more than fourfold increase, though it still lags behind other Nordic countries at 14.3 per cent. Finland sees nearly a doubling of women’s share in directing roles, surpassing 30 per cent in 2016–2020, indicating almost one in three films being directed by a woman. Norway and Sweden also exhibit increases of 5 and 3 percentage points, respectively, resulting in one in four films being directed by a woman in the 2016–2020 time period in both countries.

FIGURE 4 Gender of directing positions by country (per cent)

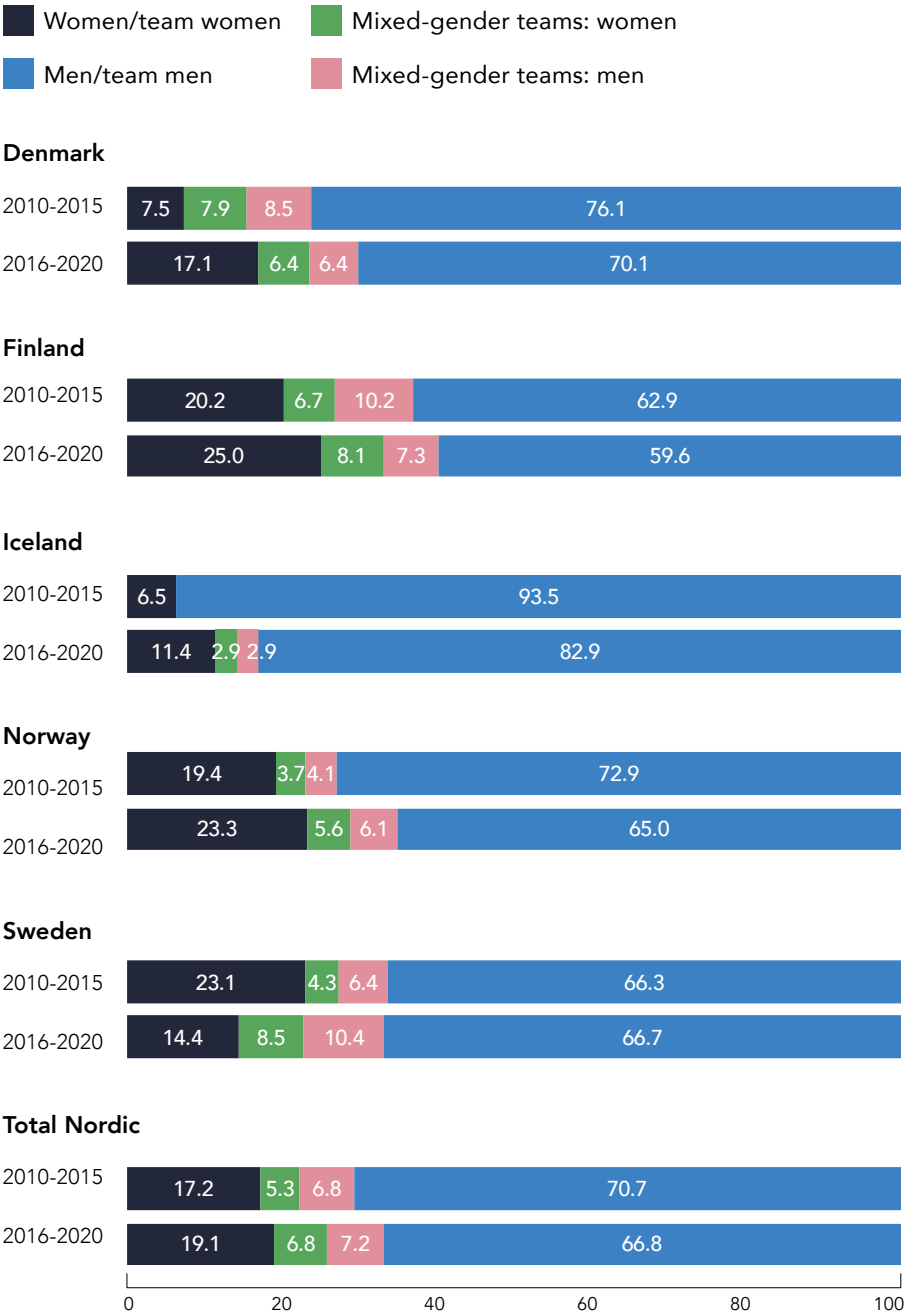


Comments: Percentage of gendered directing positions for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and overall Nordic mean, grouped by release years 2010–2015 and 2016–2020.

Unlike directing, writing and producing frequently entail collaborative efforts with multiple individuals forming a team (see Appendix 1). Therefore, for both writing and producing positions (see Figures 5 and 6), we examine the shifts in the percentage of women (dark blue), men (light blue), and mixed-gender teams (as in Figure 4) – categorised into the share of women (green) and men (pink) – in key creative positions.

Analysing writing positions (see Figure 5), we observe an increase in the number of women in four out of five countries, most notably Denmark and Iceland. In Iceland, the percentage nearly doubled, though it remains low at 11.4 per cent. Denmark experienced a increase of ten percentage points in the share of women in writing positions, but it still lags behind Finland (25%) and Norway (23%) in 2016–2020. Notably, one-third of all writing positions in Finland include at least one woman between 2016–2020 (33.1%). Sweden stands out as the only country where the share of women in writing positions decreased, albeit with an increase in mixed-gender teams. Overall, we see a discernible yet modest trend – with the exception of Sweden – towards increased involvement of women in writing positions across all Nordic countries.

FIGURE 5 Gender of writing positions by country (per cent)



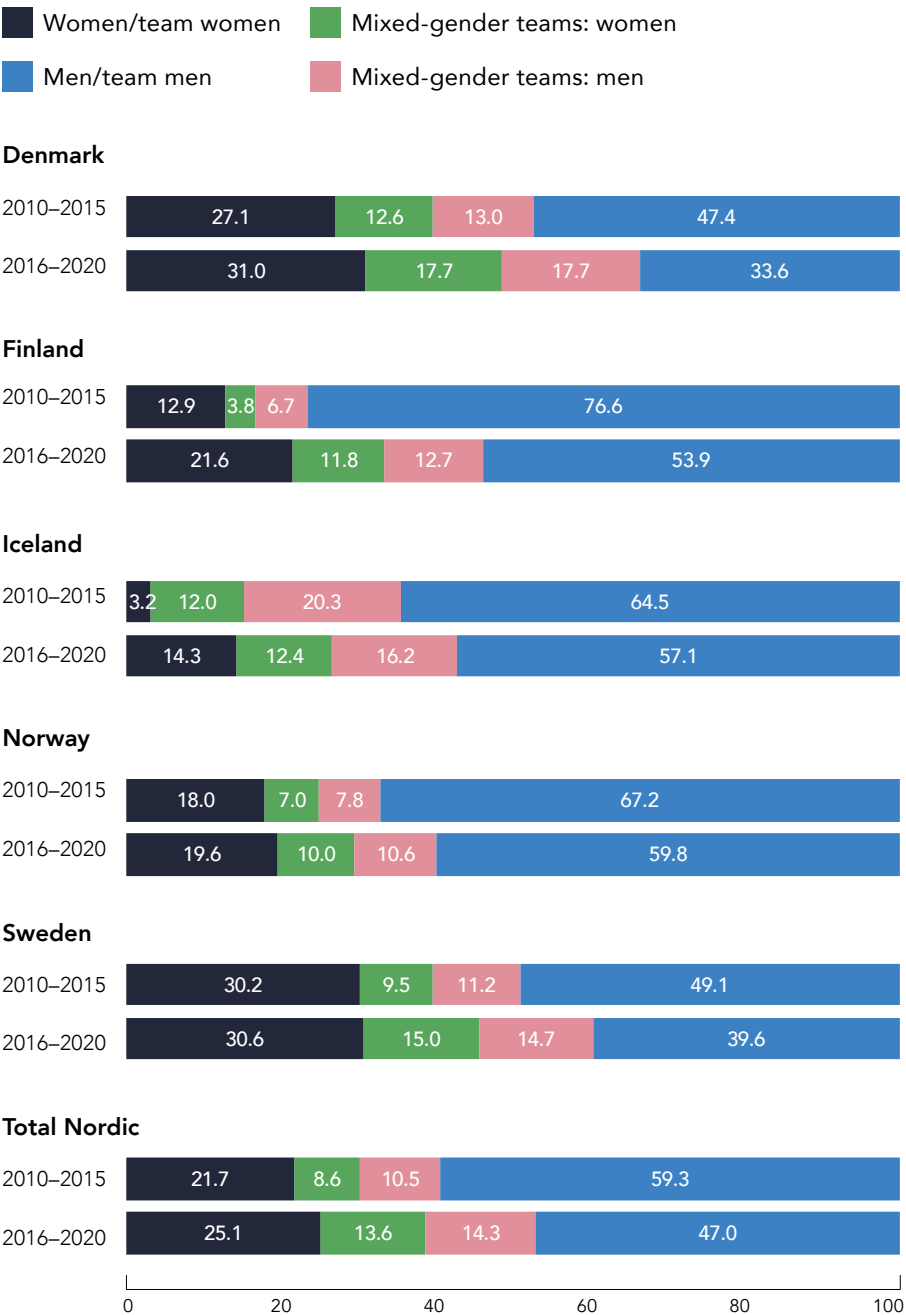
Comments: Percentage of gendered writing positions for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and overall Nordic mean, grouped by release years 2010–2015 and 2016–2020.

Concerning producing roles (see Figure 6), the Nordic countries exhibit the highest prevalence of mixed-gender teams across all positions. This is not surprising, since producing positions, unlike directing and writing, typically involve collaboration between multiple people (see Appendix 1).

Rising shares of women in producing do not come at the expense of men. Instead, mixed-gender teams with both rising shares of women and men are the norm across all countries. The only exception here is Iceland, where a decrease in the share of men in producing actually coincides with an increase in the share of women in producing positions by more than ten percentage points.

Denmark and Sweden display the highest shares of women in producing positions in both time periods, with 31 per cent and 30.6 per cent, respectively. In Denmark, parity is almost reached in 2016–2020, with 31 per cent of positions held by women, 34 per cent of positions held by men, and a balanced share of women and men in mixed-gender teams (17.7% women and 17.7% men).

FIGURE 6 Gender of producing positions by country (per cent)



Comments: Percentage of gendered producing positions for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and overall Nordic mean, grouped by release years 2010–2015 and 2016–2020.

When we dive deeper into the structure of gendered key creative teams, we find that for writing positions, women are three times as likely to be outnumbered by men than men to be outnumbered by women (see Table 3). For producing positions, women are twice as likely to be outnumbered by men.

TABLE 3 Frequency of gendered structure of key creative teams (per cent)

	Directing	Writing	Producing
No women	76.6	68.4	53.9
One woman and multiple men	0.3	2.9	5.1
Gender parity	1.8	9.3	15.5
Multiple women and one man	0.0	0.9	2.4
Only women	21.3	18.5	23.0

Comments: Frequency counted per key creative team for all five Nordic countries, if a team consists of no women, one woman and multiple men, 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men (gender equality), multiple women and one man, and only women. Calculated in Excel.

Further, we calculated the correlation between the share of women in key creative positions and key creative team size by means of logistic regression analysis. Our regression analyses show that in none of the five countries did the size of key creative teams matter when it comes to the share of women in directing, writing, or producing (see Table 4). The only exception is Sweden: Here, the odds that a film is produced by a team consisting of at least 50 per cent women decrease by 17.1 per cent the larger the key creative team is. In other words, the larger the key creative teams in Sweden, the smaller the odds that these teams consist of at least as many women as men.

The regression analyses confirm that the share of men in producing positions plays a key role in preventing gender equality. This speaks to findings for other countries where inequality is often seen as being related to homophily, that is, men seeking other men to work with (Hochfeld et al., 2017; Loist et al., 2024; Verhoeven et al., 2020). With the exception of directing positions in Sweden, a rise in the share of men in producing positions correlates significantly with a decline in the share of women in directing and writing across all countries. Exemplary of this, in Iceland, the odds that a film is directed by a team consisting of at least 50 per cent women decrease by 3.9 per cent the larger the share of men in producing positions. In other words, men producers prefer men in writing and directing positions over women. In turn, women are structurally disadvantaged in positions of writing and directing if a film is produced by men.

For the macro-level factors, we find that the odds of a film being directed by at least 50 per cent women in Sweden rises by 37.6 per cent the higher the proportion of women in senior and middle management positions. In Finland,

the odds that a film script is written by a team consisting of at least 50 per cent women rises by 20.6 per cent the higher the proportion of women in senior and middle management positions.

Lastly, we also find that co-production correlates with the share of women in producing positions in Denmark. Since co-productions tend to adhere to supranational and EU funding schemes, which may include equal opportunity goals (e.g., in the Eurimages scheme), Danish co-productions actually do increase the odds of a production team including at least 50 per cent women by almost 95 per cent.

TABLE 4 Logistic regression analyses

Dependent variable	Country	Macro-level factors		Film-level factors		
		proportion of women in senior and middle management positions	proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments	Co-production (binary)	Size team (metric)	Share of producing positions held by men
At least 50% of directing positions held by women	Denmark	.994	1.051	.869	.948	.991*
	Finland	1.003	1.009	.847	.643	.986***
	Iceland	.940	.639	1.536	1.471	.961**
	Norway	.883	.901	1.020	.892	.983***
	Sweden	1.376*	.839	1.180	.923	.995
At least 50% of writing positions held by women	Denmark	1.000	.897	.764	.995	.992*
	Finland	1.206*	1.009	1.184	1.194	.985***
	Iceland	.939	.788	.992	1.356	.970**
	Norway	.982	.728	.642	.882	.986***
	Sweden	1.138	1.007	1.805	1.070	.989***
At least 50% of producing positions held by women	Denmark	1.010	1.155	1.943*	.819	–
	Finland	1.163	.916	.724	.575	–
	Iceland	1.068	.935	1.395	.936	–
	Norway	.957	1.330	.822	1.047	–
	Sweden	1.030	.986	1.623	.829*	–

Comments: Logistic regression models were calculated in SPSS. Values are exponentiated B-parameters. The numbers displayed, which are called exponentiated B-parameters, range between 0 and 2. The deviation from 1 equals the percentage by which the odds that the dependent variable is true either increase (number is higher than 1) or decrease (number is lower than 1). We only interpret those numbers which have 1, 2, or 3 asterisks, as those are significantly different from mere chance.

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Discussion of findings

Our analysis, set against the backdrop of Nordic societies renowned for their gender equality advances but also against the persistent male dominance within film industries, presents a nuanced account of both progress and stagnation. Despite these countries' high rankings in global gender equality metrics and their public and private sectors showcasing considerable female representation, the film industry starkly contrasts with a male-dominated creative landscape.

Drawing on our contextual analysis, it is evident that gender equality in society does not automatically translate into gender equality in the film industry. The Nordic countries, celebrated for their egalitarian values, still grapple with significant gender imbalances in directing, writing, and producing roles. This discrepancy underscores the complex interplay of societal values, industry norms, and specific challenges within the creative sectors.

The early initiatives in Sweden and Norway, contrasted with the later engagement of Denmark, Finland, and particularly Iceland, illuminate varied national responses to gender inequality in the industry. Despite proactive policies and the visible efforts of figures like Anna Serner in Sweden and Irina Krohn in Finland, the entrenched norms and resistance within the industry point to the multifaceted barriers women face. Our findings resonate with the context laid out at the beginning of the article, highlighting how measures aimed at gender equality are often met with scepticism or outright opposition, framed as threats to creative freedom or quality.

Overall, for our sample of films released between 2010 and 2020, we find that women still face systemic barriers to equal numerical representation as key creatives in Nordic film industries. Women remain underrepresented in all three key creative positions of directing, writing, and producing between 2010 and 2020 across all five Nordic countries, which correlates to different degrees with some of the industry-specific and macro-level factors investigated here.

By juxtaposing macro-level indicators of gender equality (such as women's representation in parliament and managerial positions) with industry-specific data on key creative roles, we draw a nuanced picture of gender dynamics at play. This comparative analysis reveals that while macro-level progress provides a necessary backdrop for change, industry-specific factors and norms significantly shape the landscape of gender representation. Yet, based on our results, we can only speak with caution regarding the correlations. For one, we find that industry-specific and macro-level factors correlate differently from country to country with regard to the share of women in key creative positions. While in Sweden, for example, team size matters for reaching equitable ratios of men and women in producing positions (here, a large team size actually decreases the odds of reaching gender equality in producing), in Denmark, the odds of a production team including at least 50 per cent women rises by almost 95 per cent if a film is co-produced. In other words, our research shows that the norms and practices underlying gender inequality in the Nordic film industries vary per

country, and that no standardised solutions exist that work across jurisdictional specificities, thus echoing a key finding of the larger research project this study is part of (Loist et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, one common denominator for gender inequality is the fact that across all countries, men in producing positions are strongly correlated with gender equality in key creative positions. In fact, a rising share of men in producing positions decreases the odds by 0.5 per cent to 3.9 percent of reaching gender equality in directing and writing. Thus, much like previous research has pointed out, behaviour patterns of men are a root cause for ongoing gender inequality rather than shortcomings of underrepresented groups, in this case women (Loist et al., 2024; Verhoeven et al., 2020; Verhoeven & Palmer, 2016). This needs to be acknowledged by gender equality policies, industry practitioners, and advocacy groups alike.

A notable aspect of our findings is the observed correlation between the presence of women in middle and senior management roles and their representation in key creative positions, specifically in directing (Sweden) and writing (Finland). Although our analysis does not allow for causal inferences, it suggests that a rise in women holding managerial positions could enhance awareness around gender inequality, possibly leading to a production culture that champions gender equality. This shift in culture may influence the underlying systemic structures contributing to gender inequality within the Nordic film industries.

However, it is significant to note that this correlation applies to just one creative role in each of the two countries, hinting at the multifaceted and intricate nature of the factors that drive gender inequality in the film industry and in society more broadly. Adding layers to this complexity is the fact that these correlations do not necessarily mirror each country's standing in the *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2023) or their levels of representation of women in middle and senior management roles (see Appendix 3). For example, while Sweden and Finland display moderate rankings, Iceland exceeds the average of Eurimages countries, and Denmark ranks notably lower. Remarkably, Iceland shows the least proportion of women in all three key creative roles over time among the five Nordic nations. These apparent contradictions remind us that the regression analysis reveals only that the percentage of women in leadership roles is linked to the presence of women in directing (Sweden) and writing (Finland) roles, but not to similar outcomes in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, or other creative roles in Finland and Sweden. Future studies are needed to further understand these complexities, and should ideally consider more macro-level gender equality indicators and their effects on women's representation across different sectors.

The findings of this study underscore the critical need for nuanced, targeted interventions that take into account the specificities of each country and the distinct challenges within the film industry. The path to gender equality in the Nordic film industries, as shown, is not a linear or uniform trajectory, and therefore it requires a multifaceted approach that considers the interplay of societal values, industry norms, and the power dynamics within creative roles.

Our study primarily investigates recent shifts in the numerical representation of women in critical creative roles, including directing, writing, and producing, within the Nordic countries' film industries to gauge gender inequality. We recommend that future investigations extend their scope to include other key above-the-line roles such as cinematography, sound, or editing. This expansion is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of existing gender biases across all pivotal decision-making positions in filmmaking.

Moreover, it is imperative that subsequent research explores additional dimensions of inequality within the film industry, including aspects of diversity. Such an approach will enrich our comprehension of how oppressive industry structures intersect and impact individuals from marginalised communities. Despite this, the past efforts in quantifying the participation of women in the film industry underscore the importance of persisting in these endeavours. This ongoing work is vital for revealing inequalities and male dominance across the film industries, including those within the Nordic countries.

Acknowledgements

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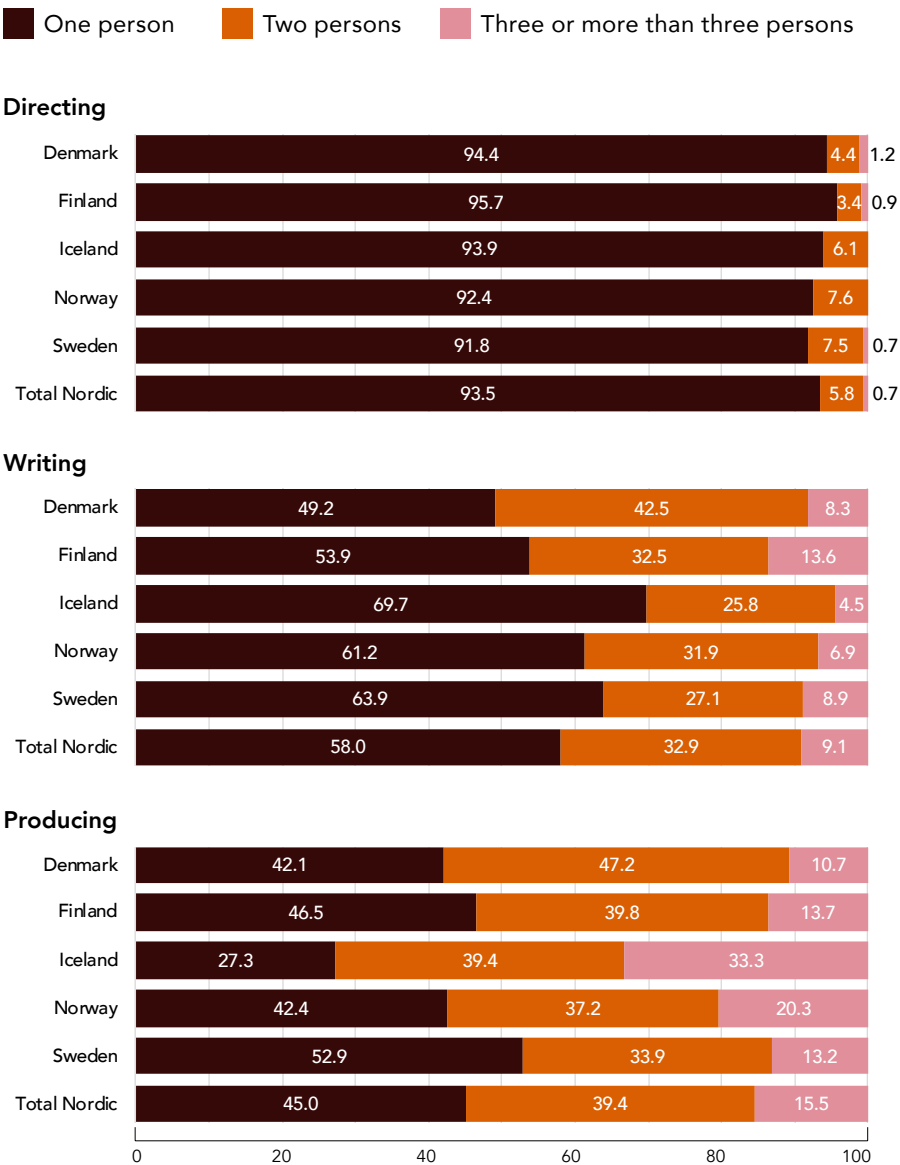
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Appendix 1

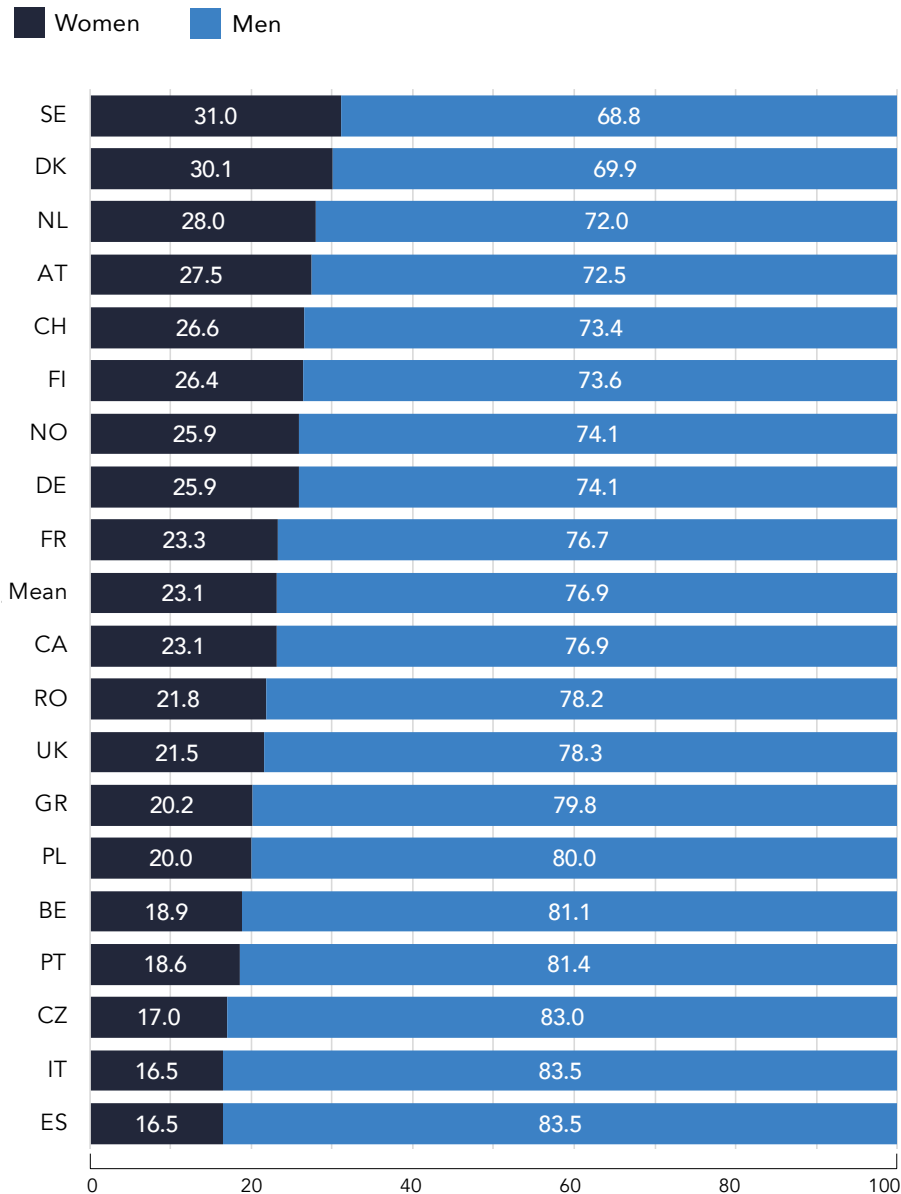
FIGURE A1 Team sizes in key creative positions in the Nordic countries (per cent)



Comments: Share of team sizes (one, two, or three and more) within the key creative positions of directing, writing, and producing for the sample of films released between 2010 and 2020 in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

Appendix 2

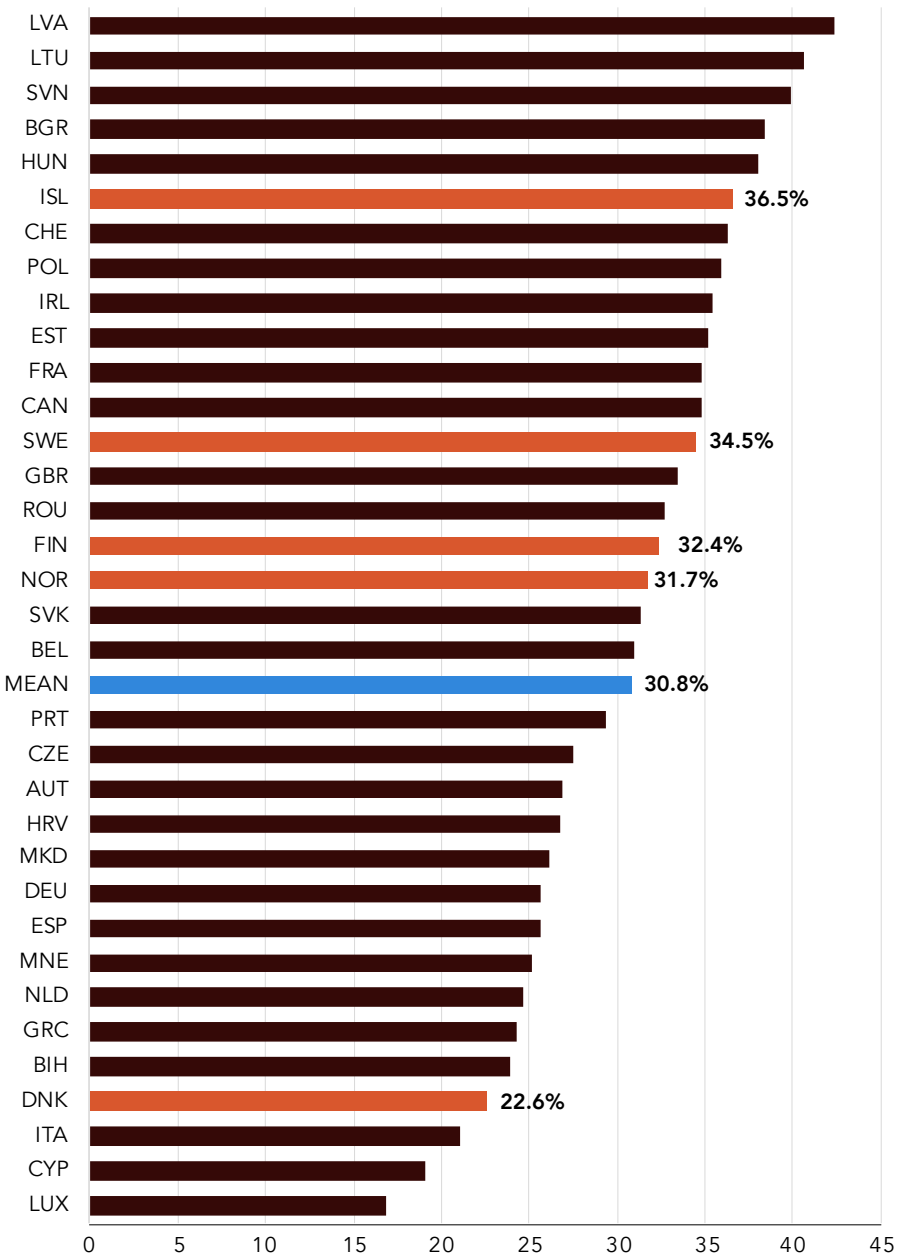
FIGURE A2 Gender representation in Eurimages film industries (per cent)



Comments: Share of women and men in key creative positions (averaged for all years) in 19 Eurimages countries with an output of 11,099 films and 50,173 key creative positions. Calculated for all Eurimages film industries with at least ten films released per year in 90 per cent of all years from 2010 and 2020.

Appendix 3

FIGURE A3 Ranking of Eurimages countries according to the proportion of women in middle and senior management positions, 2000–2020 (average per cent)



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