

Report on Measures and Methods for Gender Diversity in Nursing Education in the Nordic Region

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Contents

Introduction	3
Project participants and definitions of educational programmes.....	3
Terminology and Training Differences regarding Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) across Finland, Norway and Iceland.....	6
Registered Nurses (RNs).....	6
Healthcare Workers / Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs).....	6
Process, Methods and Measures Implemented to Support Men in Nursing Education	7
Task 1. Implementation of a system to follow up and document student cohorts and gender composition	7
Aim and challenges of implementing a student enrolment and graduation follow-up system.....	7
Task 2. Awareness-raising and encouragement to address the gender imbalance in study materials and the learning environment	13
Task 3. Scrutiny of communication and recruitment materials	17
Task 4. Improve the learning environment for male students by reducing alienation and loneliness	22
Task 5. Activate study and career counsellors in relevant geographic areas, alongside mapping and preparation of school introduction days	30
Task 6. Organise a pan-Nordic reference group to gather experiences of a range of measures in the Nordic Region.....	33
Concluding Summary	34
References	34

Introduction

The gender disparity in the Nordic healthcare sector has significant social, cultural and economic implications in societies that prioritise equality. Despite their progressive stance, Nordic countries continue to grapple with the persistent overrepresentation of women in healthcare, reflecting a broader gender division (Eurostat, 2024a). Transformations in men's roles are critical drivers of broader social progress. Although men's participation in caregiving may initially seem secondary, it plays a strategic role in advancing gender equality and addressing major social challenges (Scambor et al., 2023).

Various factors contribute to men's reluctance to pursue careers in healthcare. For instance, societal expectations and traditional views of masculinity can make nursing seem less appealing to men (Blackley et al., 2019), a perception reinforced by the communication and outreach materials used by nursing schools, which often fail to challenge those stereotypes. In addition, structural factors such as the historical context of caregiving in the Nordic Region further reinforce that gender imbalance (Dahl & Eriksen, 2005). Over the past two decades, research has consistently shown that gender equality and shared caregiving responsibilities lead to improved quality of life and better health outcomes for individuals of all genders (Scambor et al., 2023). Focusing on men in nursing education should therefore be seen as part of the greater goal of gender equality in the Nordic Region. That was also emphasised by the "Men in Nursing Education" project (Nordfjell & Nielsen, 2019), which forms the backbone to this project.

To overcome such barriers and foster a more gender-balanced health sector, the "[Share the Care](#)" project has collected experiences of measures and implemented them with the aim of helping educational programmes to address those inequalities. The "Share the Care" project was funded by the Nordic Gender Equality Fund (NIKK– Nordik information för Kunskap om kön) and implemented in Finland, Iceland and Norway. The project comprises six main tasks – interventions designed to enhance the situation of men in nursing education, targeting the individual and organisational level.

The aim of this report is to describe the measures and methods implemented during the four-year project, along with reflections on the process. For the full report, including the literature review, main findings, policy recommendations, and limitations, see [Share the Care: Strategies to Increase Diversity in Nursing Education](#). This report begins with a brief overview of the organizations involved in the project, including descriptions of the programs they run, educational levels, student numbers, and locations. The second section outlines the implemented measures and their outcomes in each of the three countries.

Project participants and definitions of educational programmes

The "Share the Care" project was implemented in three countries, namely Finland, Iceland and Norway. Within each country, several nursing education programmes were selected to participate in the project. The selection process varied slightly by country, but the common approach was to choose institutions where implementing the intervention would have the greatest impact. In each country one specific region was selected, with the exception of Iceland, where the entire country was included.

Finland

In Finland, the primary focus was on LAB University of Applied Sciences, which offers nursing education at a Bachelor of Arts (BA) level for qualification as a Registered Nurse (RN). The university is located in the eastern part of Finland. The programme accepts between 500-615 students annually, of whom about 14-18% are men. The degree course takes 3.5 years, with the first and the second years primarily dedicated to core competencies like autonomy, pharmacotherapy and clinical training in basic nursing, while the third year focuses on advanced clinical training, complementary competences and writing a thesis. Upon graduation, most students seek employment in the South Karelia region or in Helsinki and the surrounding area.

In addition to the aforementioned programme, project interventions were implemented in Saimaa Vocational College, which offers a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) programme in the South Karelia region. Students receive an LPN qualification upon graduation from the three-year programme, enabling them to work in the field of expertise that they have focused on. The programme admits between 110 to 170 students annually, of whom 13-14% are male.

Saimaa Vocational College (SVC) and **LAB University of Applied Sciences (LAB)** were chosen for the project due to existing connections and interest in collaboration. Both institutions have recognised the impact of segregation (such as the need for more male nurses in clinical settings and a more diverse student environment) and had taken steps to address that prior to the project launch.

Iceland

All Registered Nurse (RN) and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) programmes in Iceland are included in the report. In Iceland, the project was launched in 2021, with the focal organisations being the University of Akureyri and the University of Iceland, both offering nursing education at a Bachelor of Science (BSc) level for qualification as a Registered Nurse (RN). These schools are located in Reykjavik, the metropolitan area, and Akureyri in the northeastern part of the country, respectively. The programmes accept a maximum of 75 students in Akureyri and a maximum of 140 students in Reykjavik annually, with around 95% of them being women, although the proportion of men has been increasing in recent years. The degree course takes four years at both universities, with the first two years primarily dedicated to basic scientific and foundational nursing knowledge while the third and fourth years focus on specialised nursing knowledge and evidence-based practice. Upon graduation, most students seek employment in Landspítali – the national university hospital in Reykjavik.

In 2020, the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Iceland launched a Second-Degree Bachelor of Sciences Nursing Programme, also called the accelerated nursing programme (AACN, 2022).¹ The programme fulfils the requirements of the European Directive for nursing education. The intake per year from 2020 has been 10-22 students. Those students have varied educational backgrounds, such as engineering, natural sciences, educational sciences, humanities, social sciences, health sciences and the arts. This programme has a slightly higher portion of men than the traditional four-year nursing programme.

¹ A programme description can be found at: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Students/Accelerated-Nursing-Programs>, <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Nursing-Education-Programs/Accelerated-Programs>

In addition to those BSc nursing programmes, all the LPN programmes in Iceland were included in the data gathering section of the project. Those LPN programmes provide a two-year secondary education, enabling graduates to work in the healthcare field after three years of academic and clinical training. Currently over 600 students are enrolled in those ten LPN programmes. In total, 149 students received LPN certification in 2022, with six of them being men, corresponding to 4% of the group.

Norway

In Norway the project team consisted of two researchers working at the "Reform – resource centre for men". They were responsible for advising and coordinating implementation of tasks at the various educational institutions in the Østfold region. In addition, the team was responsible for retrieving information related to the numbers of students.

In Norway the focal organisations were [Østfold University College \(ØUC\)](#), which offers nursing education at a Bachelor of Arts (BA) level for qualification as a Registered Nurse (RN). The programme is located in the city of Fredrikstad. On average, the programme accepts 250 students annually, with around 85% of them being women. The degree course takes three years, with the first year primarily dedicated to an introduction to nursing theory and concepts of nursing, anatomy and clinical practice in basic nursing. The second and third years cover subjects like mental health, medical and surgical nursing, leadership and the completion of a bachelor's thesis on nursing. During the project, ØUC had a teacher with 5% of their working hours devoted to retaining and recruiting male students and following up on the project tasks and advice. That teacher was the key contact person for Reform. Østfold University College's bachelor programme in nursing education was chosen from among the 38 nursing programmes in Norway. The primary reason for its selection was its willingness to participate in the project. Additionally, Østfold University College had a lower proportion (about 15%) of male students at the start compared to the national average (about 20%) and students generally had lower starting scores than those in cities like Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø. The college also had a lower completion rate for male students compared to the national average. Those factors made Østfold University College an ideal candidate for the project, as there was significant potential for improvement.

In addition to that programme, project interventions were implemented in eight upper secondary schools offering the Healthcare Worker programme (vg2) in the Østfold region. The project had a number of further activities in one of the upper secondary schools. About 280 students are admitted to those programmes in the region of Østfold, with about 87% being women. The selection criteria for the Healthcare Worker programme included all upper secondary schools offering that vocational training in the Østfold region.

As can be observed, all the countries and project partners have a skewed gender ratio with a low proportion of male participation in nursing education. Prior to progressing to interpretation of implementation of the project, it is essential to examine the definitions of educational programmes in nursing education in order to ensure consistency.

Terminology and Training Differences regarding Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) across Finland, Norway and Iceland

Registered Nurses (RNs)

Registered Nurses (RNs) play a vital role in healthcare and have a wide array of responsibilities. They evaluate patients' condition, devise care strategies, administer medication and offer emotional support. Collaboration with physicians and other healthcare team members is essential for ensuring holistic patient care. To qualify as an RN, individuals need a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), typically requiring three to four years of study. Following that, passing the national licensing exam is necessary to practice as a registered nurse.

Healthcare Workers / Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)

The programme to qualify as a Healthcare Worker or Licensed Practical Nurse differs somewhat in the three countries. Licensed Practical Nurse training in **Finland** is a versatile and hands-on training programme that prepares students to work in the health and social care sector. The training can be completed at vocational institutions and leads to a basic qualification in health and social care. The training usually takes about two to three years, depending on the student's previous education and experience. The training includes basic studies, which cover the fundamentals of the health and social care field, such as customer service, ethics, first aid and work readiness. Professional skills include pharmacology, anatomy and physiology, as well as social interaction. As elective modules, students can choose courses that focus on their interests, such as elderly care, mental health and substance abuse work or child and youth care and education. Practical training is an essential part of the programmes and is conducted in various health and social care workplaces. Admissions requirements are completion of basic education or equivalent knowledge and skills and suitability for the field (often assessed through suitability tests and interviews). LPN graduates can continue their studies at a university of applied sciences and pursue a degree in nursing, public health nursing or social services.

In Norway, the term used is *Healthcare Worker [Helsefagarbeider]*. To become a certified Healthcare Worker, students take a four-year vocational training course. The first year is dedicated to more general subjects, the second year is dedicated to health work and the third and fourth years are dedicated to paid practical training, often in a nursing home. It is also possible to become a licensed Healthcare Worker as a practice candidate after a minimum of five years' relevant work and having passed the level 3 Healthcare Worker examination.²

In Iceland, the programme is also *Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)* training and it is conducted at upper secondary school level. The curriculum consists of 120 credit points, of which 86 credit points are for theoretical studies, 3 credit points are for clinical studies in school and 15 credit points are for clinical workplace training; the programme also includes 16 weeks of practical training in healthcare institutions.³

² <https://www.vilbli.no/en/no/strukturkart/v.hs/health-work?kurs=v.hshea3---&side=p2>

³ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media>

Process, Methods and Measures Implemented to Support Men in Nursing Education

Task 1. Implementation of a system to follow up and document student cohorts and gender composition

The first measure implemented was a follow-up document which was sent out to all study programmes. The goal of the measure was to gain better knowledge of the numbers of men enrolled in each programme and country and whether they had graduated or dropped out of the programme. Such information is useful to address in real-time cases in which students might drop out. The partners in each country aimed to collect the following data annually (in May/June) for each LPN and RN programme in each country.⁴

- Number of male students currently enrolled in each LPN programme
- Number of male students currently enrolled in each RN programme
- Number of male graduates from each LPN programme
- Number of male graduates from each RN programme

Aim and challenges of implementing a student enrolment and graduation follow-up system

The project aimed to implement a system that tracked and documented student cohorts with respect to dropout rates, students taking longer than the standard time and completion. As stated, that involved developing sustainable methods for collecting statistics over two terms and proposing routine interview questions or forms for students who dropped out during the academic year. Furthermore, the project sought to encourage schools to integrate reasons for dropout or delay into the registration system, facilitating follow-up interviews with students who had left the given programme. The idea was that the data would provide accurate and actionable insights into student retention and success.

The project faced challenges, such as harmonising data across different countries. That required discrete data collection in each country while ensuring consistency. Another challenge was guiding the programmes to deliver reliable data consistently and establishing sustainable methods for data acquisition.

⁴ While the initial aim of the project was to collect the information based on contacting the administration officers in each of the institutions, in practice, due to delays and some degree of rejection by the programme officers, in Norway the data were retrieved from the official statistics of the education ministry.

Norway

A. Implementation of a follow-up system

The initial intervention concerning the follow-up system occurred in September 2021. During that time, Reform partners contacted Østfold University College and various upper secondary schools regarding their respective systems for monitoring students, primarily through interviews with staff. The main discovery was that there is no formal system at Østfold University College for tracking students at risk of dropout. Conversely, at the upper secondary school level, students are generally monitored closely owing to their age.

During the interviews, questions regarding the reasons for dropout were raised, but no clear answers were provided. That lack of clarity suggests that the administrative personnel were uncertain and no proactive measures were implemented to prevent dropout. Furthermore, it was evident that the administration believed that obtaining information through direct contact with students violated privacy regulations, thus serving as the primary reason for not monitoring students at risk of dropout.

In autumn 2022, a second round of interactions with Østfold University College (ØUC) was conducted to facilitate knowledge transfer from a university with effective student support practices. Key takeaways for ØUC staff included the other university's higher resource allocation and better staff-to-student ratio, resulting in improved student follow-up. Additionally, the other university excels at early intervention, promptly contacting at-risk students. That university has a dedicated team focused on student well-being, composed of faculty involved in exam coordination and student support. The student chaplain, who conducts some 200 annual conversations, provides crucial guidance and referrals, especially for students unsure of where to seek help. A pilot project was also implemented to offer low-threshold counselling services by peer students in a confidential manner, complementing the psychologist and chaplain. That service includes two paid students, one male and one female. Furthermore, the university contacts all students who drop out, providing counselling, information on leave-of-absence and withdrawing options and encourages them to explain their reasons for leaving. Additionally, all students are automatically enrolled for regular exams and must consult the administration if they wish to withdraw.

As a follow-up to those meetings, ØUC implemented some new practices. As of the first semester of 2023, students routinely sign a permission form allowing faculty to contact them if they fall behind or drop out of the programme. Currently, when students notify the school of their intention to discontinue their education, they have the voluntary option to explain why they are dropping out.

In addition, Østfold University College (ØUC) has earmarked working time (5%) of an employee to focus on recruiting and retaining male students. During that time, the employee familiarised themselves with the topic and liaised with professionals working on this issue across Norway. Additionally, they provided input into the university's diversity and inclusion action plan to address the challenges boys and men face on the nursing programme (although that input has not yet been considered by the university). Nevertheless, compared to other universities in Norway, this effort is somewhat limited.

Considering the better follow-up of students on LPN programmes, Reform partners communicated quarterly with LPN programmes in the Østfold region of Norway. That communication serves the purpose of updating enrolment and graduation figures for the programmes. Statistics were also collected from the national database, as well as from the county council for the years 2020-2023.

B. Statistics^{5,6}

Year / institutional level	Enrolment			Graduated		
	Number of women	Number of men	Percentage of men	Number of women	Number of men	Percentage of men
2020						
Healthcare Worker programme, selected school	55	9	0.141	6	2	0.250
Healthcare Worker programme, Viken County Municipality	724	146	0.168	315	71	0.184
Healthcare Worker programme, Norway	3380	637	0.159	1610	390	0.195
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Østfold University College	195	30	0.133	145	15	0.094
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Norway	4620	815	0.150	3680	495	0.119
2021						
Healthcare Worker programme, selected school	65	3	0.044	28	24	0.462
Healthcare Worker programme, Viken County Municipality	716	152	0.175	280	110	0.282
Healthcare Worker programme, Norway	3525	634	0.152	1578	466	0.228
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Østfold University College	180	50	0.217	170	20	0.105
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Norway	4705	820	0.148	3690	550	0.130
2022						
Healthcare Worker programme, selected school	54	17	0.239	44	7	0.137
Healthcare Worker programme, Viken County Municipality	644	130	0.168	263	106	0.287
Healthcare Worker programme, Norway	3340	506	0.132	1527	487	0.242
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Østfold University College	230	40	0.148	175	30	0.146
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Norway	4670	795	0.145	3880	560	0.126
2023						
Healthcare Worker programme, selected school	65	9	0.122	33	4	0.108
No comparable statistics for this year						
Healthcare Worker programme, Norway	3343	406	0.108	1499	495	0.248
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Østfold University College	205	35	0.146	175	20	0.103
Bachelor's degree in nursing, Norway	4135	745	0.153	3820	575	0.131
Average			0.150			0.188

⁵ The numbers in this table have been rounded to the nearest five to ensure data protection and privacy.

⁶ Enrolment Østfold University College: <https://dbh.hkdir.no/dbh-old/statistikk/rapport>

Enrolment Norway: <https://dbh.hkdir.no/dbh-old/statistikk/rapport>

Graduated Østfold University College: <https://dbh.hkdir.no/dbh-old/statistikk/rapport>

Graduated Norway: <https://dbh.hkdir.no/dbh-old/statistikk/rapport>

Finland

A. Implementation of a follow-up system

In autumn 2021, the partners from Finland contacted LAB University of Applied Sciences and Saimaa Vocational College Sampo to gather information on the number of students. At LAB University of Applied Sciences, the focus has been on measures to ensure students graduate within the standard time and identify those at risk of dropping out. Significant effort has been put into working closely with a study counsellor who conducts monthly tutor meetings to discuss challenges and procedures. The development of existing practices has yielded results in identifying at-risk students, integrating those findings into the work of tutors. Workshops were held to hear the challenges students have regarding their studies, with topics discussed in regular tutor meetings. Solutions were collaboratively developed with managers, tutors and the study counsellor. Those discussions have led to curriculum improvements, with greater emphasis on student feedback and their needs related to the study programme. The direct link between students and mentors has changed, ensuring student feedback is not only heard but also implemented.

LAB University of Applied Sciences has centralised tutoring, with each student group having a designated tutor who monitors progress through an electronic system. Students are required to have biannual tutoring discussions to review their progress and address any challenges. The dean assesses the number of students keeping up with the curriculum and those at risk of dropping out every term.

According to the degree regulations at LAB, students can receive an extra year of study time after the standard degree duration ends, with an additional discretionary year if needed. Students taking extra time for their studies receive the guidance of a study counsellor, who can provide more individual guidance than a tutor. Other implemented changes relate to clinical work. During discussions with the tutor, students often raised concerns about the availability of clinical placement opportunities. After the intervention, flexibility in completing theoretical studies has been facilitated through non-group-bound schedules, allowing students to attend classes with other groups according to their needs. That flexibility has enabled some students to complete their studies in less time than the standard duration of the degree programme, while others have more opportunity to adjust their study time, facilitating graduation by better balancing their studies with their personal life.

An additional outcome of that feedback was the establishment of collaboration with the "Health and Social Care District Organisation" responsible for providing local services. That partnership facilitated the placement of students in clinical settings, allowing more flexibility for students to complete their practical requirements in various locations.

At Saimaa Vocational School, which runs the NPL programme, there are clear practices in place for student follow-up. Consequently, the Finnish partner focused primarily on collecting information, with less emphasis on interventions.

Why men are more likely to drop out from nursing programmes

In autumn 2021, the Finnish partner contacted the individuals responsible for recording the statistics of applicants, graduates and dropouts in the health and social care education programmes at LAB University of Applied Sciences and Saimaa Vocational College. The aim was to gather data on reasons for dropping out, including gender. At LAB University of Applied Sciences, such statistics are

managed by the head of student services, while at Saimaa Vocational College, the education secretary is responsible.

The findings suggested that the reasons male students drop out of their studies varied. The most common issue was related to internships, with male nurses working while conducting their internships, which resulted in overload. Some respondents found web-based studies confusing and support difficult to obtain. A few felt lonely, especially if they were the only male student in the group and indicated that more encouragement and care were needed. Students who dropped out also argued that clearer deadlines would have helped them schedule their time more effectively.

It was noted that there is often competition among male students and usually the weaker students drop out. A lack of male friends and feelings of loneliness were also contributing factors. Female students more easily form their own groups during studies, which can leave male students feeling excluded, reinforcing a sense of not belonging to the field. Depression, loneliness and feelings of exclusion were significant factors affecting motivation and contributing to dropout rates. Personal motivation, interest, job description and practical realities also influenced the decision to drop out.

B. Statistics

Year / institutional level	Enrolment			Graduated		
	Number of women	Number of men	Percentage of men	Number of women	Number of men	Percentage of men
2021						
Saima Vocational School	95	16	0.144	145	24	0.142
LAB University of Applied Sciences	528	87	0.141	170	24	0.124
Bachelor degrees in Finland	1839	219	0.106			
2022						
Saima Vocational School	105	15	0.125	179	21	0.105
LAB University of Applied Sciences	459	72	0.136	118	27	0.186
Bachelor degrees in Finland	1500	159	0.096			
2023						
Saima Vocational School	151	22	0.127	83	15	0.153
LAB University of Applied Sciences	417	90	0.178	155	18	0.104
Bachelor degrees in Finland	1638	162	0.090			
2024⁷						
Saima Vocational School	65	10	0.133	81	12	0.129
LAB University of Applied Sciences	174	21	0.108	33	8	0.195
Bachelor degrees in Finland	315	27	0.079			
Average	607.2	75.0	0.122	120.5	18.6	0.142

⁷ The numbers for the 2024 autumn term are not yet available, so the overall figures are lower.

Iceland

A. Implementation of a follow-up system

Addressing dropout rates on Icelandic nursing programmes posed a complex challenge due to several key factors. First, neither the University of Iceland nor the University of Akureyri has implemented any formal dropout intervention strategies. The admissions process relies heavily on academic grades, which leads to a significant fall in the number of male students after the first-semester exams, as there are more applicants than places available. However, once students pass the competitive entrance exams and are admitted to nursing programmes, dropout rates tend to be low among both male and female students. It was suggested that close monitoring by faculty played an important role. Despite the small size of these universities, faculty members appear more concerned with increasing male enrolment than the administrative staff.

During the project, the deans of nursing programmes investigated alternative admissions methods with the aim of creating a more diverse student body. However, the idea of incorporating interviews with prospective students into the admissions process was deemed too expensive, which has limited the impact of such efforts. Consequently, the majority of nursing students remain white females as the current admissions process continues to prioritise academic grades.

One important change that took place during the years of the project is that in 2022 the University of Akureyri introduced a 60-ECTS diploma programme for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), aimed at LPNs seeking an advanced practice degree. While that step is not related to the project, the programme in question has contributed to the male enrolment numbers in nursing.

It should be noted that over the past two decades, particularly since Iceland joined the European Economic Area in 1994, significant efforts have been made to address gender imbalances across various professions. The tables below indicate a gradual increase in both the enrolment and graduation rates of male students in nursing programmes. Although it is unclear whether this trend will continue and if it can be directly attributed to existing interventions, the data suggest a positive trajectory. A similar pattern is observed on the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) programmes, although the figures vary significantly between institutions and across different years. It is hoped that these trends will continue, as both the Icelandic RN Association and the universities are committed to sustaining and enhancing male enrolment in nursing programmes. Unfortunately, the same level of commitment is not currently evident within the LPN programmes and their associated organisations.

B. Statistics

Year / institutional level	Enrollment			Graduated		
	Number of women	Number of men	Percent men	Number of women	Number of men	Percent men
2021						
University of Akureyri -RN	155	3	0,019	47	3	0,06
University of Iceland -RN	127	9	0,066	178	3	0,017
LPN programs ¹	265	10	0,036	113	1	0,009
2022						
University of Akureyri -RN	205	11	0,051	54	2	0,036
University of Iceland -RN	118	3	0,025	73	2	0,027
LPN programs	270	14	0,049	122	7	0,054
2023						
University of Akureyri -RN	186	13	0,065	43	3	0,065
University of Iceland -RN	151	13	0,079	118	5	0,041
LPN programs	127	14	0,099	84	8	0,087
Average			0,054			0,044

¹Due to the very small number of men in the LPN programs at each of the seven schools, we decided to group them together in accordance with ethical research recommendations.

Task 2. Awareness-raising and encouragement to address the gender imbalance in study materials and the learning environment

The second measure implemented focused on increasing awareness among teachers regarding the situation of male students in nursing education. While the specific interventions varied across countries, they primarily involved organising seminars and workshops for teachers. Below, we detail the seminars held in each country and reflect on their outcomes.

Cross-national workshop

A cross-national online workshop was held on February 15 2022, targeting teachers in nursing education and LPN/Nurse Assistant training. The workshop aimed to address materials, teaching practices and the learning environment with respect to male and migrant students in nursing and practical nursing training. Approximately 30-45 teachers participated from Iceland, Finland and Norway.

The workshop commenced with a brief introduction to the "Share the Care" project, highlighting its objectives. A norm-critical approach was introduced, with emphasis on its relevance to teaching and study materials in nursing education. Partners of the "Share the Care" project provided insights from research and experiences on various aspects related to male and migrant participation in nursing and practical nursing training. That was followed by interactive exchanges and discussions in both chat and breakout rooms.

In the exercise for the breakout rooms, the question posed was how teachers deal with the gender and ethnic norms of the stereotypical nurse (a heterosexual Caucasian woman). The basis for the discussion was an example from a Norwegian introductory book on nursing that used the term "helsesøster", which translates literally to "health sister".⁸ The accompanying illustrations depicted two white, blonde women, showing the public health nurses helping a parent with an infant.

Norway

In Norway, three seminars were organised by the Reform team. The goal of the seminars was as follows: (1) Convey basic knowledge of the situation of men in nursing education to the teachers, (2) Increase sensitivity and make necessary adaptations in learning situations (3) Inform the teachers about the design of the "Share the Care" project. The Norwegian partners conducted the workshops with university faculty and upper secondary school teachers on nursing programmes. That involved presenting the results of the analysis of the Norwegian textbook.

During the workshops, an in-depth analysis of one section of the introduction to the nursing textbook, previously analysed in the "Men in Nursing Education" report, was discussed. The analysis critiqued the gender norms portrayed in the images and use of the term "helsesøster" (health sister).

The findings were as follows:

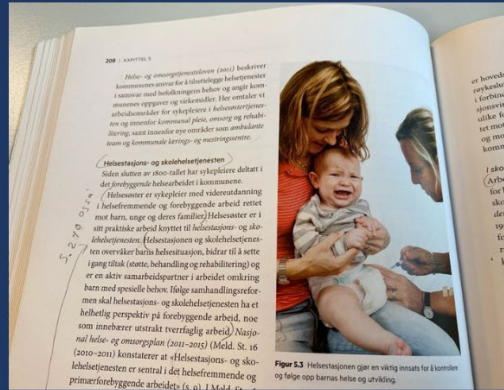
When the word "nurse" was used in the textbook, it typically appeared without any reference to the gender of the person. However, when gendered pronouns were applied, the nurse was mainly female.

- In a total of 89 instances of gendering, the nurse was referred to as "she" 71 times.
- In 16 instances, both female and male gender pronouns were used.
- A nurse was given a male pronoun in only two instances.

[...] The book was sparsely illustrated and contained few photos. Of the 25 pictures of nurses, 18 portrayed a female nurse (alone or with other female nurses). Four photos showed both a male and a female nurse working together. Only two photos depicted a male nurse alone: one was an ad for digital learning tools placed before the list of contents and the other showed only a pair of hands demonstrating the proper handwashing procedure. Most nurses depicted in the book were Caucasian and the photos primarily featured middle-aged women.

The Norwegian partners contacted the book's editors to critique the gender representation in the book. The editors responded that the new volume of the introductory nursing textbooks had been updated, with the new term "health nurse" being used in the 2021 edition. They recognised that the gender and ethnic diversity in the pictures had room for improvement and pledged to keep that in mind for future editions.

⁸ Note that in the Norwegian language, the term for "nurse" and all specialist nurse terms have now become gender-neutral, except for "perinatal nurse", which is still referred to as "jordmor." Additionally, the term "sister" in "health sister" has been replaced by "health nurse".



Figur 5.3 Helsestasjonen gjør en viktig innsats for å kontrollere og følge opp barnas helse og utvikling.

Figure 5.3 The health centre makes an important effort to control and monitor the children's health and development.

1. Describe the norms you find in this picture (gender, ethnicity, age, etc.)
2. What message may this picture/example give students of different genders and ethnicities?
Additional info:
Describing the tasks of the health/school nurse in the chapter the title "helsesøster" – in English "health sister" is used. This title was replaced by with a gender-neutral term in 2019.
3. How would you approach teaching your class this content if this was the selected textbook?

Kristoffersen, N. J. (2016). Grunnleggende sykepleie: B. [Volume] 1-3 : Sykepleie - fag og funksjon (3. utg.). Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk. Pages 207-2010

The first workshop for nursing faculty took place in October 2021 at the University of Østfold, and included approximately 25 teachers, mainly women. The workshop fostered enthusiastic discussions, albeit primarily focused on societal constraints rather than factors within their control. At the end of the project, on June 10 2024, Reform held a final seminar for management and teachers at ØUC. Many new teachers had joined since the first seminar, so significant time was devoted to the same topics: (1) Basic knowledge of the situation of men in nursing education and (2) How to increase sensitivity and adaptations for male students in learning situations. The teachers were very active and positive in the discussions. Feedback from several teachers after the seminar indicated that this kind of reflection is crucial and should be done regularly, as it is often overlooked in their daily work. Together with the contact person at ØUC, we also presented the experiences of the "Share the Care" project at ØUC and discussed how some activities can be continued.⁹

In August 2022, a workshop was held for teachers at the selected Healthcare Worker programmes at upper secondary school level in Østfold. In addition to the initial goal, in this workshop the Reform team aimed to encourage teachers to invite them for workshops with students in their class, several reflections emerged during discussions about the recruitment and retention of male students in nursing:

- Lack of role models at school, including a shortage of male teachers.
- The influence of the labour culture, particularly in heavy industry sectors, shaping a masculine culture.
- Lower status and compensation for nursing professions.
- Reputation issues: how the profession is portrayed in the media.
- Career counsellors directing boys towards other fields.

⁹ Details on continuing these activities are addressed in other parts of this document, particularly under Task 4. Improving the learning environment for male students by reducing alienation and loneliness.

- Opportunities: highlighting the healthcare perspective in sports and athletics.
- Opportunities: engaging families and men with immigrant backgrounds to consider nursing as a career pathway.

Finland

The partner in Finland organised workshops mainly for teachers at the upper secondary level. There were three such workshops with teachers from Saimaa Vocational College in 2021-2023. The workshops aimed to enhance teachers' and students' sensitivity and awareness of gender biases in study materials and learning environments. These sessions were designed and combined with the aim of developing new learning pathways for both Finnish and international students. The workshops facilitated diverse discussions on the impact of gender roles and stereotypes, particularly on the language used in teaching. In the Finnish language, gender is not distinguished by separate pronouns, so the term "nurse" is inherently gender-neutral.

At LAB University of Applied Sciences, implementing the goals and measures of the "Share the Care project" was straightforward due to the existing structures within the organisation. Increasing awareness of gender biases in teaching materials was easily incorporated into discussions within nursing teams, tutor meetings and informal conversations. In order to gather information on male students' feelings regarding the learning environment, two online surveys (webropol) were conducted, one in 2021 and one in 2024.¹⁰ Interestingly, the issue of gender-unbalanced learning materials was not brought up as affecting male students in either of those surveys. It was noted during the discussion that the meaningfulness and diversity of the work are its main attractions, notwithstanding the working conditions and wages in the health and social care sector, which have been prominently featured in public discourse.

Iceland

Throughout the project, the Icelandic team consistently engaged with stakeholders, healthcare organisations and clinical teachers to raise awareness about male recruitment and enrolment in nursing. The efforts began in 2021, when the team members gave a presentation on gender equality at a conference hosted by the University of Iceland. In 2022, they continued their advocacy work, giving presentations at various events, including the Akureyri Hospital's annual science day, a meeting for the Nordic Council of Ministers in Norway and a meeting for the Icelandic Nursing Association. The team also regularly addressed gender issues in faculty meetings at both universities, with annual presentations on the "Share the Care" project to keep the faculty informed.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration was established with both universities and the Landspítali National University Hospital to introduce nursing as a career option to boys in year ten across Iceland. That initiative was supported by a grant from the Icelandic Gender Equality Fund and

¹⁰ More information on these online surveys and their insights with regards to learning environments are available under Task 4.

was deemed highly successful by various stakeholders and participants. Funding is currently being sought to repeat that project.¹¹

In 2022, the first-ever subchapter for males within the Icelandic Nursing Association was established, with one of the co-authors becoming its founding chair. That subchapter has since organised events to support male nurses and has become a platform for discussing the challenges faced by men in nursing. Additionally, a committee on men in nursing was created within the Icelandic Nursing Association, which remains active today. Various initiatives have been undertaken by the committee, such as collecting narratives on microaggressions faced by male nurses in Iceland and collaborating with student counsellors to promote nursing as a viable career option for men. For example, in May 2024, an event was organised in which over 20 male nurses, including five students, gathered to share their experiences and support one another. Other activities included male nurses visiting schools to introduce nursing as a potential career path to boys in year nine in Reykjavik.

In 2022, special emphasis was placed on recruiting males into nursing. During the University Day, a focused effort was made to recruit more males to nursing programmes at both universities. The advocacy efforts of the Icelandic team gained momentum, leading to a record number of 26 male applicants to nursing programmes in Iceland in 2023, accounting for 8% of all applicants. That achievement was highlighted in the Icelandic media and one of the co-authors gave a national radio interview on the topic.¹²

One of the topics which was highlighted by the team members was the gendered language in textbooks. The textbooks currently used in nursing academia are sourced from the United States and the United Kingdom and are provided in English. Due to Iceland's relatively small population, the translation of those materials into Icelandic has not been deemed practical. It is noteworthy, however, that the content of those UK and US textbooks tends to be more gendered than the limited original Icelandic materials available.

During summer 2024, both Icelandic team members wrote a letter to the dean of the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Iceland, addressing several issues related to male representation in nursing faculties, also highlighting the presence of gendered ornaments (artwork) where the Faculty of Nursing is located. In early August 2024, the dean herself removed those gendered ornaments, marking a significant step towards creating a more inclusive environment.

Task 3. Scrutiny of communication and recruitment materials

This task aims to analyse critically how healthcare education institutions portray the nursing profession in their recruitment strategies. The social perception of professions is influenced not only by their societal value but also by who traditionally occupies those roles. Recruitment strategies employed by vocational schools or universities serve to attract students to their programmes, but

¹¹ Further details on one of the numerous news stories covering the project can be accessed via the following link. This particular report, which featured prominently on the national evening news in Iceland, is available at: <https://www.ruv.is/frettir/innlent/2021-05-19-hnodad-sprautad-og-haemlikkad-i-hagaskola>.

¹² Link to the radio programme: <https://www.unak.is/is/samfelagid/frettasafn/frettir/fleiri-karlar-saekja-i-hjukrunarfraedi>

they also function as marketing strategies in a competitive educational landscape. Educational institutions therefore target specific demographics with their messaging.

The scrutiny of communication and recruitment materials involves examining the imagery and language used on websites and in promotional materials. The goal is to ensure that diversity is represented in recruitment materials for the nursing profession, including individuals of all genders and ethnic backgrounds. In essence, that entails reviewing communication and recruitment materials to assess how they portray gender and ethnic minorities and providing feedback for improvement to the school administration.

Norway

In autumn 2021, Reform conducted a review of how health and social sciences are presented at upper secondary schools in Østfold region and at Østfold University College on their websites and social media platforms. As part of the review of advertising strategies and materials in schools in Norway, several interventions were implemented to promote gender balance on those platforms. In October 2021, the Reform team evaluated the portrayal of health and education on the websites and social media channels. That critical assessment focused on communication and recruitment materials and their representation of gender and ethnic minorities. Suggestions for improvement were forwarded to the respective school administration.

The websites of the eight upper secondary schools providing the Healthcare Worker programme in Østfold show that there has been no change in either image use or language use since 2021. Reform team members conducted a similar review and had an initial meeting with the school's career counsellors. Gender representation is very unevenly distributed, with a clear majority of girls. The schools represent the actual gender balance as it is on the programmes, rather than the ideal balance. Reform team members believe it is most appropriate to represent the ideal gender balance on such programmes so that they signal, for example, to boys that health and upbringing are also options they can choose or that electrical engineering is something girls can choose. However, not everyone has the same opinion on that. When Reform held the meeting for the career counsellors one of them commented that they felt it was better not to have even representation as they considered it misleading with respect to the actual balance of students. The selected school is the only exception; both images featuring on the website had a gender balance of 50/50, with boys and girls shown, and the language on the websites is completely neutral.

The website for Østfold University College's Bachelor of Nursing programme, like the upper secondary websites, largely reflects the real gender balance on the programme, which is heavily skewed. After the meeting between Reform and the management of the nursing programme in 2021, the university interviewed two male nursing students and put the interviews on its website. That was a positive and important development, which can hopefully inspire other programmes to do the same. However, the interviews are relatively far down on the given web page and it would have been advantageous if the pictures were the first images, so users of the website would more readily encounter a more gender-balanced image.

Reform also reviewed the Facebook and Instagram pages of all schools that maintain them, examining posts dating from December 2021 to May 2023. The trend on these platforms is for the

posts to reflect the current gender distribution within the student body rather than an ideal balance. Given that students likely turn to such social media channels to gain insight into where they will potentially study, more balanced gender representation becomes crucial.

Overall, it appears that while Østfold University College has made improvements, most upper secondary schools have not updated their website. Consequently, the gender imbalance in imagery and language remain unchanged compared to 2021. In spring 2024, an email was sent again to all of the upper secondary school administrations, providing examples of best practices for how schools could better highlight male students on their programmes and make their websites and social media accounts more gender-representative.

Finland

In Finland, evaluations of advertising for three health education programmes were conducted at two time points: first in 2021 and then in 2022. Those programmes include:

- LAB University – Bachelor of Healthcare, Paramedic, full-time degree
- LAB University – Bachelor of Healthcare Nursing, full-time degree
- Sampo Vocational School, which offers health and social care programmes in LPN and Basic Level Paramedic Nursing.

Beginning with the *Bachelor of Healthcare, Paramedic*, in terms of marketing materials, efforts have been made to challenge stereotypes associated with the paramedic profession. Images on the website are either gender-neutral (e.g. a stethoscope) or depict female paramedics, aiming to break traditional gender norms. The website features narratives of two female paramedic students sharing their study experiences, highlighting the diverse tasks involved in paramedic work, including urgent and non-urgent care, examination of patients, situational assessment and care planning. Moreover, students discuss the potential for leadership roles within their future careers. On the web page, students also share their study experiences at LAB University of Applied Sciences and describe the kind of individuals suited to the paramedic programme.

In line with the goals of the “Mainstreaming Gender in Health and Social Care Training” project, the marketing strategy aims for authentic representation of paramedic work, moving away from gender stereotypes and presenting a comprehensive view of the profession.

The *Bachelor of Healthcare Nursing* demonstrates relatively gender-neutral representation. Gender equality seems to be emphasised in the marketing for nursing education. Good employment opportunities and a wide field of work have also been considered in the marketing, with emphasis on the fact that nursing decisions are made both independently and as part of multiprofessional teams.

Stereotypical images of a nurse’s work in an institutional setting have not been dismantled to a significant degree. The text of the marketing website mentions that there are e.g. jobs in hospitals, health centres and home care, remarking that nursing training provides good theoretical and practical skills to work in areas such as acute care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, child and youth care, operating rooms or home care. It is also stated that it is possible to study flexibly to

become a nurse at LAB University of Applied Sciences, emphasising students' own interests and the possibility to choose between acute care work and home care services. It is also emphasised that the nursing degree programme qualifies its graduates to work as nurses throughout the European Union.

In the period between 2021 and 2022, LAB University of Applied Sciences reoriented its marketing strategy, with a particular focus on the key competencies, course content and employment prospects associated with its paramedic and nursing programmes. Going forward, it may be beneficial to dedicate a greater share of attention to the promotion of further education and career pathways.

In contrast to the two LAB programmes, which have fairly gender-neutral marketing, *Sampo Vocational School* has a strong imbalance in gender representation on its website. On the main page, social and health studies are marketed according to stereotypes, highlighting the suitability of the studies for people who are empathetic and have good social and interpersonal skills. The pictures present stereotypes of nurses as young, blonde females who are compassionate and caring. Nonetheless the website also outlines a range of employment opportunities in social security and provides information on postgraduate study options at various universities.

Overall, the marketing of a university of applied sciences seems to be more gender-neutral than the marketing of a secondary school. Nonetheless, it should be noted that while diversity in the marketing materials means that all genders and more diverse ethnic backgrounds are now represented, broad representation of ages is still lacking and almost all pictures are of young individuals.

Iceland

The co-authors from Iceland criticised the recruitment materials in the past in the scope of a previous project. As can be seen below in pictures 1-3 this clearly has rendered some positive results as both Universities appear very aware of the importance of a balanced approach to gender when representing these programs of study. Examples of that can be seen in the pictures below, all of which were taken from the websites or social media content of the universities in 2024.

In addition to that improvement in the recruitment materials of both universities, the University of Iceland recently featured a man who went into nursing after completing a law degree very prominently in its general recruitment materials for the university as a whole, see picture 6. Numerous interviews, pictures and publicity materials were distributed in the media featuring that example. Pictures 5 and 7 illustrate efforts by the PR departments of both universities to emphasise and highlight positive news about males in nursing.



Picture 1. Recruitment material from the University of Akureyri featuring two male nursing students.



Picture 2. Recruitment material from the University of Iceland featuring a male and female.



Picture 3. Social media campaign material for nursing at the University of Akureyri featuring a male nursing student.

Task 4. Improve the learning environment for male students by reducing alienation and loneliness

The overarching goal of the fourth task was to enhance the learning environment for male students in nursing education. To achieve that, several practical interventions were introduced, varying between countries. Those interventions included: (1) creating a national sub-chapter/unit for men in nursing education through dialogue with the nursing association; (2) providing male students with opportunities to be in the same classes or study groups; and (3) establishing meeting points for male students.

Norway

Action 1: Grouping men together

To improve the learning environment for male students, Reform proposed a measure to ensure daily interaction among male peers. This recommendation was presented to management and staff at ØUC in autumn 2021. Since the semester had already begun, implementation of this measure was planned for the start of the nursing programme in autumn 2022, with an evaluation to follow in the next year.

In the first term, nursing students are organised into working groups of eight. Previously, the approximately 35 male students were distributed evenly among those groups, resulting in most groups having one male student and some having two. Since some of the students drop out in the first year, a majority of male students will have the experience of being the only man in the group. The

new plan was to assign at least three male students to each working group of eight, meaning that half of the working groups would have no male students. Implementation of that plan proceeded as scheduled in autumn 2022.

Evaluation

Feedback from the person responsible for assigning students to the working groups indicated that one potential issue was that male students were assigned based solely on the gender indicated by their names. At the beginning of the second year of the nursing programme, the male students were asked in a questionnaire about their experiences of how the working groups were organised during their first term. A total of 14 students responded, representing about half of the male students. A group interview was then conducted with three of the students to collect more qualitative insight into their experiences.

All respondents to the questionnaire reported having gotten to know a male peer within their working group and had continued to maintain contact after the working group ended, with the exception of one student who was the only man in his group due to an assignment error.

Twelve of the respondents indicated that the intervention had a positive or very positive impact on their daily student life, while two felt it neither positively nor negatively affected their experience. Seven respondents provided additional comments, with most expressing satisfaction with the intervention. One respondent noted: "It was good to know that I wouldn't be surrounded by women all the time but could interact with other men". Another respondent suggested that it would have been even better if there were men of similar age in the working groups.

The results of the evaluation closely align with the responses from Norwegian students in the "Men in Nursing Education" study. While some male students were indifferent to such grouping, for many it was quite significant. The three students in the group interview agreed that the optimal gender distribution in nursing education would have a balanced number of men and women in working groups. One respondent noted that the genders complemented each other in his group by emphasising different aspects: the men focused on the treatment perspective in nursing, while the women were primarily concerned with the care aspect. However, he noted that this difference could also be due to their relatively young age.

The three students were also asked to reflect on how it would have been different if they had been the only man in their working group of eight, instead of being one of three in a group of eight. They said:

"The difference would be that you would feel very alone. You wouldn't have anyone on your level of thinking to discuss the subject with."

That point of view was shared by one of the other respondents, who said that:

"[...] Alone, you really stand there as an underdog, and it also depends on the group size. If the group has three people and one man, it's probably enough, but if it's eight like we were, then there should be two to three men, otherwise you would feel very alone."

The intervention requiring a minimum of three men in each working group during the first term has been permanently adopted at ØUC. Reform is committed to ongoing monitoring and evaluation of

the outcomes of this measure in collaboration with university stakeholders beyond the end of the “Share the Care” project.

Reform also recommended that the Healthcare Worker programme at the selected upper secondary school implement a similar measure of grouping male students together. To that end, Reform conducted a workshop with research input and discussions with teachers and management at the start of the term following summer 2022. Initial discussions were held on implementing the measure at the beginning of the 2023 term. However, the responsible leader of the section ultimately lacked confidence in the measure. Despite her participation in the workshop and broader discussions, she was not convinced and other members of the management and staff were unable to sway her.

Action 2: Provide students with knowledge about men in nursing education

Reform has implemented various initiatives aimed at providing students of all genders with knowledge about men in nursing education, sensitivity about minority positions and combating stereotypes. Workshops were conducted to educate students about gender dynamics and being a minority in nursing and health education.

At the university level, in autumn 2021, Reform proposed and planned a workshop for first-year students, which was held for students attending ØUC in the following autumn. However, only a small fraction of students attended due to the optional nature of the workshop. While those who participated expressed satisfaction, the low turnout prompted discussions about making attendance mandatory. Since then, Reform held a few more workshops during the project period, but despite the efforts made, attendance remained low. Reform partners have communicated to the faculty management the need to make the content of the workshop mandatory and part of the curriculum. The national curriculum in nursing already requires that “candidates have knowledge of inclusion, equality and non-discrimination, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion and belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and age, so that the candidate contributes to ensuring equal services for all groups in society”.¹³ While Reform partners suggested that a workshop on inclusivity in nursing education could be linked to those curriculum requirements, the faculty did not agree to include it as a mandatory part of the education programme. That raises the question: how is it possible to provide inclusive health services if students are not encouraged to reflect on their own gendered and ethnic positions?

In spring 2022, a workshop was provided at an upper secondary school in the region and several workshops were conducted in another region as part of a different Reform project, gathering valuable input. In October 2022, workshops were held at selected upper secondary schools for numerous students on the health and social care programme. Those sessions yielded similar input as prior workshops, emphasising the importance of ongoing education and dialogue on gender dynamics and minority positions in healthcare education.

¹³ Forskrift om nasjonal retningslinje for sykepleierutdanning fra 2019. § 7. Sykepleierprofesjonen, etikk, kommunikasjon og samhandling – Kunnskap. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2019-03-15-412>

Action 3: Obtaining input from students to improve the learning environment

Reform has undertaken initiatives to identify specific obstacles faced by male students in education, aiming to inform the implementation of targeted measures. That involved seeking input from students to enhance the learning environment.

At the university level, several processes were initiated, with the overall impression among university staff being that there is a lack of student organisation and structures to address issues related to male representation in nursing education. However, valuable input was provided by a student representative of the nurses' union during a networking meeting in June 2021. He emphasised the need to create a balanced culture that welcomes male students without reinforcing overtly masculine stereotypes.

Furthermore, in September 2021, the Reform team expressed its intention of involving students in evaluating the experiences of men in nursing education. That prompted the university to plan a research project aimed at surveying male students' experiences, reasons for choosing the given programme, sources of information and overall well-being. Unfortunately, that research project was not pursued due to a change in staff at the university.

Engagement with students during a workshop in September 2022 led to insightful discussions and input on potential measures. Concerns raised included stereotypical expectations in practice settings and the need to address gender imbalances in social activities. The discussions also brought up the following topics:

- Stereotypical expectations persist regarding female fragility and male emotional toughness among students during practical training.
- There is an expectation for students to enjoy their placement at nursing homes for the elderly, which can be unrealistic. While students should be prepared to undertake all nursing tasks, they should not feel pressured to enjoy every aspect of their training.
- Additionally, distributing men in groups to prevent loneliness warrants reconsideration.

At the upper secondary level, similar input emphasised the importance of facilitating same-sex meeting points, increasing male representation among teachers and adopting a norm-critical approach to teaching. A workshop was conducted at the selected upper secondary school in October 2022 to explore such ideas further. Additionally, mentoring programmes and gatherings for new male students were considered, with planning initiated based on student input in February 2023. Furthermore, collaboration with the nursing association's student body was explored in August 2023. It expressed a commitment to increasing male representation in the field and welcomed input from Reform, signalling a potential avenue for disseminating project results and fostering cooperation.

Action 4: Peer support

In autumn 2023, Reform partners attempted to launch a peer mentoring programme for male nursing students. The idea was for first-year students to be paired with mentors studying in their second year of the nursing programme. The mentor would be someone they could meet for coffee or reach out to

with questions, fostering a better sense of community among male nursing students. That initiative was inspired by similar programmes for women in STEM disciplines at universities.

Reform partners initially managed to recruit only three out of 30 second-year male students as mentors. Realising this was insufficient for the original vision, they decided to change the format to monthly group meetings led by the three second-year students. Reform partners introduced the monthly group meetings to all first-year nursing students and 14 male students signed up to participate.

An important takeaway resulted from presenting this initiative to the first-year students. Their lectures are split into two groups. For the first group, Reform partners presented the initiative at the end of the lecture, allowing interested students to sign up as they left. For the second group, Reform partners presented it just before a break, with students able to sign up during the break. Sign-ups were significantly higher after session one than session two. Reform partners believe that students might have felt embarrassed to sign up in front of their peers during the break when many people remained in the room, as opposed to signing up on the way out when fewer people were paying attention. That was a valuable insight for recruiting students to such initiatives in the future.

After a brief meeting with second-year students, a Reform employee suggested that the students organise the meetings throughout the year, making it a primarily student-driven initiative. The first meeting, held in September, was successful, with about ten first-year students attending and three second-year students leading the session. However, scheduling conflicts prevented any further meetings in autumn 2023. Following discussions between Reform, the university's contact person and the second-year students, it was decided to suspend meetings for the remainder of 2023 and instead plan for the following academic year (2024-2025), with more direct organisational involvement by ØUC. The ØUC management decided to continue allocating resources to 5% of a teacher's working hours being spent on recruiting and retaining male students, with one of the responsibilities being the organisation of peer-support activities.

Several changes are planned for the peer-support initiative in 2024-2025. The format will shift to a monthly meeting open to all male nursing students. Each meeting will feature a male nurse from various workplaces (hospitals, ambulances etc.) who will share their experiences. Additionally, students will have time to discuss their studies and challenges. To ensure consistent organisation, a working group will be formed, comprising one staff member and several students. That change acknowledges that students may have clinical placements that take them away from the university for weeks at a time, making it challenging for them to organise meetings independently.

Finland

Action 1: Obtaining input from students to improve the learning environment

In Finland, the main measure was obtaining input from students to improve the learning environment. That was done using online surveys for registered students (named Webropol). Two such surveys were conducted. The first one was conducted in autumn 2021, in which six males from LAB university volunteered to share their perspectives on various aspects of men's experiences in healthcare studies. Taking into account the low number of responses, it is not possible to generalise from the results of

the survey. Nevertheless, it can be used as an overview of qualitative data input. One key suggestion that arose from the survey was the implementation of active measures to facilitate male interaction during the programme, including opportunities for group work and social activities. Participants also emphasised the importance of initiating discussions at the outset of the programme to address the feelings and challenges specific to male students in healthcare fields. The survey highlighted the significant impact of feelings of loneliness and alienation on male students' motivation to pursue their studies and remain engaged in their future careers. Respondents agreed on the need for cases and study materials to be gender-neutral, ensuring inclusivity and relevance for all students. Furthermore, there was a call for greater involvement and leadership by student and nursing associations in fostering connections among male students during their studies and professional endeavours.

The second survey was conducted at LAB University of Applied Sciences and Saimaa Vocational College between February and March 2024. Eleven male students at various stages of the programmes participated. Students were asked if the overrepresentation of female teachers and nurses manifested itself in teaching or study materials. Surprisingly, the majority had not noticed any such bias and felt that teachers had a very inclusive approach. However, respondents did note a lack of male teachers, leading to fewer male role models. Despite that, teaching was considered equal with gender issues being discussed appropriately. That finding at LAB University contradicts findings from past studies, including "Men in Nursing Education" (Nordfjell & Nielsen, 2019), and might be attributed to the way in which the information was collected. While individual interviews and focus groups were conducted in previous studies, in this project, we were limited to an online questionnaire in Finland.

In addition, students answered the question about what kind of social, functional or study guidance support male students need by stating that those who feel lonely or depressed may benefit from initial social support in the academic environment. Some of the students indeed reflected on the feeling of loneliness and suggested that there should be more promotion of the support at the university.

Some students felt that there is a lack of role models, saying: "Personally, I have found male instructors in the health and social care field to be valuable role models, enhancing my sense of belonging in this field." Other students, however, felt that "it is essential to identify and reinforce the strengths of male students, just as we do for female students", leading to the conclusion that male students should not be singled out in the teaching process, as fairness and sound reasoning are essential irrespective of gender when making nursing decisions. The objective is to foster a sense of belonging without differentiation.

In addition to the two surveys, in spring 2024, Step College conducted a workshop for students pursuing a career in healthcare, including those who had initially expressed no interest in nursing. The workshop addressed topics such as career aspirations, effective study strategies and the personal attributes required for success in healthcare roles. Students were subsequently invited to attend LAB's nursing programme open day in autumn 2024, with the objective of fostering interest in pursuing a career in healthcare.

Action 2: Provide information about the challenges faced by men in nursing education

A second measure undertaken in Finland involved recording a podcast series focusing on men in nursing education. Recorded in March 2024, the series consists of three episodes and features participants from the Finnish Nursing Association and LAB University of Applied Sciences.

The podcast series covers key issues in the health and social care sector.

- The first episode discusses the gap between public perception and reality, emphasising the importance of attracting and retaining workers by highlighting career opportunities and the meaningfulness of the work.
- The second episode focuses on integrating foreign healthcare workers, noting a rise in foreign applicants and stressing the need for ethical recruitment and recognition of international qualifications.
- The third episode addresses workplace violence against healthcare professionals, advocating for legislative changes, better training and improved practices to ensure safe and attractive working conditions.

Throughout the series, participants emphasised that open dialogue, collegiality, onboarding and cooperation with clinical practice and stakeholders like educational organisations and the nursing association are crucial for healthcare to thrive. The aim of this podcast series is to highlight such factors and encourage more men to enrol in nursing education.

Link to the podcast <https://soundcloud.com/labfocus/sets/sote-alan-haasteita>

Action 3: Activate an online platform for discussion and mentoring groups

The online discussion platform is based on the measures of the "Mainstreaming Gender in Health and Social Care Training" project. The aim of the online discussion platform was to bring together individuals potentially interested in health and social care education and workplaces, as well as representatives from education and working life, to discuss the topic of "Men and Health and Social Care". The goal of those discussions was to increase the attractiveness of health and social care jobs and education programmes, thereby increasing the number of men in both contexts.

An advertising agency developed an online discussion platform for health and social care education, jobs and organisations, including a free discussion area. However, the platform encountered difficulties in attracting users, was perceived as unwieldy and necessitated costly updates by the agency. Therefore, in spring 2024, it was decided to build a simpler version of the discussion platform using the existing Discord server at LAB University of Applied Sciences. Students are accustomed to using Discord, so attracting registered users should be effortless. Students at different stages of their studies are directed to the discussion platform. The "Professional Growth" course, which runs throughout the entire curriculum, focuses heavily on topics related to building professional identity. In addition to general discussions on the platform, the goal for autumn 2024 is to organise expert talks on topics related to salaries, working conditions and recruitment.¹⁴

¹⁴ Link to the platform <https://discord.com/channels/@me>

Iceland

In Iceland, several interventions have been implemented to improve the learning environment for male nursing students by reducing feelings of alienation and loneliness. A significant step was the official establishment of the subchapter for males in nursing within the Icelandic Nursing Association in 2023. While that subchapter focuses broadly on nursing, a large part of its mission is centred on nursing education. As stated, the subchapter aims to create a centralised space for ongoing activities under the nursing association's umbrella, with an emphasis on fostering inclusivity and engagement for men in the profession.

The subchapter's objectives include:

- To be an active partner to health institutions in fostering and increasing the presence of male nurses at the institution in question.
- To be an active participant in discussions in society about the role of men in nursing and the importance of correcting gender imbalances within the nursing profession.
- To play an advisory and supportive role for men who are interested in pursuing nursing or are studying nursing.
- To be in active collaboration with the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri on the development of ways to increase the proportion of men in nursing studies and prevent them from dropping out.
- To make male nurses more visible to the general public so that there are professional role models for boys who want to pursue nursing.
- To provide a basis for discussion and support for men working in nursing.

The subchapter has already convened three times, fostering a supportive atmosphere for male nurses and including active participation from male nursing students. Additionally, a separate male committee was established through the Icelandic Nursing Association, distinct from the subchapter, to further support the aims of increasing male representation in nursing.

At the University of Akureyri, a new course was developed specifically addressing the experiences of males in nursing education. While the primary goal of that course is to familiarise students with the relationship between society and health, exploring both broad concepts and specific issues related to how social factors can either enhance well-being or contribute to illness,³⁵ it also highlights aspects related to gender. The mandatory six-credit course, taught in autumn of the second year of the four-year programme, includes content and discussions on gender issues and the role of men in nursing. Experts on men in nursing education and gender issues engage with students, aiming to reduce feelings of alienation and loneliness among male nursing students.

³⁵ Link to the course syllabus:

<https://ugla.unak.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=namskeid&id=86389020256&namskra=1>

Task 5. Activate study and career counsellors in relevant geographic areas, alongside mapping and preparation of school introduction days

This task was aimed at establishing career counsellor discussion groups in various relevant locations such as lifelong learning centres, unemployment offices, secondary schools and military bases, tailored to the specific needs and relevance in each region. The aim was to collaborate with those groups to explore strategies for attracting and influencing men to choose Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) or nursing education as a career path. The objectives were to activate those groups multiple times throughout the project period to ensure ongoing engagement and progress. In addition, the project partners strived to map and participate in school introduction days to encourage higher registration of men to nursing programmes.

Norway

While working on the "Share the Care" project, Reform was also involved in a separate initiative focusing on addressing gender imbalances in educational and career choices. Although these projects were distinct, the insights gained from our discussions with career counsellors in the Østfold region proved valuable. Through seminars and meetings, we explored how career counsellors influence students' educational decisions, with a particular focus on encouraging gender diversity in healthcare careers. Reflections and feedback from those interactions were incorporated into this chapter.

Reform conducted a meeting for leaders of career counsellor networks in the region to discuss measures aimed at raising awareness of gender imbalances in the healthcare field, with the aim of collecting feedback rather than obtaining immediate results. The participants reflected on the extent of the student counsellors' influence on students' choices and the need to avoid gender stereotypes. The primary objective of engaging with student counsellors was to emphasise the importance of presenting all possibilities to students.

Reform's inquiry about increasing the number of men in healthcare or other non-traditional fields was met with resistance, with the career counsellors emphasising that their role is to guide students in finding the right path, not to promote specific careers or increase the proportion of men in healthcare. That highlights the focus on personalised guidance, though some leaders acknowledged structural factors.

Since many male students in health and youth development programmes at the upper secondary level come from ethnic minority backgrounds, much of the discussion focused on how to recruit and retain such students. Some aspire to medical careers but see pharmacy technician as a more attainable goal with a high status in many countries.

The career counsellors mentioned that they help organise open days at which upper secondary schools present themselves and their programmes. However, it is the students themselves who decide which educational programmes they want to visit, meaning health and youth development programmes are only presented to students who actively seek out these programmes. An aspect highlighted by several participants was a form of "working week" during lower secondary school, where students work at a company for one week. Many boys who chose kindergarten during the working week later pursued health and youth development in upper secondary school. The

participants recommended more active use of the working week and the opportunity to try out different professions in practice.

When making their career choice, young people's perceptions of who they are can be central. One of the career counsellors illustrated that point with the example of the "Road and Construction Work" programme: "If you are a young woman and your perception of the profession is unkempt men with potbellies standing in a ditch, the choice will likely conflict with your identity and peer culture and the choice will be excluded. If you want to get girls to work in construction, you can't have such images." One of the career counsellors also had an interesting objection to using diverse and gender-balanced imagery in presenting the Healthcare Worker programme and other programmes and believed it would be better to reflect the reality at the school so that students knew what they were potentially getting into.

As part of the other project, workshops were conducted with students enrolled in vocational programmes that exhibited significant gender imbalances. Those workshops gathered student input on improving equitable educational choices. Two seminars were subsequently organised with career counsellors in the Østfold region, aiming to enhance the career counsellors' understanding of how gender and other social factors influence students' educational decisions. The seminars identified barriers and proposed measures for promoting non-gendered educational choices.¹⁶

The counsellors emphasised the need for better competence in guiding students, particularly through improved teaching plans and more practical opportunities that balance theory with practical experience. They also highlighted the importance of showcasing diverse role models.

Time constraints were a significant concern, with the need for more time dedicated solely to counselling, without the added burden of teaching other subjects. The influence of societal attitudes, traditions and generational perspectives was recognised as a barrier to non-traditional educational choices.

Several measures were suggested, including raising awareness of gender perspectives in educational choices at parent meetings, assessing teachers' and career advisors' knowledge of gender issues and implementing a more systemic approach to educational choices starting from early education levels. It was also recommended that the equality perspective be integrated into relevant subjects and that the status of career guidance be elevated within schools by ensuring that career counsellors have sufficient time and resources to focus exclusively on this role.¹⁷ At the end of the project, a tool was created to help career counsellors better support students in choosing non-traditional educational paths. That resource was designed to promote greater diversity in educational choices by offering practical guidance to counsellors.¹⁸

In terms of mapping and participating in school introduction days, the aim was to create positive awareness of nursing education for men in the Østfold region. One of the challenges that was brought

¹⁶ Agenda Kaupang, 2022: Evaluering av prosjekt Større mangfold – friere valg. Rapport. Oppdragsgiver Barne-, ungdoms- og familiedirektoratet. [Evaluering av prosjekt Større mangfold – friere valg. \(bufdir.no\)](https://www.bufdir.no/evaluering-av-prosjekt-storre-mangfold-friere-valg)

¹⁷ Pedersen, Amalie Mago, 2024: *Men and Likestilling. How an Organisation Works for Men's Perspectives to be a Part of the Gender Equality Debates in Norway*. Master Thesis. Department of Social Anthropology University of Oslo.

¹⁸ The resources developed in the project ([in Norwegian](#)) [Greater Diversity – Freer Choices](#)

up in all countries is that many open days at the school were cancelled due to the pandemic. Lack of management involvement and weak organisation hindered change.

Iceland

In Iceland, project members participated in a relatively large initiative aimed at exposing students to a broad range of career possibilities. This project involved all pupils in year ten (aged approximately 15) in *Aku* and *Rey*, introducing them to nursing, while a similar approach was taken with girls regarding STEM careers. However, securing funding has been challenging. Organising a full day for boys in year ten is costly, particularly due to the high expense of buses. Furthermore, project members have engaged in discussions with study counsellors to encourage more gender-balanced suggestions when consulting with potential students.

Finland

In Finland, several interventions occurred throughout the project. Initially, two meetings were held in lifelong learning centres in Lappeenranta, where study counsellors brought secondary level classes and the paramedic programme was presented. During that session, male students presented the programme and the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) programme was also discussed. Additionally, an elderly care unit had a stand at the event, providing information about career options in the field. Students had the opportunity to interact with professionals and ask questions. Following the initial meeting, additional sessions were organised during November and December. The overall impression was that all materials related to healthcare were welcomed and well-received. Nevertheless, there was a sense that cooperation between teachers and students could be more seamless. It is important to explore the most effective methods for student counsellors to offer students the option of pursuing healthcare careers.

The LAB team of students visits various schools to discuss the available programmes. LAB uses paid marketing methods aligned with policies and strategies developed with management units, including a range of media options such as videos, audio, social media and other channels. In spring 2024, LAB public health nurse students promoted their programme in a shopping centre. The event attracted many people from various age groups. People had an opportunity to discuss public health programmes, to have their blood pressure measured, obtain nutritional information etc. The event was held at a time close to the national joint application period to raise awareness of the nursing education programme. A blog post about the event was published on the publication platform of the LAB University of Applied Sciences.¹⁹

Moreover, efforts were made to introduce career possibilities to both unemployed individuals and army personnel. Unemployed people were mainly met at the lifelong learning centres. Presentations were conducted in garrisons to engage those serving in the army and spark their interest in healthcare careers. Similarly, outreach was conducted to unemployed individuals who could potentially apply for nursing education programmes. The general impression is that applicants visiting the centre are more focused on seeking consultation rather than actively applying for the programme.

¹⁹ Link: <https://blogit.lab.fi/labfocus/terveydenhoitajan-tyo-edellyttaa-vahvaa-asiantuntijuutta/>

Overall, the partner in Finland attended and gave presentations at many open days, preparation days, learning centres and unemployment centres with the aim of raising awareness that nursing and health education programmes are possible options for all genders.

Task 6. Organise a pan-Nordic reference group to gather experiences of a range of measures in the Nordic Region

The aim of this task was to gather information and create collaboration across the Nordic Region in relation to the challenges and measures that are implemented in each country. An online meeting was held in January 2022, during which participants from all the Nordic Region discussed the issue and shared their knowledge.

In total, 15 researchers and practitioners participated in the meeting. The agenda included presentation of several projects in the Nordic Region that aim to reduce segregation in the health and care sectors specifically.

The discussion focused on two main questions, namely: **(1)** What is the most interesting question for you/your organisation regarding gender imbalance in the health sector and why?

Participants highlighted several key points regarding gender imbalance in the health sector. One participant emphasised the importance of using role models to attract men to healthcare worker roles, particularly those seeking career changes. Another noted the impact of unemployment on men entering health-related jobs and the need for sustained initiatives to engage men in the field. A change in curriculum and job roles were discussed as affecting male enrolment, with the suggestion that more male-oriented narratives and tasks could attract men. There was an effort to recruit men through male-focused marketing, which was challenging due to the female-overrepresented environment. Strengthening pride and collaboration among male healthcare workers was also mentioned. The importance of understanding why some men stay in healthcare was highlighted, along with the suggestion that the unattractive nature of the current curriculum might deter men; here participants advocated for specialised nursing education that appeals to male students. Criticism of the study programme and curriculum centred on its lack of appeal and relevance to the diverse roles nurses perform in practice. It was argued that the curriculum does not adequately reflect the varied positions within the nursing profession; consequently, there is a need to revise the curriculum and develop specialised nursing education programmes, particularly for male nurses, to better align with the expanding range of tasks and responsibilities in healthcare. It was suggested that this approach could help healthcare professionals receive education tailored to their specific roles. Overall, the discussion underscored the need for targeted recruitment, curriculum changes and supportive environments to address gender imbalance in the health sector.

(2) What are measures or strategies that address the issue of gender imbalance in the health sector in your region/country? Do they work? Why do you think they work/do not work?

Participants discussed various measures and strategies to address gender imbalance in the health sector, noting mixed results and challenges. One approach is to strengthen pride and engagement among male health workers by focusing on the importance of their roles and creating supportive environments through workshops. Another strategy involves leveraging men's lived experiences in

caregiving roles to attract them to professional care work. Tailoring educational content to include activities appealing to men, such as outdoor nursing, was highlighted as a way to increase male enrolment.

The curriculum and structure of nursing education were identified as important factors which prevent men from enrolling in nursing education. Suggestions were put forward to make the education more male-oriented and to reflect on the implicit gender messages conveyed. Example of more male-oriented training including "outdoor" nursing, surgical nursing. The need for male role models and addressing attitudes of teachers towards male students was emphasised. Recruitment materials and marketing campaigns targeting men have shown some success, but retention remains a challenge due to the female-overrepresented environment and job roles.

Participants also pointed out that societal and structural factors, such as unemployment and stereotypes, influence men's participation in the health sector. There was consensus that comprehensive approaches, including curriculum changes, supportive environments and targeted recruitment strategies, are necessary to address the gender imbalance effectively. Additionally, there is a need to understand the motivations and success factors for men who stay in the healthcare sector in order to develop better retention strategies.

Concluding Summary

The "Share the Care" project highlights key challenges in addressing gender imbalances in nursing education across Finland, Iceland and Norway. Through a series of tailored interventions, the project explored ways to enhance male participation and retention in nursing programmes, focusing on improving learning environments, refining recruitment materials and promoting diversity. Despite encountering systemic challenges such as entrenched gender norms, the project successfully raised awareness among educational institutions, introduced measures to foster inclusivity and initiated changes in teaching materials and outreach efforts. While the project made significant strides in terms of gender representation, ongoing efforts and institutional commitment will be required to sustain and expand those changes, thereby ensuring that nursing education becomes a more gender-balanced and inclusive field.

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