

# Equality and diversity in the Norwegian higher education institutes

Case study for KOTAMO-project

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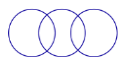
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# 1. Introduction

This section introduces the reader to structure of the higher education system in Norway as well as provides a brief introduction to gender equality and diversity in higher education institutes (HEI) in Norway.

## 1.1 The HEI structure in Norway

There are a total of 33 accredited higher education institutions in Norway. There are 10 universities, 9 specialised university institutions and 14 university colleges. In addition, there are 18 non-accredited university colleges offering approved first-degree programmes (Bachelor). Overall, responsibility for accreditation rests with the Ministry of Education and Research and is regulated in the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges and in the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT's regulations, among others.<sup>1</sup>

There are 9 universities, 8 university colleges, and 5 scientific colleges owned by the state in Norway. Norway has also many private higher education institutions that receive public funding. Apart from some private university colleges, all higher education institutions are state-run.<sup>2</sup>

All higher education learning institutions, and particularly the universities, are responsible for conducting basic research as well as researcher training, primarily by means of graduate-level studies and doctoral degree programmes. The main differences between the types of higher education institutions are related to their self-accreditation rights. Universities can offer study programmes without an external accreditation, while university colleges must apply for external accreditation for their study programmes.<sup>3</sup>

The universities and most university colleges are run by the Norwegian state and studying at these institutions is free of charge. Students at private institutions pay tuition fees, but many of the institutions also receive financial support from the state.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Gender equality in higher education in Norway

Women are generally under-represented in top academic positions at research institutes, especially at technical-industrial institutes. In 2020, the share of women among full professors was 33,5%. Among PhD-candidates there were 54% women in 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Nokut [website](#) (n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Study in Norway [website](#) (n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> Nokut website (n.d.).

There also are significant differences in the gender balance between different subject areas and institutes and especially technology-oriented programs and higher education institutes have a lower proportion of women in the research staff compared with other institutes.<sup>5</sup>

Gender equality in academia has been on the agenda of Norwegian stakeholders since the late 1970s. In 1975, National Secretariat for Women's studies was established by the research Council NAV with the aim of promoting research on women and women in research. In 1998, KILDEN – an information and documentation centre for gender research was established. In 2004, KIF Committee (discussed with more detail below) was established by the Ministry of Education.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.3 Diversity in higher education in Norway

The discussion regarding diversity in the HEI is relatively new in Norway. The latest statistics are from 2018<sup>7</sup>

- In 2018, 29% of the researchers and academic staff at Norwegian universities, university colleges, health trusts and research institutes had an immigrant background.
- Most of the immigrant researchers, about 80%, are internationally mobile researchers, who come to Norway with a higher education degree, and several also with a PhD degree.
- Descendants of immigrants accounted for 0.5% of researchers in 2018, compared with 0.4% in 2007. The highest share of immigrants and descendants of immigrants were among postdocs in the higher education sector (59%), postdocs in the institute sector and research fellows in the higher education sector (42%).
- Medical and health sciences, technology and engineering and natural sciences had the highest number of immigrants and descendants of immigrants among their researchers and academic staff in 2018.
- Women accounted for 44% of the researchers with an immigrant or descendent of immigrant background in 2018.

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<sup>5</sup> Kifinfo (n.d.)” [Statistics on gender balance and diversity](#)”

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Senior Advisers at Kif (2021).

<sup>7</sup> Kifinfo (n.d.)” Statistics on gender balance and diversity”

- Nearly half of the researchers in temporary positions have an immigrant background (48%).
- In 2018, descendants of immigrants accounted for 1.2% both of all employees in HEIs.

## 2. Cases

This section introduces two Norwegian measures: KIF Committee and BALANSE Programme.

### 2.1 Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research

**Background:** The Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research (hereinafter KIF Committee) was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2004. Since then, subsequent Committees have been appointed five times.

Originally the purpose was to promote equality between women and men in the university and higher education sector. The Committee focused on increasing the number of women in top level positions among the science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) disciplines at universities.<sup>8</sup> When the committee was appointed for the fourth time in 2014, promotion of diversity became part of its mandate.<sup>9</sup>

The latest mandate period ended in December 2021.<sup>10</sup> This section focuses on this latest mandate period (2018-2021). However, new Committee has been appointed for 2022-2025.<sup>11</sup>

**Objective:** The Committee's key function is to support HEIs and make recommendations on measures that contribute to mainstreaming gender equality and diversity efforts at universities, colleges and research institutes. The focus areas (2018-2021) were promotion of gender balance in senior-level positions, promotion of ethnic diversity in research, advancing gender and diversity perspectives in research as well as combatting sexual harassment.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the work also includes diversity perspectives, including

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Kif representatives (2021).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Agenda Kaupang (2021). *Evaluering av Komité for kjønnsbalanse og mangfold i forskning (Kif)*.

<sup>11</sup> Kifinfo (2022) Mandat for Komité for kjønnsbalanse og mangfold i forskning (Kif), <https://kifinfo.no/nb/content/komiteens-mandat>,

<sup>12</sup> Kif Committee Strategy 2018-2021, [https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/strategi\\_2018-2021\\_eng\\_ferdig.pdf](https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/strategi_2018-2021_eng_ferdig.pdf).

gender perspectives in research.<sup>13</sup> Actors and institutions in the university and higher education sector and at research institutes, ministries and the Norwegian Research Council can seek assistance and advice from the Committee.<sup>14</sup>

**Mandate:** The Ministry of Education and Research sets Kif's mandate for a period of three years. The mandate is general and gives guidance for the composition of the committee and specifies the overall purpose, but beyond that the committee itself has great freedom to prioritise key tasks and manage and implement its own activities.<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Education and Research also provides funding for the Committee's activities.<sup>16</sup>

**Budget:** the annual budget of the Committee is around NOK 5 million (EUR 0,5 million). Financing comes from the Ministry of Education and Research.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.1.1 Target Group

**Target group:** The primary target group of this measure are leaders of the research sector, such as rectorates and managers of the Norwegian higher education institutes. The KIF Committee also works towards the Research Council in Norway, as well as the universities and research institutes.<sup>18</sup> Alongside these direct target groups, the individual researchers and other members of the staff of the Norwegian higher education institutes can be seen as the indirect target group of the KIF Committee.

### 2.1.2 Actors involved

**Composition of the Committee:** The committee is appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research every four years. The committee consists of 11-13 members that represent the higher education sector, research institute, national student organizations as well as the Research Council of Norway.<sup>19</sup>

**Permanent staff:** Two permanent staff members are employed and based at the Norwegian Council of Universities and Higher Education (UHR). The secretariat prepares the meetings of the Committee together with the head of the Committee, prepares the background papers for the meetings, follows up the work and operation of

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Kif representatives (2021).

<sup>14</sup> Agenda Kaupang (2021). *Evaluering av Komité for kjønnsbalanse og mangfold i forskning (Kif)*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Kifinfo.no (n.d) Mandate for the Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research (KIF), <https://kifinfo.no/en/content/mandate-committee-gender-balance-and-diversity-research-kif>.

<sup>17</sup> Kif (2021) Årsrapport 2020, [https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/arsrapport\\_2020\\_kif-komiteen.pdf](https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/arsrapport_2020_kif-komiteen.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Kif representatives (2021).

<sup>19</sup> Kifinfo.no (n.d) Mandate for the Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research (KIF), <https://kifinfo.no/en/content/mandate-committee-gender-balance-and-diversity-research-kif>.

the Committee between and arranges and carries out many of the main tasks of the Committee.<sup>20</sup>

**Partners:** The Committee cooperates with higher education and research institutes both in Norway and internationally. It also interacts with ministries, funding organisations, EU instruments, similar organisations in other countries as well as trade unions and employers' organisations

### 2.1.3 Measures included

According to an evaluation carried out in 2021, Kif's performance targets/measures are the following:<sup>21</sup>

**Advice/guidance:** The Kif Committee aims to be a professional resource for work on gender balance and ethnic diversity in HEI, research institutions. Kif acts as an advisory body for the ongoing work within educational and research institutions. The Secretariat is contacted by various institutions, and individual researchers. It is highlighted in the annual report for 2020 that areas the secretariat typically advises on include the development of action plans for diversity, proposals for seminar programmes, proposals for initiators, input for various actions, etc. Kif is also contacted by various public bodies to provide input on ongoing policy processes in the field of competence, and consultation opinions are written by Kif where relevant.

**Conferences and seminars:** The Kif committee organizes seminars on gender balance and ethnic diversity in higher education and research. During the pandemic, they have shifted to organising ICT-based webinars. The webinars carried out during 2020 were well attended and attracted a wider geographical participation than they usually do in physical sessions.

**Communication:** Kif's website ([Kifinfo](#)) which is operated by the national information organisation Kilden kjønnsforskning (Kilden gender research) is a central part of Kif's communication. Kifinfo functions as a combination of an informational website about the Committee, and as a site that conveys current news, information and research within Kif's field of interest. The goal is for Kif to become more visible in the social debate in its fields, and for Kifinfo to have an increase in the number of users and be used as a professional resource by more people in the sector.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with the Kif representatives.

<sup>21</sup> Agenda Kaupang (2021). Evaluering av Komité for kjønnsbalanse og mangfold i Forskning, [https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/rapport\\_evaluering\\_av\\_kif\\_0.pdf](https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/rapport_evaluering_av_kif_0.pdf).



**Institutional visits and follow-up:** The Kif Committee does regular follow-ups at universities and research institutes by meeting the management of different institutions to discuss their work with gender balance and diversity. In addition, the Committee has annual meetings with the Norwegian Research Council and the Ministry of Education and Research. These are activities that are given high priority by the Committee. The institutional visits are often carried out in conjunction with the Committee meetings, and the Committee feels that they are well received and that the institutions they visit are positive about the Committee's work and well prepared for the visit. The Secretariat also has some follow-up with the institutions that have received a visit, either with advice and input for further work and activities or for example the development of action plans for diversity or other things. It is important to stress the fact that the Kif Committee is an advisor for institutions but is not the Ministry's supervisory authority.<sup>22</sup>

**Management training:** the Kif Committee aims at influencing already established leadership development programmes in the sector to include themes such as gender, diversity, and sexual harassment. The aim of the Committee in this area has been to be in dialogue with relevant leadership development programmes and to develop material for these, as well as for internal leadership training at the institutions. The evaluation shows that the area appears as a somewhat lower priority, than the other activity areas identified in the strategy.<sup>23</sup>

**Knowledge development:** Kif initiates and disseminates research and knowledge development in the field of gender balance and diversity in research. A special focus is on research in areas with significant gaps, sexual harassment, and career gaps in academia for descendants of immigrants. The evaluation shows that knowledge development is an area where Kif prioritises activities. A wide range of activities and initiatives are being promoted in this area. Kif combines the commissioning and production of reports on its own initiative and also tries through its channels to focus on areas where it believes more, and better research is needed.<sup>24</sup>

**Political influence:** The Committee monitors drafting of laws and regulations and assesses how these impact on gender balance and diversity. According to their website, Kif has been consulted 18 times by departments during 2018-2021 period. The input varies from separate consultation statements to other forms of input on concrete activities or other policy development.

**Committee meetings:** Committee meetings are the central activity that brings together the members of the Committee. These meetings are held at various academic institutions

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Kif representatives (2021).

<sup>23</sup> Agenda Kaupang (2021). Evaluering av Komité for kjønnsbalanse og mangfold i Forskning, [https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/rapport\\_evaluering\\_av\\_kif\\_0.pdf](https://kifinfo.no/sites/default/files/rapport_evaluering_av_kif_0.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

throughout the country and include a meeting with the management of the institutions. During the meetings the Committee discusses its own operations and activities, issues that need to be raised with the sector and political leadership to get gender balance and diversity on the agenda. The committee meetings are also competence-building for the committee. Between 2018 and 2020 the committee has held five meetings.

**International cooperation:** The Kif Committee seeks to participate in Nordic and European networks within gender balance and diversity issues that will strengthen the national work and implement new measures nationally. According to the interviewees, Kif has become a significant player in the EU cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1.4 Results and impact

**Results:** Agenda Kaupang, a Norwegian consultancy company, evaluated Kif in 2021.<sup>26</sup> According to the evaluation, the percentage of women in top level positions have increased by almost 1% per year. Although this cannot be directly correlated to the work Kif has done, the representatives considers their work to be an important contributor to the increasing numbers. Spreading knowledge through networking and providing inter-sector knowledge has increased visibility of gender equality and diversity in the Norwegian HEIs. This in turn has led to new measures. There is for instance a significant research program focusing on gender balance, and research funding has been earmarked to promote gender balance. According to representatives from Kif's<sup>27</sup>, this would not have happened without the work of Kif.

### 2.1.5 Lessons learned

**Success factors:** According to the representatives from Kif, the fact that Kif is appointed by the Ministry gives a very clear signal to the research sector that gender balance and diversity is important.<sup>28</sup>

Another success factor is that, even though the committee is appointed by the Ministry, it works independently. The committee has a long-term perspective and has been able to work systematically on these issues since 2004. Kif works knowledge-based and takes initiatives based on what is being discussed for the moment in the research sector. Another important thing is that the committee has a dual approach – it is both a push factor/driving force and a partner/helper in the sense that the committee puts up

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Kif representatives (2021).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

regulations/requirements but at the same time helps and gives guidance on how the institutions can strengthen their work on gender equality and diversity.<sup>29</sup>

**Challenges:** Ethnic diversity among researchers is a question that has been challenging for Kif to work with. The core challenge is definition of diversity in general and specifically definition of ethnic minorities in academia. For many higher education institutes, it is difficult to find balance of legal requirements for inclusion of ethnic minorities (such as migrants from non-academic homes) in Norway versus institutions' prioritization of internationalization. Furthermore, diversity is most often an additional task for employees with responsibility for gender equality which can lead to diversity questions ending up lower on the agenda if compared to gender equality.<sup>30</sup>

Although Norway has taken steps forward, the Committee still considers gender balance and diversity too often being “a footnote” in research policies, instead of being an integral part of the policies. Even though public bodies have declarations on the integration of equality and inclusion, such considerations are often neglected during ongoing research policy debates and processes<sup>31</sup>.

**Next steps:** Kif has until the end of 2021 had its primary focus on research positions, from doctorate to professor level. However, the student level is vital for equal recruitment (gender balance in STEM, economics, education, nursing). The student level is also important because students outside of Europe need particular attention since few get recruited to doctoral and postdoctoral programs. Kif's new mandate (2022-2025) includes the whole career “ladder” and the members include young researchers<sup>32</sup>. With the new mandate the Ministry will appoint both a leader and a deputy from the university/college and the institute sector.<sup>33</sup>

The new mandate is more focused on careers, less on the content of research. Kif found that the previous mandate was a little too wide, and the Committee's powers and role are less suited to influencing gender and diversity in research than measures to improve equality and diversity among researchers. The new mandate also explicitly includes harassment - this was an area that has been central in 2018-2021, but not mentioned in the mandate.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2 BALANSE

**Background:** The Programme on Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management (in Norwegian ‘Kjønnsbalanse i toppstillinger og forskningsledelse’) (hereinafter BALANSE) is a policy-oriented programme initiated by the Research Council of Norway in 2012. It finances projects that aim to improve gender equality in Norwegian research and functions as a knowledge-sharing and learning platform. The program of BALANSE period is ten years (2012-2022).

**Objective:** The aim of the programme is to promote gender equality in Norwegian research through increasing the number of women in professorships and academic leadership positions.

The programme seeks to improve gender balance in Norwegian research by facilitating the efforts of research institutions to promote gender equality in research and research management and supporting structural and cultural change at these institutions. The programme seeks to increase awareness of research managers in recognising and recruiting women researchers and contributes to development of active leadership strategies.

**Budget:** The program is funded by the Ministry of Education and Research. The estimated budget is NOK 158 million (around EUR 16 million).<sup>35</sup>

### 2.2.1 Target group

The target groups are universities and research institutions, and the indirect target group is women at senior positions and at a professorial level.<sup>36</sup>

### 2.2.2 Actors involved

BALANSE is a national programme funded by annual allocations from the Ministry of Education and Research.

The overall responsibility for the programme lies with the Division for Society and Health of the Research Council of Norway.

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<sup>35</sup> Forskningsrådet (2017) Work programme 2017-2022: Programme on Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management (BALANSE), <https://www.forskingsradet.no/siteassets/sok-om-finansiering/programplaner/balanse-work-programme.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with representant from the Research Council of Norway (2022).

The Division for Society and Health also appoints the steering committee. The committee consists mainly of representatives of higher education institutes and is responsible for making sure that the programme meets its goals and objectives.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the steering committee, BALANSE has administrative personnel.

### 2.2.3 Measures included

**BALANSE funding:** BALANSE funding can be used for Norwegian research institutions' projects that seek to improve gender balance in research (e.g. facilitation of career development). Only projects that have their basis in the institutions own internal strategies can receive funding.<sup>38</sup>

The BALANSE programme does not offer standardised measures, instead each individual institution is asked to address its problems regarding gender equality and suggest measures to meet the challenges when the institutions seek funding.<sup>39</sup>

**National learning:** BALANSE is also a learning arena that targets project participants and leaders in the research sector. The main activities include knowledge-sharing meetings, awareness raising, networking and information sharing.

### 2.2.4 Results and impact

The programme is currently under evaluation as its program period is coming close to its end. It is thus difficult to say what kind of impact the programme has had on gender equality in Norwegian research. However, it can be argued that the programme has contributed to increased visibility of gender equality and the remaining challenges in Norwegian Research.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.2.5 Lessons learned

**Success factors:** According to the representative<sup>41</sup> the BALANSE programme has been successful because it does not point fingers and decide how research institutions should deal with their problems and which measures they should use to improve gender balance. Instead, the institutions themselves address the challenges they face and decides which

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<sup>37</sup> The Research Council of Norway (n.d.) Programme on Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management, <https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/apply-for-funding/funding-from-the-research-council/balanse/>.

<sup>38</sup> Descriptions of projects that have received funding are available at: <https://prosjektbanken.forskningsradet.no/project/FORISS/321069?Kilde=FORISS&distribution=Ar&chart=bar&calcType=funding&Sprak=no&sortBy=date&sortOrder=desc&resultCount=30&offset=0&ProgAkt.3=BALANSE-Kj%C3%B8nnsbalanse+i+toppstillinger+og+forskningsledelse>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with representative, BALANSE (2022)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

measures that are suited best for the institution. The process is thus more bottom-up than top-down. However, identification of challenges and measures is done through an active dialogue with the BALANSE programme.

**Challenges:** According to the representative<sup>42</sup>, the initial problem was that there were so many institutions applying for grants but there was not enough money so many were left without grants. Later, the problem was reversed: few institutions applied for funding but there was plenty of money.

It is important that as many as possible would have access to the BALANSE grant so that as many institutions as possible can work on gender equality issues. But it also means that the amount of money/support awarded per programme cannot be very large, which is problematic if large scale (and thus potentially more impactful) programs need to be excluded.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

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## Interviews

Interview with two Representatives, the Kif Committee, 16 December 2021.

Interview with Representative for the BALANSE Programme, 6 January 2022.





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