# Who Is Involved? Gender Representation in Northern European Climate Institutions

Wilma Henning, Viena Lahtinen, Gunnhildur Lily Magnusdottir, Vilija Šatienė & Nína M. Saviolidis

**10/2025**

**Summary**

- This brief examines the gender representation of civil servants in Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Finnish and Lithuanian climate policy institutions. This brief is a part of the research project; *Gendered norms and practices in Nordic and Baltic Climate Policy Institutions: Implications for the Climate Transition* (see further information below).
- The results show that the key climate institutions are either gender-balanced or over-represented by women, both at the employee and leadership levels. This is interesting since globally, the energy and transport sectors are male-dominated.
- With numeral mapping as a basis, the research project will continue by conducting interviews with civil servants to better understand how gender is understood and implemented in climate policy institutions.

# Civil Servants: Institutional Gatekeepers?

This research brief explores the gender representation in key climate policy institutions in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Lithuania. The data consists of the gender composition of civil servants employed within ministries and governmental agencies responsible for climate transition.

Civil servants constitute a relevant focus for the research project as they occupy a central role in climate policy-making, and their expertise grants them epistemic authority. They act as institutional gatekeepers by translating political visions into concrete policies. This also means that their understanding and knowledge of the gendered differences and effects of climate change shape national policies. In this context, it is necessary to ask: who is involved in policy-making, at which levels and whose voices are being heard?

The statistics, which form the figures presented at the end of the brief (p. 5), were gathered from January to April 2025[1] from governmental ministries and agencies in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Lithuania (see Appendix 1 for a full list of the institutions). The data was collected either online, via inquiry of the institutions or from a governmental data centre. It includes both employee and leadership positions of civil servants who work on climate transition.[2]

The data indicates that the climate institutions in question are, in general, either gender-balanced or over-represented by female experts. This is interesting given the global underrepresentation of women in energy and transport institutions and sectors.

***Descriptive vs substantive representation – Critical mass vs critical acts?***

Descriptive gender representation refers to counting female and male bodies within institutions to reveal gender imbalances, with the belief that a 'critical mass' of women may influence policy change (see Kanter, 1977). Substantive representation, however, examines whether the inclusion of more women leads to meaningful actions, 'critical acts'. This concept challenges the notion that simply "adding women and stirring" guarantees more gender-sensitive policies without addressing structural issues (Dahlerup, 2006; Magnusdottir & Kronsell, 2015).

[1] As the ministries and agencies in Iceland were restructured during the data collection, some additions to the data were made in October 2025.

[2] Since the data was collected in different ways, the scope of employees who are included varies. When emailing the institutions, we specifically asked them to include the employees working on the climate transition. This allowed the agencies to decide who to include in the data based on a broad definition of "working with the climate transition". When searching websites, it wasn't always possible to make that distinction, leading to a broader scope.

# Key Climate Institutions Are Over-represented by Female Experts

When breaking down the data on gender representation reveals some country-specific differences emerge, especially when taking a closer look at the employee level versus leadership positions.

As Figure 1 shows, Swedish climate institutions are over-represented by women both at the employee and leadership level. The only exception was found in the Swedish Energy Agency (SEA), where men hold 55% of the leadership positions. Compared to Sweden, the Danish climate institutions are more gender-balanced, but there is still an over-representation of women in employee positions across most of the Danish institutions (see Figure 2). This gender balance is also reflected in leadership roles, although men hold a slight majority of the leadership positions in all but one institution (DMT). Norwegian climate institutions follow the same pattern with a strong over-representation of women in both employee and leadership positions (Figure 3).

The Icelandic statistics in Figure 4 indicate that the relevant ministries are mostly gender equal (usually 40% men – 60% women ratio), apart from the Icelandic Road Transport Agency (IRCA), where men form the clear majority (76%). This institution is also the only one that is male-dominated at the leadership level.

Figure 5 displays that the key climate institutions in Finland either have gender-balanced workforces or a higher representation of women at the employee level. However, at the leadership level, three out of seven Finnish institutions are strongly male-dominated (Syke, FED and FEA). Out of the remaining four institutions, two are rather gender-balanced with a ratio of approximately 55% men – 45% women (FTCA and FTIA), whereas the remaining two are strongly female-dominated (FCPED and FNSD). The results seem to be similar at both levels, meaning that the gender distribution of the employee level follows onto the leadership positions.

In terms of the total number of employees, nearly all Lithuanian climate institutions are over-represented by women, with only the Lithuanian Transport Safety Administration (LTSA) being male-dominated (see Figure 6). When examining the gender distribution of leadership positions, the numbers are more evenly distributed.

# Who Is Engaged in Climate Policy and Why?

The initial results demonstrate that at the employee level, women are equally represented or over-represented in Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Finnish and Lithuanian climate policy institutions. The pattern is less consistent at the leadership level, but even there, many of the explored institutions are gender-balanced or over-represented by female experts working on climate transition.

Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions from the data, it is interesting that many of the Nordic and Baltic climate policy institutions are female-dominated, whereas these policy areas are globally male-dominated. A partial explanation might be that women are

the majority of the workforce in the public sector in the Nordic welfare states (UNDP, 2021; Haavio-Mannila et al., 1992).

This over-representation also raises questions about who is engaged in climate policy and whether an increase in female civil servants within climate institutions will lead to more gender-aware climate policy. Previous research on Scandinavian climate authorities does not indicate that a numeral increase of female civil servants, thus a "critical mass," will automatically impact male-dominated climate institutions, i.e. manifest in more gender-sensitive climate policy (Magnusdottir and Kronsell, 2025; 2015; 2016). Alternatively, it is necessary to explore substantive representation further and examine the types of structures that enable or restrain actual changes. Moreover, this over-representation of female civil servants possibly indicates that the interest in working with climate policy is gendered.

Historically, environmental politics have been connected to feminist movements and were treated as "soft politics," at least in comparison to policy areas such as economy and security. Climate change was however originally framed as a natural science problem best approached with techno-economic solutions and expertise grounded in male-dominated or gender-blind sectors, such as transport and energy (Kronsell et al., 2021; Singleton & Magnusdottir, 2025). Arguably, the over-representation of female civil servants in techno-masculine sectors, such as energy and transport, opens an avenue to explore how these two tendencies interact.

# Future Steps of the Study – What Do We Know, What Lies in Store

It is important to note that numeral mapping is limited in presenting the substance and reality of climate policy; as was already argued, it is necessary to further explore substantive representation. Therefore, mapping serves as a background on which we build broader research on how gender and gender equality are understood and implemented in Nordic and Baltic climate policy-making.

To deepen our understanding of representation in climate institutions, we have also gathered data on the educational background of civil servants in climate institutions. This is of interest as the educational background of civil servants may affect institutional norms and practices as well as knowledge production, e.g. by reproducing existing techno-economic norms in climate policy-making (Magnusdottir & Kronsell, 2021; Singleton & Magnusdottir, 2025; Allwood & Kronsell, 2025). However, the educational data revealed that there was surprisingly little gender segregation in educational backgrounds, except in the case of Finland (Henning et al., 2025).

We have also systematically analysed national climate policy documents to seek answers to how gender is understood, what type of knowledge is privileged, and how intersecting differences are taken into consideration. This has helped us understand how climate institutions perceive and consider gender aspects. The results will be published in forthcoming articles. During 2025-2026, we will strengthen this mapping base with thematic semi-structured interviews with civil servants. The interviews will allow us to further explore how civil servants understand and practice gender equality in their everyday work, as well as identifying possible institutional obstacles, in the form of practices and norms.

# Figures

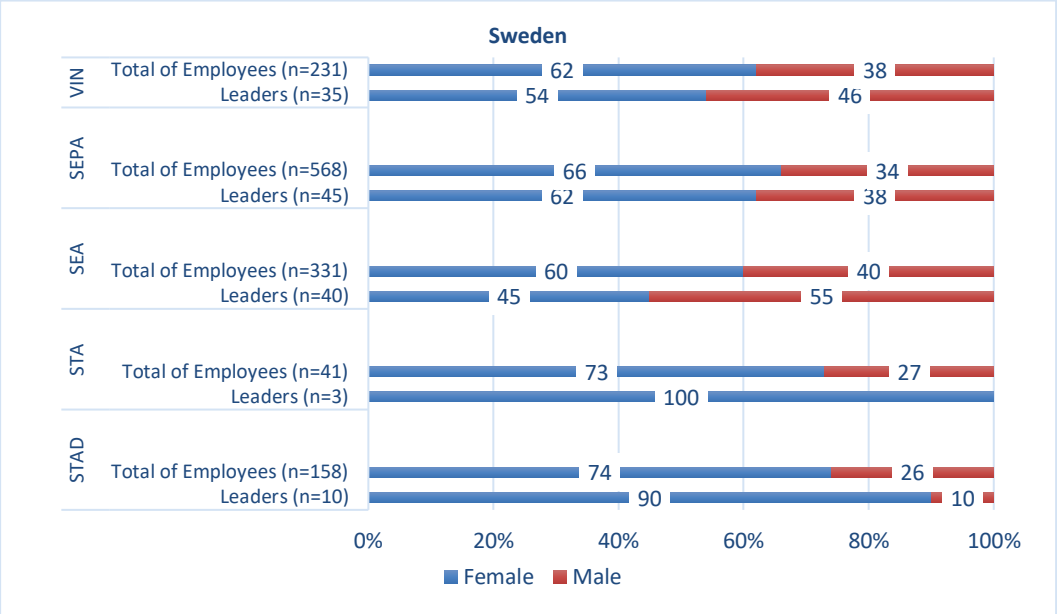


**Figure 1.** Gender representation in Swedish climate institutions, %

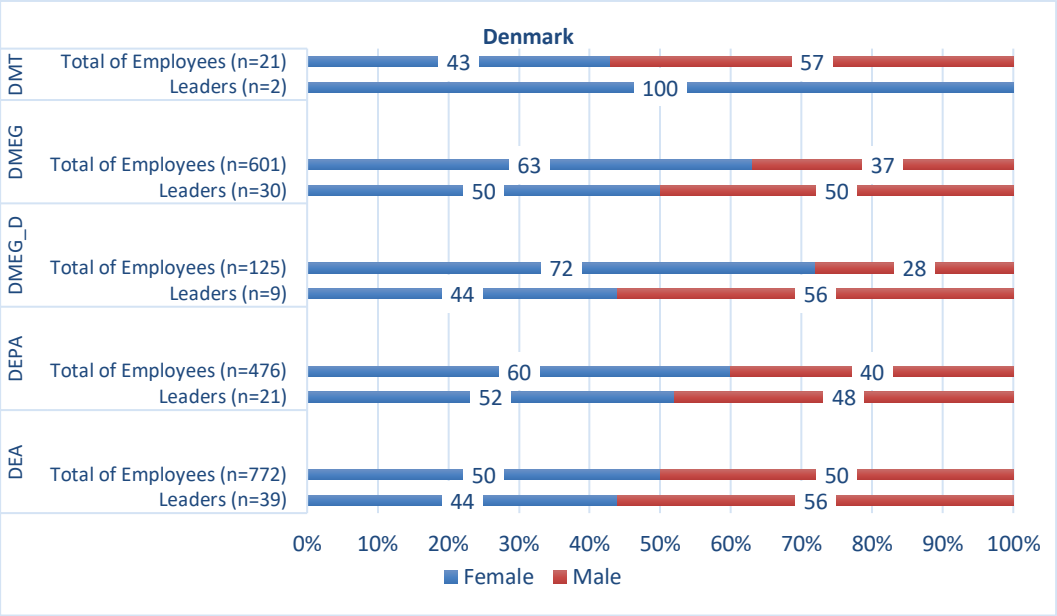


**Figure 2.** Gender representation in Danish climate institutions, %

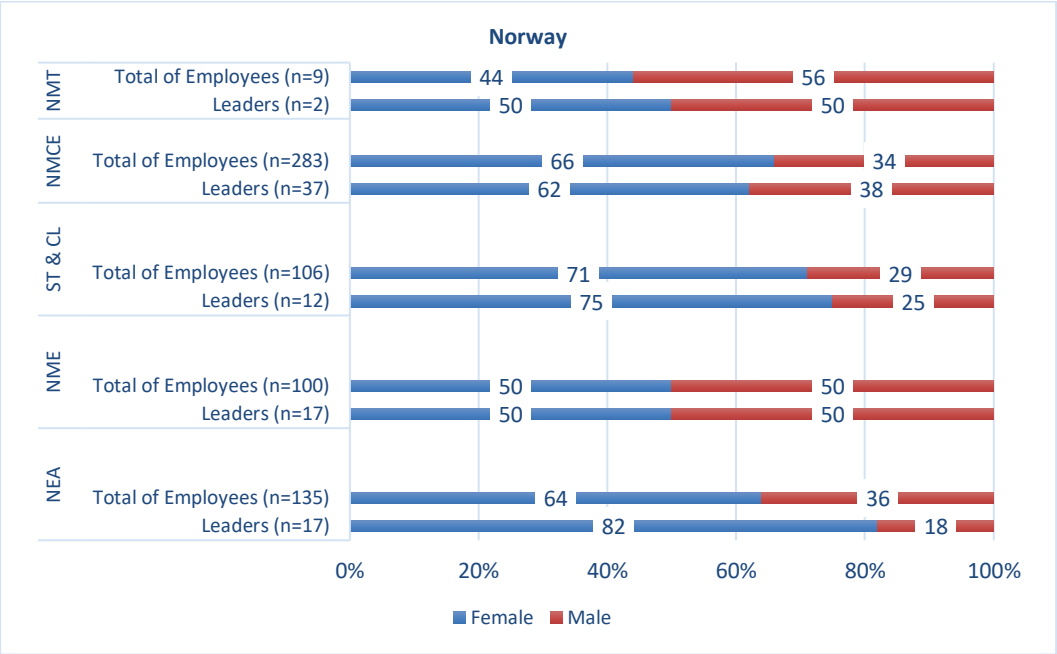


**Figure 3.** Gender representation in Norwegian climate institutions[3], %

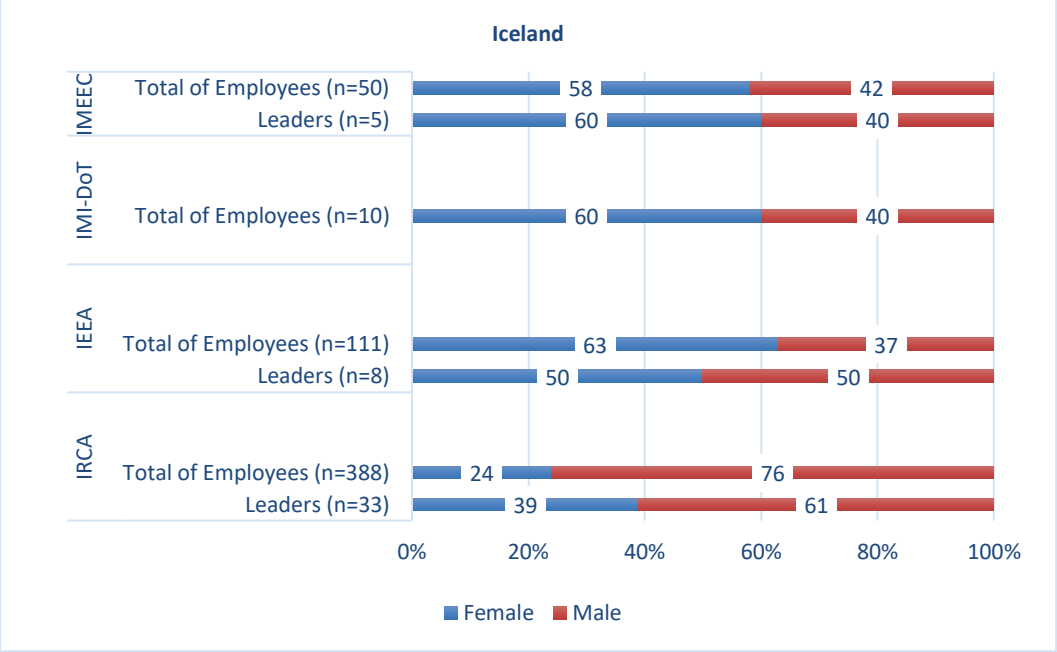


**Figure 4.** Gender representation in Icelandic climate institutions[4], %

[3] Only the Section of Environmental Affairs (Miljøsektionen) is included in the NMT data.
[4] In the case of IMI-DoT it has one male in leadership position.

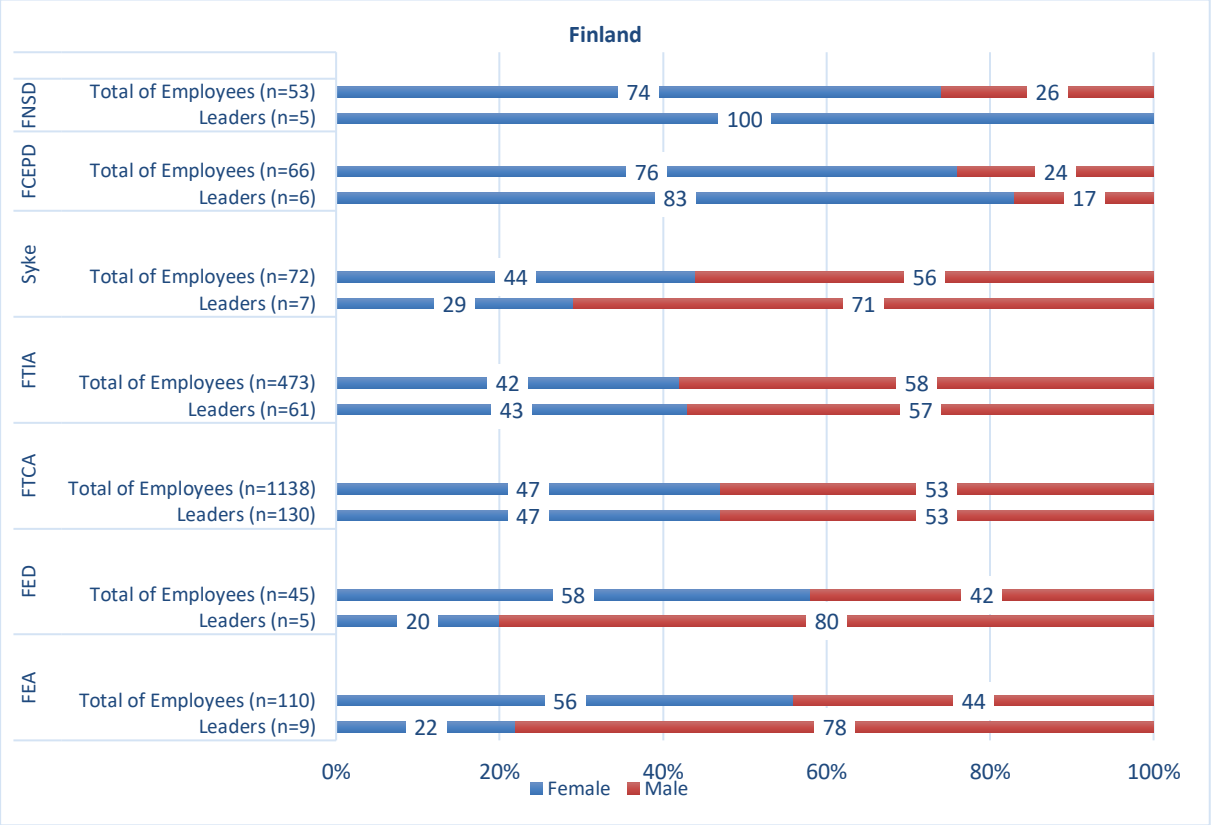


**Figure 5.** Gender representation in Finnish climate institutions, %

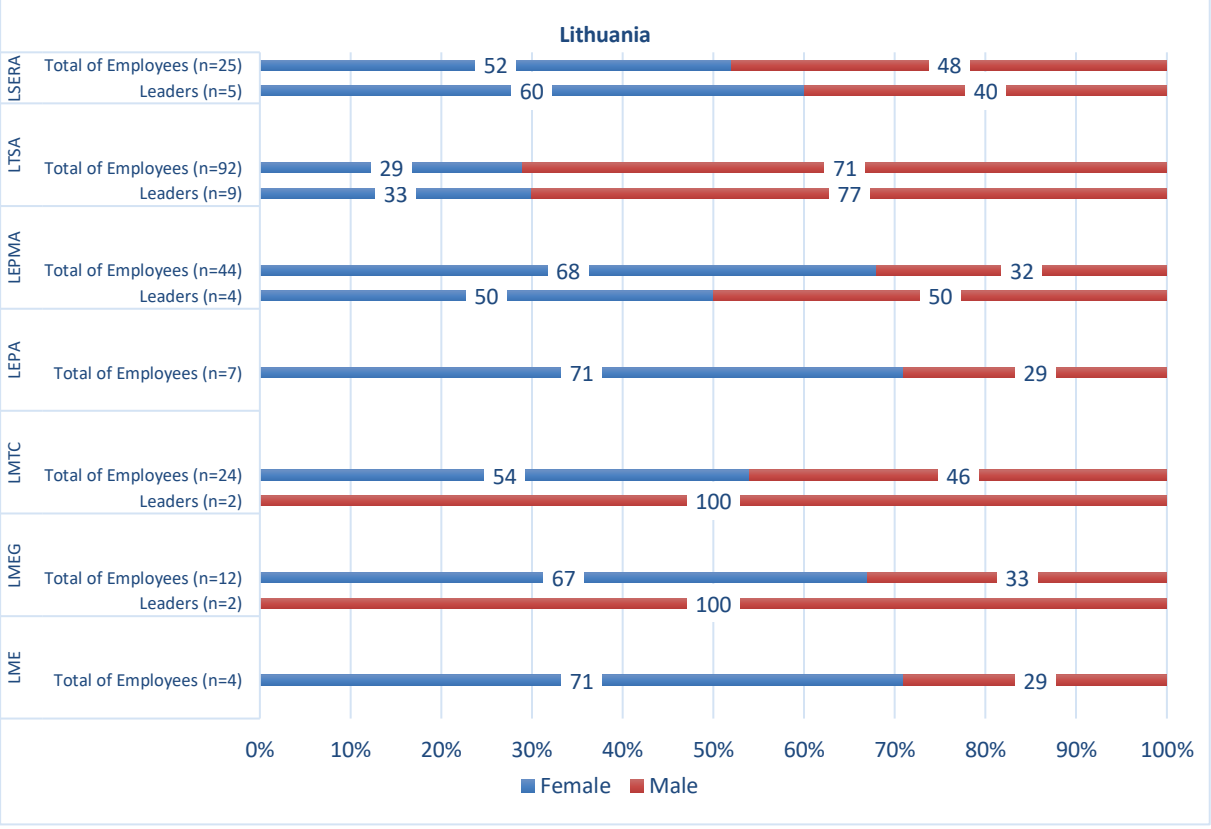


**Figure 6.** Gender representation in Lithuanian climate institutions[5], %

[5] In the cases of LEPA and LME, each institution has one female in a leadership position.

**Appendix 1.**

Below is a table presenting the number of institutions that were mapped in the study. The institutions are divided by the data source.

| Mapped institutions | Acronym | Data source |
|---|---|---|
| Sweden | | |
| Energimyndigheten – The Swedish Energy Agency | SEA | SEA via email |
| Transportstyrelsen – The Swedish Transport Agency | STA | STA via email |
| Vinnova – The Swedish Innovation Agency | VIN | VIN via email |
| Naturvårdsverket – The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency | SEPA | SEPA via email |
| Trafikverket – The Swedish Transport Administration | STAD | STAD via email |
| Denmark | | |
| Miljø- og Ligestillingsministeriet – The Danish Ministry of Environment and Gender Equality | DMEG | DMEG via email |
| Departementet – The Department (a section of DMEG) | DMEG_D | DMEG via email |
| Miljøstyrelsen – The Environmental Protection Agency | DEPA | DEPA via email |
| Energistyrelsen – The Danish Energy Agency | DEA | DEA via email |
| Transportministeriet – The Danish Ministry of Transport | DMT | DMT via email |
| Norway | | |
| Klima- og miljødepartementet – The Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment | NMCE | NMCE via email |
| Bærekraft- og omstillingsavdelingen og Klimaavdelingen – The Sustainability and Transition Department and The climate department (both are departments under NMCE) | ST & CL | NMCE via email |
| Miljødirektoratet – Norwegian Environment Agency | NEA | NEA via email |
| Energidepartementet – The Norwegian Ministry of Energy | NME | NME via email |
| Samferdselsdepartementet- Norwegian ministry of transport (only including the Section for Environmental Affairs) | NMT | NMT's website |
| Iceland[6] | | |
| Umhverfis-, orku- og loftslagsráðuneytið – Icelandic Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Climate | IMEEC | IMEEC website |
| Umhverfis- og orkustofnun – Icelandic Environment and Energy Agency | IEEA | IEEA website |
| Innviðaráðuneytið – Iclenadic Ministry of Infrastructure | IMI | IMI website |
| Vegagerðin - Icelandic Road Transport Agency | IRCA | IRCA |
| Finland | | |
| Ilmastoyksikkö (Suomen ympäristökeskus) - Climate Solutions Unit (Finnish Environment Institute)[7] | SYKE | Palkeet |
| Väylävirasto (Liikenne- ja viestintäministeriö) - Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency (Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications) | FTIA | Palkeet |
| Traficom (Liikenne- ja viestintäministeriö) - Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications) | FTCA | Palkeet |
| Energiaosasto (Työ- ja Elinkeinoministeriö) - Finnish Energy Department (Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment) | FED | Palkeet |
| Energiavirasto – Finnish Energy Authority (Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment) | FEA | Palkeet |
| Ilmasto- ja ympäristönsuojeluosasto (Ympäristöministeriö) - Finnish Climate and Environmental Protection Department (Finnish Ministry of the Environment) | FCEPD | Palkeet |

[6] Ministries and agencies in Iceland have been restructured during the selected period.

[7] Finnish Environment Institute is a research institute guided by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. They create independent and reliable information and solutions to support the sustainable transition

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Verkko- ja palveluosasto (Liikenne- ja viestintäministeriö) - Finnish Networks and Services Department (Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications) | FNSD | Palkeet |
| Lithuania | | |
| LR Aplinkos ministerija -Lithuanian Ministry of Environment | LME | LME via email |
| LR Energetikos ministerija - Lithuanian Ministry of Energy | LMEG | LMEG website |
| LR Susisiekimo ministerija - Lithuanian Ministry of Transport and Communication (LMTC) | LMTC | LMTC via email |
| LR Aplinkos apsaugos agentūra -Lithuanian Environmental Protection Agency | LEPA | LEPA via email |
| LR Aplinkos projektų valdymo agentūra -Lithuanian Environmental Project Management Agency | LEPMA | LEPMA via email |
| LR energetikos reguliavimo tarnyba -Lithuanian State Energy Regulatory Authority | LSERA | LSERA via email |
| LR transporto saugos aadministracija -Lithuanian Transport Safety Administration | LTSA | LTSA via email |

# References


Allwood, G. & Kronsell, A. (2025 forthcoming). 'The European Green Deal through an Equalities lens: A Lost Opportunity? In Eds Abels, G., Kantola, J., Lombardo, E. & Müller, H. (Eds.) *Towards a "Union of Equality": The European Commission under President Ursula von der Leyen (2019–2024*). Oxford University Press.

Dahlerup, D. (2006). The Story of the Theory of Critical Mass. *Politics & Gender* 2(4), 511–522. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X0624114X

Haavio-Mannila, E., Kauppinen, K., & Kahne, H.G. (1992). Women and the Welfare State in the Nordic Countries. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429268007-14

Kanter, M. R. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Kronsell, A., Magnusdottir, G.L., Rask, N., & Singleton, B. E. (2021). An Intersectional exploration of climate institutions. In J. Sowers, et al. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Environmental Politics* (p. 223-239).

Kronsell, A., Magnusdottir, G.L., Rask, N, Singleton, B. E., and Lundgren, A. (2025). *Intersectionality and Climate Policy-making: Ways forward to a socially inclusive and sustainable welfare state – Final Report.*

Magnusdottir, G. L., & Kronsell, A. (2015). The (In)Visibility of Gender in Scandinavian Climate Policy-Making. *International feminist journal of politics*, 17(2), 308-326. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2014.896661

Magnusdottir, G. L., & Kronsell, A. (2016). The Double Democratic Deficit in Climate Policy-making by the EU Commission. Femina politica, 25(2), 64-77. https://doi.org/10.3224/feminapolitica.v25i2.25353

Magnusdottir, G. L., & Kronsell, A. (2021). *Gender, intersectionality and climate institutions in industrialized states*. Routledge: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003052821

Magnusdottir, G.L. and Kronsell, A. (2025). Gender in Global Climate Governance. In Goetze, C. and Singh Rathore, K. (eds.) *The Contemporary Reader of Feminist International Relations*. Routledge.

Singleton, B. E., & Magnusdottir, G.L. (2025). Encouraging institutional change with cultural theory. In *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2025.2496754

UNDP, and University of Pittsburgh. (2021). Gender Equality in Public Administration. United Nations Development Programme report. https://www.undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration

## Collaborators

## Project Information

This research brief is written as part of the research project *Gendered norms and practices in Nordic and Baltic Climate Policy Institutions: Implications for the Climate Transition* (180198).

The research aims to explore how gender equality is understood and implemented in Nordic and Baltic climate policy institutions. The project aims to increase knowledge on how to develop gender-sensitive climate policies in line with national and international commitments.

The project was supported by NordForsk, Nordic Energy Research, Formas, the Swedish Energy Agency, the Research Council of Finland, the Research Council of Lithuania and The Icelandic Centre for Research Rannís.

## Contact Information

Gunnhildur Lily Magnusdottir, Project Leader (2025), gunnhildur.lily.magnusdottir@mau.se

Annica Kronsell, Project Leader (2026–2027), annica.kronsell@gu.se

Cover photo © Åbo Akademis bildbank, RN