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New President of LO-Denmark defends
the Nordic model

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New regulations improve Swedish
workers' protection against bullying

Editorial

Tighten up!

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Europe wants to turn waste into gold

Nov 30, 2015

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 8/2015

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Tighten up!

The limit has been reached. Controls are being increased and things are being tightened up. Even Sweden has thrown in the towel. Swedish asylum rules will be adapted to fit with the EU's minimum level. What now? Will the Nordic welfare societies stand the test?

EDITORIAL

27.11.2015

BERIT KVAM

Refugee politics — it is what everyone is talking about, Finnish Jari Lindström at the meeting of Nordic labour ministers tells the Nordic Labour Journal. This is also our theme this month, when we ask: Refugees - burden or resource?

Tighten up! We have heard it so much and often that it must reverberate in Africa. That is exactly the point. When cabin pressure falls and oxygen masks come down, you help yourself first and others second. That is the Norwegian answer to the challenges, presented to foreign journalists by a Norwegian state secretary.

There are different opinions for when you should say stop. When a Swedish politician fights back tears so that she can hardly say what she has decided, the decision might be better grounded in numbers than when a Norwegian proclaims that this is what we always warned against. It is about so much more, not least human dignity.

It is up to politicians to make decisions. This autumn we have seen that the increase in the number of refugees arriving has accelerated in a way which cannot continue, as our estimates show.

That is what makes it so difficult — no-one knows how the situation will develop in the longer or shorter term. Is the Finnish Minister of Justice and Employment right when he fears an increased polarisation of society? How do we avoid that? And what will the effect be on our Nordic welfare model? Will it stand the test?

The question remains; should we throw in the towel, allow the tightening up of rules choke development, or how do we secure good development where everyone gets a better future?

The Norwegian expert on refugees and work, Berit Berg, is convinced that cutting wages in order to get people into the labour market will help create a new underclass.

The social partners say we should negotiate and find collective solutions to make sure we prevent further discontent among unemployed Nordic citizens and a gap between workers who are paid differently for equal work. Perhaps we should be inspired by the Finnish entrepreneurs and Startup Refugees, who have poured their money and efforts into creating a new spirit in Finnish society. They look at refugees as a resource. People who can give Nordic welfare a boost.

[See all articles in theme](#)



What happens when the refugee stream has been stemmed?

“It’s like on a plane when the oxygen masks have been activated. When you’re told to put on your own mask before helping people sitting next to you. If we are to help the world, we must look after our own country first,” says Jøran Kallmyr, State Secretary at the Norwegian Ministry of Justice.

THEME

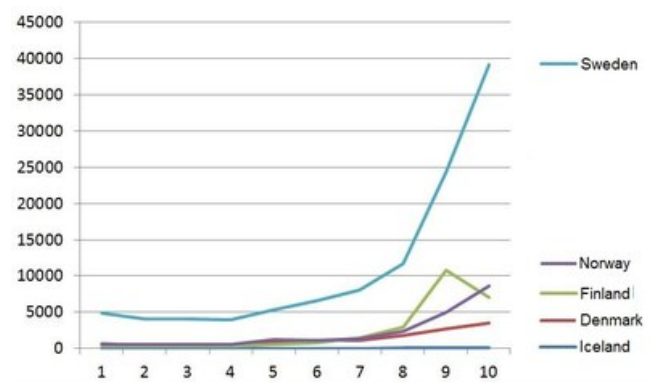
27.11.2015

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

He has asked to meet foreign journalists in Oslo to relay his message to international media: Norway will send back nearly everyone who applies for asylum because, according to him, they do not have valid reasons to apply. This applies first and foremost to those crossing Europe’s northernmost border point, between Norway and Russia. In the past few weeks 4,500 refugees have arrived there.

The airplane analogy is problematic. Are the Nordic welfare states really under threat from the current flow of refugees? In what is beginning to look like panic, one country after the other are introducing border controls, temporary permits to stay and are generally making conditions for refugees harder.

What is clear is that the increasing rate at which the number of refugees are arriving is unsustainable. You only need to take a ruler and draw the continuation of the Swedish graph in the illustration below to realise that.



Asylum applicants Jan-Oct 2015. Source: the different countries' migration authorities

Between September and October this year the number of asylum applicants in Sweden rose from 24,307 to 39,181 people, a 38 percent increase. If that increase were to continue for another 10 months, 1.35 million asylum seekers would be arriving in Sweden. The overall for the coming 10 months would be 3.4 million asylum seekers.

But the graphs for the past ten months of asylum applicants in the Nordic countries also shows a different development — what has happened in Finland. There, the number of asylum applicants has fallen dramatically. It is very likely the other countries will also experience a fall as new obstacles to immigration are introduced.

This means the flow of refugee will probably be considerably lower in the months to come. But what will happen to those who have already crossed the border?

There is no escaping the fact that refugees cost money. Before they find work and can contribute by paying taxes which finance the welfare system, they need to learn the language, complement their educations and learn to understand Nordic societies.

Seven years to get a job

“The median time it takes for a refugee immigrant to enter the Swedish labour market is seven years,” says Joakim Ruist, who studies immigration at the University of Gothenburg.

During that time the refugees need a place to live, food, clothes and the necessary training. It is uncertain how many get permission to stay, just like it is uncertain how many of them will ask for family reunion. The refusal rate is not low, not even in Denmark, the country considered to having tightened the conditions for asylum seekers the most.

87 percent of asylum applications in Denmark were approved during the ten first months of 2015. How strict politicians can be also depends on how the flow of refugees looks like.

“Only a small part of the 4,500 who have arrived to Norway from Russia have any chance of staying,” says Jøran Kallmyr.

The tasks are also very different between countries. This is how many asylum seekers have arrived in the various Nordic countries so far this year:

Country	Number of asylum seekers	Number of citizens per asylum seeker
Iceland	291	1,119
Denmark	13,293	423
Norway	21,946	232
Finland	24,910	232
Sweden	112,264	85
Nordic total	172,704	151

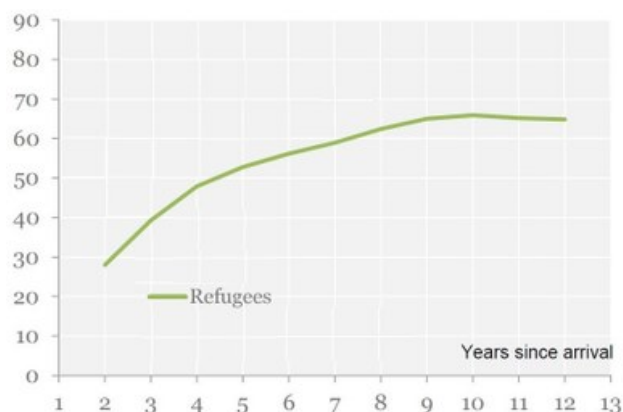
This means 85 Swedes must share the costs and necessary work in order to look after each asylum applicant who arrived between January and October in 2015. Less than 300 asylum seekers have arrived in Iceland in the same period, meaning 1,119 Icelanders share the task of looking after one asylum seeker.

Compared to previous major flows of refugees, the current one is by far the largest since World War II. For Sweden it is also larger than what happened during the war, when 70,000 Norwegian and Danish refugees arrived, plus 70,000 Finnish children.

For Finland, the current number of refugees is dwarfed by the 400,000 people who were forced to leave Finnish Karelia after the Winter War against the Soviet Union, and who had to find places to live elsewhere in Finland.

It is difficult to measure the percentage of BNP which is being spent on newly arrived refugees instead of on the native population. Joakim Ruist has tried, and says it amounts to 1.35 percent of Sweden's BNP. He studied a group of more than 70,000 refugees and the income and expenses they represented in 2007, and he has extrapolated this number for the number of refugees expected to arrive this year.

The Swedish Public Employment Office has also been looking at the employment of male refugees arriving in Sweden between 1997 and 1999. Ten years later 65 percent were employed.



Percentage of employed refugees after years of living in Sweden. Men arriving between 1997 and 1999. Time axis: Years since arrival. Source: Swedish Public Employment Office, OECD.

The sooner refugees get jobs, the sooner they can contribute to both their own costs and to the welfare system. That is why politicians prefer to talk about processing those with an education as quickly as possible.

“Politicians talk a lot about validation. For the refugees with a higher education this is of course important. But only ten percent of the refugees have that, and they make up the group with the least problems of accessing the labour market,” says Joakim Ruist.

“40 to 50 percent of the refugees who have arrived have not even finished an upper secondary education. They must first gain the necessary qualifications, then take upper secondary education and preferably get some extra training too before surviving in Sweden’s highly specialised labour market,” says Joakim Ruist.

According to him there are only two alternatives:

“You either accept more lower wages, giving more refugees a chance in the labour market, or you accept that they will receive welfare benefits for many years to come.

“The current flow of refugees will not have any immediate effect on the labour market. It has plenty of time to adapt. The immediate effect will be increased public costs,” says Joakim Ruist.

See all articles in theme



"We need to tell the stories about the importance of immigrants," says Berit Berg, Professor of Social Work at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, in Trondheim

Researcher: "Lowering the minimum wage creates a new underclass"

There is agreement on one thing when it comes to refugees — the many newly arrived must be integrated into their new societies. They need accommodation, language skills and jobs. The Nordic cooperation could do with sharing experiences for how to achieve that.

THEME

27.11.2015

TEXT OCH FOTO: GUNHILD WALLIN

"I have been a migrant in Sweden for 26 years. Problems and differences are being discussed all of the time. This seems to be more important than creating a culture of "Let's build this

country". There is a fear — always this fear — of migrants taking our jobs and being a threat to our culture. What are we afraid of, and how do we get rid of this fear?"

It is 10 November and the Nordic Region In Focus is staging the conference 'The refugee crisis and Nordic solidarity' at the Kulturhuset in central Stockholm. The man who poses the question is in the audience and challenges the panel who have spent the past one and a half hours debating what role the Nordic cooperation can play in the face of the stream of refugees who in later weeks have been flowing north and mostly to Sweden.

"We have to tell the stories about the importance of immigrants," answers Berit Berg, a Professor in Social Work at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, in Trondheim, and the conference's moderator.

Vietnamese education winners

She has been working with refugees since the late 1970s, when she helped Vietnamese boat refugees arriving in Norway. The experience is now one of those good examples. Many of the Vietnamese who came had no education, but got unskilled work which was more common back then. Now, 35 years later, we see that their children are education winners. On average they scored far higher than any other group at school, and can now be found in universities, hospitals, government departments and in other prestigious jobs. This is an example of something migration researchers have been shouting about at the top of their lungs for years — the fact that it pays, according to Berit Berg.

At the same time she wants to highlight that you must never forget that accepting refugees is about humanism and solidarity.

The Vietnamese boat refugees' children are education winners and a goldmine for Norwegian society. Those arriving in our countries are human beings, and they are human beings who also are labour," says Berit Berg.

The well-visited seminar concluded that it is exactly these good examples of integration which could be shared between the Nordic countries.

"Work is the be all and end all for integration. It is a source of normality, economic independence and social networks. It is very important," said Berit Berg.

It is important to hit the ground running, and this also has a positive effect on society. How to accelerate the integration process was another theme during the conference.

No integration represents a ticking bomb

Lars Dencik, a Professor of Social Psychology who works in both Denmark and Sweden, was another panel member. He is himself a child of refugees and highlights the importance of accepting refugees and giving them a chance to integrate.

"This is not about numbers but about how you receive those who do arrive. The worst thing you can do is accept large groups of people and then not integrate them. You create a

ticking bomb," says Lars Dencik and underlines politicians' responsibility of not playing to people's fears or to weaken refugees' conditions, which in the long term will make integration more difficult.

One measure often touted by employers for easing the entry into the labour market is so-called entry wages. This was also up for debate during the conference.

Juhana Vartiainen, a member of the Finnish parliament representing the National Coalition Party and a member of the Nordic Council of Ministers, believes it is necessary to consider minimum wages with a critical mind, and to be open for the possibility of lowering them in order to help newly arrived people find work.

"This is not about upsetting Nordic labour market politics, but to lower wages a little bit for those waiting to enter the labour market," answers Juhana Vartiainen when he is criticised for praising wage dumping.

Extremely short-sighted

His statement was countered by Social Democrat MP Carina Ohlsson, who also chairs the parliamentary social insurance committee. She referred to women's wage development and concluded that low wages rarely remain a short term solution, but stay low for a long period of time.

"Do we want to create a new group of low earners? I don't believe in this," she said.

"Lowering the minimum wage would create a new underclass, a new level of poverty with bad living conditions and marginalisation. You must definitely not lower minimum wages, but rather try to think two thoughts at a time," says Berit Berg when we speak a few weeks later.

By that she means that during an internship and apprenticeship period it could make sense paying lower wages, but only then. Elsewhere it goes without saying that you have equal pay for equal work.

"If you cut the minimum wage by 20 percent you are disturbing the Nordic basic principle of equal pay for equal work. You run the risk of having other low-salary workers being squeezed out, and that leads to unrest, unease and conflict, says Berit Berg.

Secure jobs good for integration

The Council of Nordic Trade Unions, NFS, also actively opposes the lowering of the minimum wage as a tool for better integration of newly arrived migrants. On the contrary, it argues, safe and secure jobs make integration easier.

"The Nordic model applies to everyone, and lowering wages is not a solution. It might ease the entry into a few sectors, but how do you differentiate between those who have been here for a long time and the newly arrived? And how would you handle conflicts that might arise? We also do not want to

see a situation where you need three jobs in order to survive," says Magnus Gissler, General Secretary at the NFS.

The flow of refugees is a challenge, agrees NFS, and calls for a dialogue between trade unions and employers, governments and the Nordic Council of Ministers. How do we work together to find solutions which make it easier for the newly arrived to settle? The refugee issue and what it means to the Nordic labour market and welfare model is high on the agenda among trade unions. This was clear to see at the unions' recent visit to Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, during the Nordic labour ministers' meeting in Copenhagen.

"The flow of refugees challenges the Nordic labour market and welfare model if you start lowering wages. We must protect the conditions of the labour market and fight dumping in order to secure economic growth in the long term. The fact that the Finnish government now wants to make changes which are in breach of the collective agreement model is a greater threat to the current model than the refugees themselves," says Magnus Gisele.

Several simultaneous processes

He wants to see more processes happening simultaneously, which means fixing accommodation and mapping an asylum seeker's skills at the same time as you check out the residence permit. Another important issue is to make it easier for third country citizens to cross Nordic borders.

The Nordic countries are also considering what kind of conditions refugees can expect when they arrive. What does it mean for integration whether a residence permit is permanent or temporary? What role does the chance of family reunion play, or the size of the benefits being offered? Berit Berg is very negative to temporary residence permits, introduced by the Swedish government on 24 November, and to tighter restrictions on family reunions. It is very stressful not knowing whether you will be allowed to stay, and this gets worse the longer it takes to find out. There are precedents. When large waves of refugees came from Bosnia in the early 1990s, several Nordic countries introduced temporary residence permits.

"Return should be voluntary"

"Everybody said 'we have come to stay'. They were tired of war, exhausted, marked by their difficult journey and what they said was 'we must be allowed to land, to know that we will be allowed to stay'. Return to the home country should be voluntary," says Berit Berg.

Much of her research involves looking at what stimulates and what hinders refugees' entry into the labour market. Obstacles include determining which qualifications foreigners have, language issues and discrimination. When it comes to adapting qualifications and learning the language, much of the responsibility rests with the individual, but with support from society — for instance help with the validation

of skills and necessary extra training. People also need help with learning the language, and we know from experience that language is often best learned in proximity with working life.

"The last piece, discrimination, is society's responsibility. It must create opportunities for the newly arrived and invite them in. This is not about being kind, it is about finding the best resources — which you can often find among migrants if you consider their backgrounds to be a qualification and not an obstacle," says Berit Berg.

[See all articles in theme](#)



Riku Rantala shouts down anyone claiming refugees are burden.

Entrepreneurs with a clear message about refugees

Finland has been caught unprepared by a flow of refugees the size of which the country has not experienced since World War II and the evacuation of Finnish Karelia. Many private individuals have been willing to help look after the new arrivals by offering food, clothes and accommodation. And now entrepreneurs are starting to turn up at refugee centres.

THEME

27.11.2015

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDEN, PHOTO: MARKO RANTANEN

The government estimates that some 30,000 asylum seekers will arrive in Finland this year, and another 15,000 in 2016. It also predicts just over one third of them will be granted asylum. That means that Finland will see more refugees arriving in just two years than in the past 40 years — between 1973 and 2012 (40,742 people).

“The number of new arrivals has risen rapidly. Even with additional funding, we need to introduce new and cost efficient measures in our integration work,” said the Minister of Justice and Labour, Jari Lindström in November when he asked the Finnish parliament for extra funding in order to help the refugees.

The government has now got help from an unexpected source. This autumn two adventurers and entrepreneurs, Riku Rantala and Tuomas Milonoff, introduced a new initiative: Startup Refugees. The idea is to map the skills among the new arrivals and to try to get them into work as soon as possible.

Starting grant

Many refugees will have been skilled professionals in their home countries, and should be well positioned to set up their own company. The idea is to give each asylum seeker a starting grant worth 1,000 euro which they can use as they please. Riku Rantala says this could be anything at all.

“A small initial investment, a work tool, a hygiene passport, an occupational safety or language course, hairdressing equipment, a computer, a mobile telephone, money for a bus pass so that they can travel to work, a computer program.”

In the past few weeks several hundreds of university and vocational university students across the country have visited refugee centres to map asylum seekers’ skills. Johanna Vierros is one of the coordinators of this work, and she says the job is not altogether easy since most of the people interviewed do not speak English.

“We are now in the data collection phase. We create profiles, who they are, what they have done previously, what high schools and universities they have been attending, who are doctors or lawyers.”

The other problem is understanding what the corresponding Finnish level of education is.

There is great interest in the project. Every day business representatives call Startup Refugees to learn how they can contribute.

“This is powerful,” says Rantala, who got a standing ovation when he presented his plans to the global entrepreneur conference Slush in Helsinki.

Rantala and Milonoff have been crossing continents around the world while filming their adventures for the internationally distributed TV series Madventures and the follow-up Docventures.

“I see the enormous advantage of people who understand different cultures, markets, languages — how many Finns understand the Arab market, for instance?”

Games developer

Among those helping to finance the project are the owners of games developer Supercell, Ilkka Paananen and Mikko Kodisoja, who became incredibly rich when they sold their majority share to Japanese SoftBank in 2013, and more stocks earlier this year. Supercell’s games include Clash of Clans. Paananen and Kodisoja paid more than €100m in taxes on their capital gains.

Paananen and Kodisoja have established the Me-säätiö foundation, which aims to bridge social gaps partly by improving public administration. The Managing Director, Ulla Nord, comes from various roles at the non-profit Helsinki Deaconess Institute where she has spent more than 20 years working with marginalised youths and children.



“In the biggest cities the major challenge is the sheer number of youths with foreign backgrounds who don’t have a place in society, who are not studying nor working.”

Ulla Nord says that number in Helsinki is close to one fourth compared to around four percent among youths on average. That is why it was not difficult to accept Startup Refugees’ request for help.

“We wanted to contribute and create opportunities for people with a refugee background, to make them part of Finnish society, its culture and language,” she says.

Each year the foundation awards some seven million euro to various programmes, and the capital is linked to shares, including at Supercell, whose dividend is being used for the programme. The foundation also recently awarded 2.5 million euro to the Helsinki City Youth Centre, to support a five year project for the integration of immigrant youth.

Long term

Riku Rantala says successful integration also benefits businesses.

“We realised we had to get businesses on board, they can benefit from it. They don’t need to recruit people, they get new innovations and this should not be funded with tax money.”

For Rantala, Startup Refugees was not something he started on a whim.

“I want to highlight the fact that this is a long term project — an investment in the future.”

Refugees have the right to apply for work within three to six months after handing in their asylum application, but the system has become clogged up and in reality it could take a year before a refugee can start looking for a job. The competition with other new arrivals is tough, too: unemployment among immigrants is considerable higher than among the native population — in Finland it is 2.5 to 3 times higher.

See all articles in theme



Nordic labour ministers met on 17 November: Senior Advisor Ingi Valeur, General Secretary Dagfinn Høybråten and ministers Henrik Old, Robert Eriksson, Jari Lindström, Jørn Neergaard Larsen, Ylva Johansson

Marginalised youths on the labour ministers' agenda

“No youths should be left to their own devices for longer periods of time,” Danish Noemi Katznelson told Nordic labour ministers when she presented her latest research in Copenhagen recently. Marginalised youths and work were the themes for discussion between the ministers and the social partners, with a focus on preventative measures against unemployment.

INSIGHT

27.11.2015

TEXT AND PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

“One of the challenges we have in the Nordics is how to help young teenagers find a foothold through interaction between education and the labour market. The discussion has been very valuable,” Jørn Neergaard Larsen tells the Nordic Labour Journal. He has been Minister for Employment in Denmark's Venstre-led government since June 2015.

Denmark holds this year's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and he is hosting the meeting which would debate both the EU's mobility package, social dumping and youth unemployment. The ministers briefed each other about the current situation in their respective countries,

about political initiatives for employment and about refugees and integration.

When it comes to refugee politics, we definitely have a lot to learn from Denmark, says Norway's Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, Robert Eriksson.

Time limit for living and a dual approach

“When it comes to the job I am doing right now, where we are making important cuts to our welfare provisions, Denmark has chosen a dual approach which we will take a closer look at in Norway. It involves not being allowed access to ordinary

welfare benefits before you have lived in the country for seven or eight years, and a lower level for those who have not fulfilled the time requirement. This is something we are considering in Norway and we are looking at new ways of implementing this.”

Joint statement to the EU

The debate on the EU's mobility package and the coordination of social security systems prepared the ground for a statement to the EU Commission.

“Our conversations about regulation number 883 provided input for a joint letter to EU Commissioner Thyssen to make her aware of the issues which we as a group feel is most important,” says Jørn Neergaard Larsen.

“This is an illustration of the fact that we can meet over shared interests and present our joint wishes to the Commission. If the Nordic countries get together and argue well for what we feel is important, our voices are heard in the EU.”

“I also feel we have had good discussions about our welfare systems,” Norway's Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, Robert Eriksson, tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

“All of the ministers are positive to not expanding the time people are allowed to take unemployment benefits out of the country from three to six months. These are positive signals which you agree on in order to protect Nordic welfare politics.”

The debate on social dumping, proper working conditions and expectations to the EU Commission's revision of Directive 96/71 EF on the posting of workers did not lead to any joint actions.

“Our debate today on regulation 883 was a really good one where we quickly and without complications found out what we could agree on and present to the EU. This is something we ought to do when we are able to, of course, but we must also respect that in other situations the different Nordic countries will have different interests — for example whether or not to open the directive on the posting of workers. That is the nature of politics,” says Jørn Neergaard Larsen.

Fighting youth unemployment

Ahead of the formal meeting of ministers, they met the social partners to debate marginalise youths and employment. Researcher Noemi Katznelson from the Centre for Youth Research at Aalborg University opened the session by presenting a piece of research called ‘Marginalised youths and their motivation for education and work’. She drew attention to current trends, including the increasing polarisation among young people; some create a career for themselves at a very early age, others fall outside of society early.

Another trend is that a majority of young people feel they can rely on parents to back them up, yet this makes it even harder

for marginalised youths. Expectations from schools and the labour market are also becoming higher and narrower. With these trends in mind, she underlined the necessity of focusing on the individual. Young people not in education, employment or training — or NEETs — make up a very complex group where you find many different personal and academic problems.

Noemi Katznelson's findings focus on how you manage to motivate young people who lack motivation for an education — if that is the goal. One of her conclusions is that a regular education with normal conditions is not a realistic goal for everyone. On the contrary, it increases the problems because it leads to defeat after defeat.

Noemi Katznelson defines motivation as a result of the interaction between the young people and the situations they find themselves in, and not a precondition for participation. She has also defined different motivational orientations as a basis for working with motivation. These can work together and change over time. They are not normative. There is no good or bad motivation, but you could get an imbalance in how much emphasis is put on the different motivational orientations. She warns against leaving the young people to their own devices over longer periods of time, and underlines that strong individual factors determine whether the young person is motivated or is caught by a ‘drive’.

“The study shows good results can be achieved when you plan a path which prepares those ready for an education for that education, and you can maintain really good results if one mentor sticks with the young people when they stumble along the way — because they will,” says Noemi Katznelson.

This is where the social partners came in, represented by General Secretary Magnus Gissler and President Bente Sørngrenfey from The Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS), and Director General Jacob Holbraad at the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA). All were very interested in helping getting marginalised teenagers into working life.

The partners want a seat at the table

“These are shared challenges. We are facing major socio-economical challenges if these young people can't get jobs. When it comes to the social partners, I feel we could also discuss these issues during collective agreement negotiations, for instance mentor jobs. How you create space for mentors both in the public and private sectors, and how you finance this,” Bente Sørngrenfey told the Nordic Labour Journal.

“The social partners in the Nordic region have always been included in the face of major changes. We need to remember that. This has not happened during the crisis, when the social partners have been kept in the dark to a certain extent. I think it is time to sit down and try to come up with ideas together for how we solve our current challenges.”

Director General Jacob Hobraad, DA, agreed to the proposal for introducing mentors in working life. He also emphasised the need in the short run to help get young people who have often struggled in elementary school into working life, by allowing them to do practical work which gives them skills which can be used in the labour market. He warned against focusing too much on education.

“Not because we are against education, but because many leave elementary school feeling they have suffered defeat upon defeat. In the long term, in order to avoid too many to fall into the NEET group in future, I believe it is important to create an elementary school which prepares young people for education. Too many leave elementary school with qualifications which are not good enough,” said Jacob Holbraad.

The debate inspired new thoughts

“It is interesting that despite our different levels of youth unemployment, many ministers raised the problem that not enough young people take a vocational education. We have a great need for getting young people to choose and to be aware of these occupations, and this is a challenge that we share,” Ylva Johannsson told the Nordic Labour Journal. She considered the opportunities which can be found in a cooperation with the social partners.

“I was just thinking that we perhaps could do something with the partners in trades where there is a need for labour today, and even more so in the future, so that young people can become aware of these occupations.”

Sweden's Minister for Employment made a point of telling her Nordic colleagues how she step by step had managed to reduce youth unemployment, which now has fallen considerably and which keeps falling.

The researcher was fired up by that discussion too:

“I find it interesting to hear that many labour ministers are actually interested in more things than I had expected, and in what is happening in the educational system — not just within the labour market. They point out that with today's challenges it is necessary to cooperate across political divides and down through the education system,” she said.

“Usually politicians often think political strategy. You have to take into account the individual. This was also made clear in several of the speeches. But it is important to remember, and to look for, the differences. It seems you have solutions for certain groups, but it is more difficult to find solutions which target individuals,” said Noemi Katznelson.



Magnus Gissler og Bente Sorgenfrey participated at the labour ministers' meeting

Refugees must find work as fast as possible

The social partners, NFS and DA, were also invited to present their view of the refugee situation in the Nordic region. The partners agreed that it is important to integrate the refugees into the labour market as soon as possible.

Magnus Geissler, NFS, felt the Nordic region had a responsibility to exchange good experiences when it comes to the integration of refugees, just like information on youth unemployment is shared.

“We understand the many political interests at play, that it is more difficult to find joint Nordic solutions and that Nordic workers are nervous. But we feel that the collective agreements we have can help lift the newly arrived into our societies.”

The fear of refugees undermining the labour market is a very good reason for NFS to get involved, things Bente Sorgenfrey:

“That is why it is important to include the social partners in the discussions, because we are not interested in a conflict which would help undermine the collective agreements we already have, and which perhaps would create more antipathy among wage earners if they see that the solutions which emerge only help undermine conditions. So it is very important to find solutions which involve the social partners in those discussions.”

General Director Holbraad, DA, agreed that the starting point must be to get refugees into the labour market as soon as possible. There is a need to map refugees' skills, and there needs to be a fast track for those who have found jobs themselves, so that they can move to where that job is rather than stay in an asylum centre. Individual municipalities are very focused on jobs when the decision is made that refugees will be living there, he felt.

Nordic agreement on cuts

"I understand very well that Sweden faces a challenging situation, and that a breaking point has been reached. But it is not the case that other countries are passing their problems over to Sweden, on the contrary. Norway faces considerable challenges when it comes to migration. And in my opinion, the level of challenges Sweden now faces does relate to the politics which has been carried out there previously," Norway's Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion, Robert Eriksen, told the Nordic Labour Journal. But he points out that everyone is feeling the pressure.

"I feel all of the Nordic countries which are now seeing the refugee situation close up, both Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, understand the challenges it brings and see that there is a limit to how many you can receive. This is something all the countries have come to realise.

"The consequence is that you cannot accept the numbers of refugees which are arriving, you have to send a signal that we cannot receive all of them in a satisfactory manner, and that there are other ways of helping. We need to help more people where they are, and we need better cooperation with the rest of Europe."

Nordic conference on migration and integration in 2016

The integration of refugees into the labour market is one of the important issues right now, says the Finnish Minister of Justice and Employment, Jari Lindström from the Sipiläs government.

"This is a completely new situation for Finland," he says.

"Finland is not used to receiving refugees. That is why I am very interested in hearing how the other Nordic countries deal with the challenges, and I feel the discussions at the ministers' meeting have been very interesting. This is the issue which interests everyone now," he tells the Nordic Labour Journal, and underlines that Finland too is very interested in Denmark's politics.

"Denmark is very close to Finland in these matters, while the Swedes have completely different traditions. But what really matters is what the EU does, and they are not able to find answers to these problems," he says.

"There are almost 350,000 unemployed people in Finland. We have received 30,000 refugees, but only a few of them will be allowed to stay. We don't know what qualifications they have, whether they can start their own businesses for instance."

Jari Lindström says he fears potential conflicts between the many unemployed and the newly arrived.

"This is already in the air in Finland. The Paris terror has made a difficult situation worse. Finland will help those who

arrive and who are in need of help, but not those who come to Finland to seek a better future."

Finland takes over the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016, with the slogan 'Water, nature and people'. They are organising a conference on migration and integration in the spring. In May the Presidency stage an experts' seminar on working life and physical disabilities. There will be a Nordic work environment conference on risk based inspections in June and a conference on new ways of working, which forms part of the contribution to the ILO's 'the Future of Work Centenary Initiative' in September.



New President of LO-Denmark defends the Nordic model

The new first lady of the Danish trade union movement, Lizette Risgaard, is a staunch defender of Nordic cooperation and has already proven that she will fight to the bitter end in defence of the Nordic collective bargaining model.

PORTRAIT

27.11.2015

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: DEMOTIX

A fighter has taken the helm at Denmark's trade union movement. Many knew she was one before 55 year old Lizette Risgaard was elected the new President of the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) on 27 October 2015, the first woman to hold the post. But it became clear to everyone when she sacked the entire top management only four days after taking the seat as the new President of Denmark's largest trade union confederation.

The LO head of administration, chief economist, head of communication and the head of development were all sacked, because the new President wanted to appoint her own team. Most labour market experts agree the trade union movement needs new blood, and refer to falling union membership, partly because young people don't see the point in being a trade union member.

Lizette Risgaard does not welcome that interpretation, she tells the Nordic Labour Journal:

“It is not the case that young people don’t want to join the trade union movement. Many surveys show that young people would like to join, if we make sure we give them space.”

She believes both the trade union movement and all of society could become much better at demonstrating for young people the major benefits trade unions and the Nordic model can have.

“We have a unique model in the Nordic region. It is important to communicate this, and it can be done by parents at home as well as in school, for instance as part of social science teaching.”

Equality is about more than gender

The new President takes the helm at an organisation she knows like the back of her hand. She was born and raised in LO, so to speak — the umbrella organisation for 18 trade unions with more than one million members. Lizette Risgaard trained as an office assistant and has a master’s degree in public administration, but trade union work has taken up most of her adult working life. She has worked her way slowly up the ladder to reach the position of first ever female President for LO-Denmark.

Lizette Risgaard herself isn’t particularly preoccupied with the fact that she is LO’s first female President, but gender equality does concern her, she says:

“I stand out because I don’t wear a tie, but I am elected President because I am me, not because I am a woman. I am happy and proud of this. I have been working for gender equality for as long as I can remember and will continue to do so with a focus on equality no matter the gender. We must also fight for men in several areas where they are facing discrimination.”

During the election process several media described her as very insecure during the start of her time as LO’s deputy leader, but that she had grown with the job and turned into a proper fighter. Being portrayed as weak is not unusual for a woman, Lisette Risgaard says with a smile:

“I choose to smile at that and take it as confirmation that female leaders face more scrutiny than men. We must address this in a calm and collected manner.”

Her reputation as a fighter has come partly as a result of her central role in the so-called Ryanair case, when Danish trade unions with Lizette Risgaard in front went into battle with low-cost airline Ryanair, and secured a court ruling saying Danish salaries and working conditions must be followed in Denmark.

Defending the Nordic model

She is a keen defender of the Danish and Nordic model, where the social partners enter into agreements about the labour market. The new LO President will fight tooth and nail any attempt to introduce a legally binding European minimum wage:

“We do not want a legally binding minimum wage. It does not work in a Nordic setting. If trade union movements and employers in other European countries want to go down that route, like what has happened in Germany, it is their business. But it is not something which the EU treaty should make compulsive.”

She is full of praise for the cooperation between Nordic trade union movements. This is an important supplement to European cooperation, she thinks.

“It is not an alternative to European cooperation, but Nordic trade union movements cooperate in many areas, inspire each other, enjoy a good network and can send very clear signals together, for instance in European and global fora.”

One area where the Nordic trade union movements can cooperate is defending the Nordic model, say Lizette Risgaard. One example, she says, is when the Nordic trade unions recently joined forces and sent a letter to the Finnish government, strongly criticising a plan to introduce legislation which would impose cuts that limit the negotiating principle and weaken collective agreements between the social partners.

No to integration wages

Lizette Risgaard finds it harder to see how the Nordic trade union movements can cooperate on a different major and current pan-Nordic and pan-European challenge — the integration into the labour market of the many refugees who are coming to Europe. Danish employers have proposed the introduction of a lower integration wage to encourage businesses to hire refugees who might need training. To that, the LO President says a firm no:

“We will gladly help these people gain access to the labour market, but an integration wage will be discriminatory and create a gap. Neither refugees nor other groups of people should only function as cheap labour.”

She points to the fact that the Danish labour market already has tools which cover some of a company’s costs connected to hiring workers with special training needs, for instance the so-called staircase model.

The LO President watches the current refugee situation in Europe with “concern” and expresses hope that European countries will cooperate and find ways to share the many refugees who are in need of help, making the situation less chaotic — and that the social partners will be involved with helping find solutions.

Europe wants to turn waste into gold

Leading Danish politicians and businesses believe the circular economy is about to become a mega trend in Europe. Now they get backing from a new study which lists the enormous economic benefits which following a better use of resources. A new EU plan is in the works.

NEWS

27.11.2015

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The EU Commission will soon present a plan for making the EU a so-called circular economy — which would mean introducing a completely new level of waste recycling. Even though the Nordic countries are leading the way globally when it comes to recycling, they have so far only benefited from a very small part of the environmental and economical advantages which can be achieved by a better use of resources.

These are some of the conclusions in a brand new analysis of the potentials a circular economy would bring to Denmark, 'The potential for Denmark as a circular economy', which was launched on 25 November 2015 and discussed by leading Danish politicians, civil servants, businesses and experts during a conference in Copenhagen hosted by the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI).

The analysis has been produced by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which has studied circular economy for the EU Commission in the past. The new analysis was written for the Ministry of Environment and Food and the Danish Business Authority among others, and is based on a comprehensive case study of the potentials for the Danish economy and Danish businesses of a circular economy.

400,000 jobs in the EU

The conclusion is clear: There is such an enormous, untapped potential in improving the recycling of waste and other by-products in sectors such as breweries, food production and machine production that it can create a lasting, more innovative, resistant and productive social economy.

In concrete terms the analysis predicts that Denmark by 2035 could create between 7,000 and 13,000 new jobs by applying a circular economy, as well as achieving a 3 to 6 percent increase in exports, increase the BNP by 0.8 to 1.4 percent while reducing CO₂ emissions and the use of new resources.

An increasing number of international research results all point in the same way: Introducing a circular economy leads to growth, benefits the environment and creates jobs. The EU Commissioner for the Environment, Karmenu Vella, earlier this year estimated that a circular economy could create 400,000 jobs in the EU in the short term, and even more in the long term.

Denmark's Minister for Business and Growth, Troels Lund Poulsen from the Venstre party, promised the conference to work towards one of the analysis' recommendations: to remove any legal obstacles to a circular economy. Parts of the tax system work against any increase in recycling, amongst other things.

"I want to lead the way when it comes to exploiting the potential of a circular economy, which is so large that any business minister must look at this with the greatest interest," the minister said.

He expects the circular economy to be a theme during the next meeting of EU business ministers.

Could solve raw materials shortage

Danish businesses welcome the initiatives. The Deputy Director General of the Danish Confederation of Industries, Tine Roed, said a circular economy opens up new business potentials and can help solve the shortage of raw materials for production, which companies will be facing as the world's population grows and a larger middle class emerges, leading to higher consumption.

This development increases the pressure on the Earth's resources, and for some businesses this also means increased exposure when it comes to procuring the resources they need for their production. That vulnerability can be eased by the introduction of a circular economy.

Former Minister of the Environment Ida Auken from the Danish Social-Liberal Party has played a central role in cre-

ating the analysis 'The potential for Denmark as a circular economy'. She called the circular economy a new "mega-trend". So far it has been a topic for environment ministers and was viewed as an obstacle to productivity. Today the situation has been turned on its head in Europe, she thinks:

"The EU Commission's initiative will not solve everything, but there is a change happening in the EU system, and we are about to see a completely new approach to waste as a resource," says Ida Auken.

NEW arrival: EU action plan for the Circular Economy

New regulations improve Swedish workers' protection against bullying

Swedish employers are to become better at preventing people going off sick because of unhealthy workloads or bullying at work. That is what new regulations from the Swedish Work Environment Authority aim to achieve. They contain clearer rules for how employers should work with organisational and social work environment issues.

NEWS

24.11.2015

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

The Swedish Work Environment Act clearly states that employers are obliged to prevent psychological health problems just like they are obliged to prevent accidents and physical illness. Yet while the Swedish Work Environment Authority provides plenty of detailed rules for how to prevent physical injuries, there has so far not been any similar binding rules covering risks to psychological health. For years, attempts to adopt such rules have failed in the face of opposition from employers' organisations — until now.

In October the Swedish Work Environment Authority finally presented regulations for the organisational and social work environment. There is no doubt these are needed. In Sweden different psychological diagnoses make up the second most common cause of long term sick leave, after musculoskeletal disorders. The lack of proper regulations has also made it difficult to use the sanctions which are provided in the Work Environment Act to compel employers to take responsibility for their employees' psychological wellbeing.

Managers found guilty of causing suicide

Last year Sweden was rocked by the judgement in the so-called Krokomb case, where two senior managers were found guilty by the District Court for having caused a social worker's depression and resulting suicide. Despite the fact that they knew his mental health was deteriorating because he felt bullied by a manager, they took no active measures within the actual workplace. Instead they initiated dismissal proceedings, which pushed him over the edge.

However, the Court of Appeal found the senior managers not guilty. Yet even that court said they had been negligent and had failed to do what they ought to have done according to the Work Environment Act. The court specifically highlighted just how badly they had carried out the investigation into whether the social worker had indeed been bullied by his

manager. Yet they had not been sufficiently negligent to be convicted, the Court of Appeal ruled. One reason was exactly the lack of clear regulations for how an investigation into alleged bullying should be carried out. As a result it was necessary to tolerate a greater degree of misjudgements and mistakes.

Substandard investigation harmful

As a response to the appeal court's ruling, the Swedish Work Environment Authority's new regulations say a substandard investigation of psychological harassment, i.e. bullying, can be damaging both from a work environment and a health point of view. Therefore anyone carrying out such an investigation must have the necessary skills, be impartial and have the trust of the parties concerned.

The regulations also address workload issues and the organisation of working time. Employers should adapt resources in relation to how much employees have to work and how difficult their tasks are. To avoid unhealthy workloads the employer could for instance reduce the amount of work, alter the priority of different tasks, offer opportunities for recovery, make use of alternative work methods or increase staffing. Allowing a government agency to interfere in staffing and workload like this is one of the things employers' organisations have found hard to swallow.

The same goes for rules on the organisation of working time. The Working Hours Act does indeed limit the number of hours people are allowed to work, and sets out how much and how often an employee must be allowed to rest, but it does not say anything about how working time should be organised within that framework. Thus, employers have traditionally had great authority in this matter.

Unhealthy working hours

The new regulations clarify the employers' obligations to do what is necessary to prevent employees from becoming ill as a result of how working time is organised. The regulations list shift work, night work, split working periods, a lot of overtime and long work shifts as examples of possibly unhealthy working time patterns, but also far-reaching possibilities to work when and where you want, combined with expectations of being constantly contactable.

Compared to regulations covering physical health risks, the regulations covering the organisational and social work environment are still fairly general in the way they are formulated. But they will provide support for the Swedish Work Environment Authority's inspectors, and they could also increase employers' awareness of the fact that they must carry out systematic work environment assessments also when it comes to psychosocial health risks.



Researcher Anna Karlsdóttir says the younger generation is well informed, well educated and has new and different visions from previous generations.

Nordregio: Young Icelanders shy away from traditional occupations

Icelandic youths are not interested in a future career in agriculture or fisheries. The only animals they will consider looking after in the future are pets. They would rather become coaches or work in the fitness sector, according to a fresh study from Nordregio which has mapped the future perspectives of young people in the Arctic.

NEWS

24.11.2015

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: YADID LEVY/NORDEN.ORG AND PRIVATE

Higher education and vocational training are important reasons for why young people in the Arctic move to larger towns and cities. They also want to be able to combine work, education and a new place to live. They prefer bigger towns in the Arctic but also want to be mobile if needs be. These are some

of the results from Nordregio's working paper on the future perspectives of Nordic Arctic youth.



Senior Research Fellow fellow Anna Karlsdóttir says young people in Iceland are not aiming for traditional occupations in the countryside.

“I think we need to consider how we want to shape society in rural municipalities,” she says, and proposes that municipalities appoint youth delegates as paid representatives to give young people the possibility to influence how the municipalities develop.

Norwegians think along the same lines

Norwegian youths share many of the future perspectives of their Icelandic colleagues. They want to start a family with a spouse and children, and perhaps also have pets at home, but they do not want to look after cows, sheep or chickens. Anna believes this is interesting in light of how the labour market will develop and also in an Icelandic and Nordic context.

“Right now we are discussing Nordic cooperation on food security. But if young people cannot imagine working with food production or in related areas in the future, we are facing a gap which we must discuss,” she says.

The youth study is part of a larger and more comprehensive project called Foresight which is based on material gathered from several areas in the Nordic region. In Iceland meetings were held with young people in the north-east of the island. The youths were aged 16 to 20+, which was slightly older than the youths in Norway and in the Faroe Islands. Anna believes this might influence results:

“The Icelandic participants had clearer visions and ideas for the future than the other Nordic participants,” she says.

“They would like to gain work experience from larger towns and to be able to move back home again,” she says.

Active in the labour market

There is high youth unemployment among Swedish, Finnish and Danish youths, but Icelandic and Norwegian youths normally start working early on and have more workplace experience. Anna Karlsdóttir thinks this is good. She wonders whether young people who are in the process of getting an education will remain young rather than develop into established adults.

Icelandic youths are following that trend, according to Anna. They just want to study and enjoy a carefree life, and they do not want to take on responsibilities like their parents were forced to do, not for another 10 to 15 years.

“This is also a global trend,” she says.

Health is important

Icelanders are preoccupied with health. They exercise and aim to live long. Previous generations focused less on this. Young people also aim for new occupations, like coaching, working in the fitness sector or with mindfulness. Anna believes the reason for their interest in new occupations could be the fact that young Icelanders have major weight issues.



Icelandic father and daughter playing basketball.



Has EU gender equality policy lost its momentum?

Yes, reckons Finnish researcher Johanna Kantola. The EU Court of Justice, meanwhile, is having a positive impact through judgements which could also have major consequences in the Nordic region, according to Kirsten Ketscher, Professor of Social Security and Welfare at the University of Copenhagen.

NEWS

19.11.2015

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Both were among the speakers at a one day conference at Oslo's House of Literature on 5 November, called 'When gender equality becomes a European matter'.

"Is the EU good or bad for gender equality? Sometimes the EU is very good and sometimes very bad. It depends where you come from," said Johanna Kantola, who still largely be-

lieved there was a lack of vision within the EU system and that the economic crisis had had a negative impact on many gender equality projects.

Kirsten Ketscher, who spoke about the importance of the EU Court of Justice for gender equality, was more optimistic:

“The EU is no more than what 28 countries can do together. The EU Court of Justice represents a power of enormous importance, however,” she said.

The EU Court of Justice interprets EU legislation and makes sure this is adapted in an equal fashion in all EU countries. It also solves legal disputes between EU countries and EU institutions. It must not be confused with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

“Nordic courts often tone down and exist in a kind of symbiosis with parliaments and governments. The EU Court of Justice is highly independent and is a very competent court,” said Kirsten Ketscher.



One judgement which will have a big impact, she said, is Lex Maïstrellis, which concerns the individual's right to parental leave during a child's birth. The judgement was passed on 16 July this year.

Konstantinos Maïstrellis is a Greek judge who applied for parental leave in 2010. It was turned down because his wife was not working at the time. The EU Court of Justice ruled that each individual parent has an individual right to parental leave, and that Greek legislation cannot prevent this. The Greek approach is echoed in Norway, where a man's right to paid parental leave in certain cases depends on whether the child's mother is working.

“The Maïstrellis judgement is like a letter to Norway. The judge, Juliane Kokott, is really wielding the whip!”

The EU Court of Justice is known for basing its judgements on individual rights. As a result it reacts in cases where people are divided into groups for whom different conditions apply.

Unisex insurance

“Another such case is what is known as Test Achats, where a Belgian consumer organisation took an insurance company to court for using average life span calculations to give lower insurance payments to women,” said Kirsten Ketscher.

Since women in most countries live three to four years longer than men, female insurance customers' pension insurance money is stretched out over a higher number of years, making the annual sum lower because the women might outlive men on average.

“The judgement is a huge victory for female insurance customers!”

According to Kirsten Ketscher this means so-called unisex insurance policies will become the norm in the EU and the EEA, where Norway and Iceland are also members. Today only six to seven out of the EU's 28 member states have unisex insurance policies, including Denmark and Sweden.

Five pillars in EU gender equality politics

Johanna Kantola, a researcher at the University of Helsinki, who has written the book *Gender and the European Union* (2010), described the five pillars which the EU's gender equality politics rest on:

- Anti-discrimination
- Positive action
- Gender mainstreaming
- Action programmes
- Funding



Johanna Kantola described each pillar and how they had developed. She also used information from researcher Sophie Jacquot from the University of Louvain in Belgium, whose book ‘Transformations in EU Gender Equality’ has followed developments up until present time.

“The book's subheading is ‘from origins to dismantling’. She shows how all of the five pillars are facing serious challenges.”

The most obvious of these is budget cuts.

“When austerity measures were introduced in Europe, gender equality did not play a major part. But this is about more

than the economic crisis, there is more going on,” said Johanna Kantola.

Fewer directives

“There are fewer directives addressing gender equality coming from the Commission now, and there is a debate about ‘cutting red tape’ which also affects gender equality issues.”

In other instances the Commission tries to introduce directives which are then slowed down by member states, or by the EU Parliament which demands more from the directives than what the Commission has proposed. That is the case for the directive on parental leave, which the Commission passed on 8 March 2010. The Commission wanted to extend parental leave in EU countries from a three month minimum to four months. But the Parliament wanted the minimum limit to be five months.

The issue has been locked for the past seven years, and there is nothing to suggest a solution is anywhere close.

“It would have been nice to be more positive about the development of EU gender equality politics, but I’m afraid my bleak vision is being shared by most researchers in my field,” said Johanna Kantola.