

Portrait

Finland's Anne Berner: We must not
lose the right to Nordic freedom of
movement

Editorial

More cooperation, less division

News

Opening the labour market for
vulnerable citizens

News

The Swedish agreement model's big test

Feb 08, 2016

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 1/2016

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 1/2016

Theme: How are you doing in the Nordic countries?



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

Work Research Institute
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130
Oslo

PUBLISHER

Work Research Institute, OsloMet
commissioned by the Nordic Council of
Ministers.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Björn Lindahl

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.nordiclabourjournal.org

An email edition of the newsletter can
be ordered free of charge from
www.nordiclabourjournal.org

ISSN 1504-9019 tildelt: Nordic labour
journal (online)



Contents

More cooperation, less division.....	3
Sustainability must be based on democracy and has a hefty price tag.....	4
When the diversity diversifies	6
Iceland's Welfare Watch cushioned the crisis and led to stronger Nordic cooperation	8
Kick off for "How are you doing in the Nordic countries?"	10
Art, culture and wellbeing	13
Finland's Anne Berner: We must not loose the right to Nordic freedom of movement	16
The Swedish agreement model's big test	20
Opening the labour market for vulnerable citizens	22
Labour dispute at Icelandic smelter – a threat to the country's agreement model?	24
Nordic countries fight unwanted consequences of EU benefit rules	26

More cooperation, less division

How are you doing in the Nordic countries? asks Finland at the kick-off for the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Finland wants to promote exciting meetings and new thinking. The future is all about finding new ways of cooperating across disciplines and across borders. The Nordic region seeks new perspectives on new challenges. Why?

EDITORIAL

08.02.2016

BY BERIT KVAM

The Nordic model is under pressure. The challenges include economic crisis, a changing labour market, refugees, immigration and integration, an ageing population and young people who can't access the labour market.

[See all the articles in the theme:](#)

New tendencies and phenomena demand new answers and action in order to maintain the welfare society. This is how Finland explains a three year long project which will be a priority during its 2016 Presidency: "An Open and Innovative Nordic Region with Healthy People 2020 – Equal Opportunities for Welfare, Culture, Education and Work".

Step one is to carry out a cross-sector background analysis to review research and assessments from 2011 onwards, in order to get a comprehensive overview of Nordic welfare policy cooperation. The background analysis will be the starting point for a more targeted cross-sector and cross-border cooperation. The aim is to achieve better results, better efficiency and more impact.

The basis for Nordic welfare is an equal and inclusive labour market with a high participation rate among both women and men. The Nordic labour market model is based on trust, driven by a democratic negotiation process between the social partners and authorities. The gap between management and employees is narrow, people tend to be in control of their own work situation, income differences are small and productivity high. This finely tuned system is at risk if we allow the emergence of a shadow economy and dodgy working conditions, a B and C team and rising income inequalities.

Trust is a vulnerable thing.

Finland's Presidency seeks new ways of cooperating in order to create a sustainable development of the Nordic welfare state. That sustainability is to be built on the Nordic region's strengths. Respect for the rules of the labour market and the Nordic labour market model is crucial together with education, culture and health in the welfare society.

Sustainability must be based on democracy and has a hefty price tag

Nordic countries are leading the way in sustainable development and welfare, built on solid democratic foundations. That was one of the central themes when Finland organised its first conference after taking on the 2016 Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

THEME

08.02.2016

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN

NLJ chose to follow the expert debate on ‘Socially sustainable development and the welfare state’, where the Nordic countries were looked at in an international perspective. Ralf Ekebom, Ministerial Advisor at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Helsinki, wanted to pin down one central word in the debate.

“We should not understand the word ‘social’ as aspects linked to individuals and societies, but it should be interpreted as a description of how society functions in general and how it is being shaped.”

He noted that institutions and culture cement societies, while unsustainable development – market failures and financial collapse, corruption, tax evasion, lack of trust, civil conflict, failed states – are the results of weak institutions.

Hefty price tag

Ekebom pointed to the Nordic welfare system’s weak points: the financing of welfare, demographic pressure from immigration and political tension.

“These are facts we need to keep an eye on. The Nordic model comes with a hefty price tag in the shape of redistribution, high employment and high taxes.”

He also argued that the Nordic countries represent an international model for how you build an efficient and well-functioning welfare society.

“That’s why we should highlight the way we work – how did we arrive at the results we have reached?”

Ekebom quoted an interview which the American economist Jeffrey Sachs gave to Helsingin Sanomat where he claimed it was impossible to combine a Nordic welfare model, a large variety of public services, with open borders. Ekebom wondered, just like the Brundtland Commission in 1987, how far solidarity stretches in times of crisis.

Re-inventing the wheel

During the debate, researcher Kirsi-Marja Lehtelä from the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) noted that the Nordic welfare model in itself is an example of sustainable development.

“There is no need to re-invent the wheel.”

Lehtelä underlined that the Nordic countries are building a region of prosperous people not matched by anything anywhere else in the world. The Nordic region’s strength is social development firmly anchored in democracy.

“We have shown that you can use political tools to strengthen social development, the economy and the use of natural resources. We also have a way of governing which involves interest groups, for instance by referring proposals for consultation,” she pointed out and underlined that “democracy takes time”.

Chinese authorities can choose to ignore local people’s concerns, for instance when giving the go-ahead for new construction projects, while Nordic politicians and civil servants are forced to take into consideration various opinions despite the fact that the process is slow.

Political scientist Cay Sevón, a former departmental head and director general at the Finnish Ministry of the Interior, highlighted the power of culture. She talked about culture and education, the right to fulfil your own ambitions and to make a difference in society.

“Art has its own value and should not be seen as a means to achieve other ends – even though artists gladly make themselves available for doing good things.”

Judging from the subsequent discussion, sustainable development and the welfare state is not a theme which creates strong emotions. As Ekebom observed, the human dimen-

sion has been on par with ecological, social and economical aspects for decades in international declarations. The question, of course, is how to achieve all the goals which have been set over the years. He highlighted the European agreement on the freedom of movement and immigration, the Schengen and Dublin agreements, which no longer work.

See all articles in theme

Nearly 15 percent of Nordic citizens were born abroad. Map: Johanna Roto/Nordregio

When the diversity diversifies

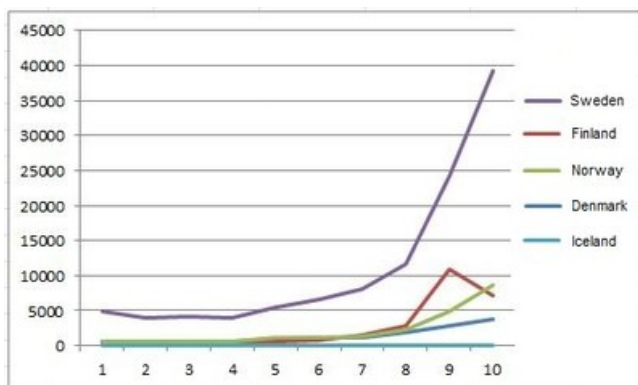
“Immigration to the Nordic region does not only mean more diversity. What we’re seeing now is that the diversity is diversifying. We get super-diversity,” says Tuomas Martikainen, Director of the Finnish Institute of Migration.

THEME

08.02.2016

TEXT AND GRAPHS: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The number of asylum seekers arriving to the Nordic countries in 2015 was more than twice that of 2014. A total of 248,077 asylum seekers arrived last year. Until October all graphs pointed steeply upward in all the Nordic countries except for Finland, which had already started tightening the rules:



Asylum seekers to the Nordic countries Jan-Oct 2015

Major refugee flows have been seen before, like during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Yet according to Tuomas Martikainen today’s refugee flows are different. This is partly down to technology, which makes it easier to move from one country to another and which allows refugees to make quick decisions based on information found on social media.



Then there is the sheer number of refugees.

“There are already more than 150,000 Iraqis in the Nordic countries. That is more than the number of Finns living in Sweden,” Tuomas Martikainen told the conference ‘How are you doing in the Nordic countries?’ in Turku.

Iraqis are already the second largest immigration group in Sweden. The number in Iraqis in Denmark and Finland is also considerable, making them the fourth largest immigrant group in those countries.

“Meanwhile we still entertain old ideas when it comes to how we group different people. We think a person coming from country A must belong to culture B and practice religion C.

“But people are influenced by the social setting they live in. They change and new links emerge. The resulting diversity is not the same that came in to the country.”

As an academic he has studied how people’s religion is influenced by their new country. The Institute of Migration is Fin-

land's only research institute specialising on migration research.

"Muslims in Turku, Vietnamese Buddhists, Iraqi Christian Chaldeans, the Lutheran Ingrian Finns and the Russian Orthodox Christians who live here are not practicing their religion in the same way as they did when they left their countries. The differences are sometimes very big.

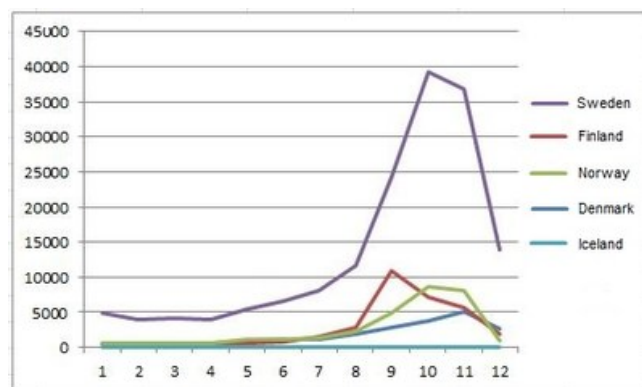
"Take an example from a different country. We all have an idea of what Buddhism is and think about monks living in temples. But in the USA there are Buddhists practising their religion in buildings looking like churches, singing Buddhist psalms while sitting on benches

"None of that happened where they came from."

Hot political potato

The flow of asylum seekers arriving in Europe and to the Nordic countries towards the end of last year became a hot political potato. No political coordination was achieved on a European or a Nordic level. Some countries, like Germany and Sweden, accepted a disproportionate share of the refugees. Thousands of asylum seekers arrived across borders which had not been used by refugees before, like the one between Norway and Russia.

One after the other, European and Nordic countries introduced border controls or limited the access to social benefits and family reunifications. The result was a dramatic reduction in the number of refugees arriving:



Asylum seekers to the Nordic countries Jan-Dec 2015

There is still no end in sight for the Syrian civil war or other conflicts which cause people to flee. As national borders close, mental borders are being moved. Things are happening very fast.

"A year ago we could not have imagined that many would question whether the Schengen agreement on passport-free movement would survive," says Tuomas Martikainen.

In Turku people speak 104 different languages. Five percent of the population speak Swedish, for historical reasons, while another five percent speak different languages.

Begin resembling the local population

"What research has taught us is that immigrants begin resembling the local population, and some people who have had to leave their country once are more likely to move again.

"Finland has one of the least urbanised populations in Europe. But if you look at the 450,000 people who moved from Karelia when the region became part of Russia, they were very much overrepresented during the major urbanisation of Finland which happened after the war."

We still do not know how immigration will affect the Nordic countries, but in Finland you could already see ten years ago a new nationalism emerging through lion-themed jewellery and T-shirts reading 'Thank you 1939-1945' (Kiitos in Finnish). The message was to honour the war veterans.

"This tendency could be found even earlier among youths, 15 years ago."

Two paths

"The welfare state is facing major challenges. What will the future labour market look like and how will the economic basis for the welfare system work? We have an ageing population but also a changing population, where diversity means immigrants sometimes have different needs," says Tuomas Martikainen.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the debate in Finland and other Nordic countries is what all this means for the social contract where we accept the role of the state. What happens if people lose faith in the way the state acts?

Tuomas envisages two different paths for Finland: The country will either arrive at a broader definition of 'us' and who are entitled to stay there, or it will develop a more narrow understanding which will raise the bar for how people are accepted into society.

See all articles in theme



Siv Friðleifsdóttir is Welfare Watch's director

Iceland's Welfare Watch cushioned the crisis and led to stronger Nordic cooperation

The Finnish programme for Nordic cooperation aims to secure welfare by extending cooperation between different government departments and organisations. But can it be done? Iceland's Welfare Watch is one of the best examples of an innovative way to cooperate.

THEME

08.02.2016

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The Nordic Labour Journal has previously written about how the Welfare Watch came to be and the role it played during the economic crisis which hit Iceland harder than other countries in 2008. A group of 35 people were tasked to warn authorities if various social groups were falling outside of the

welfare system, and to come up with ideas for what could be done to prevent it from happening.

No foreign model

Director of the Welfare Watch, Siv Friðleifsdóttir, presented the project at the Turku kick-off conference, and she could find praise from several quarters. Researchers from the University of Iceland have assessed the Welfare Watch's work. Iceland's Minister of Social Affairs, Eygló Harðardóttir, has written this in the preface to the evaluation:

"The Welfare Watch has no direct foreign model to base itself on and can therefore be considered a powerful and successful example of innovation that we Icelanders can be proud of."

Siv Friðleifsdóttir also pointed to how Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the UN's independent expert on foreign debt, visited the Welfare Watch when he investigated how Iceland was handling the crisis. He wrote this in his report:

"Welfare Watch managed to spread the message that during the crisis the weakest in society should be protected."

Iceland is often compared to Ireland in research on the finance crisis.

"The Irish authorities cut unemployment benefits so that it could only be accessed for 12 months rather than 15 months. In Iceland they did the opposite, increasing the period from three to a maximum of four years, although this was later cut back a bit."

Nordic research project

The Welfare Watch also created waves in the Nordic region. It led the Nordic Council of Ministers to launch a three year long research project, which will conclude on 10 November this year with a conference in Iceland.

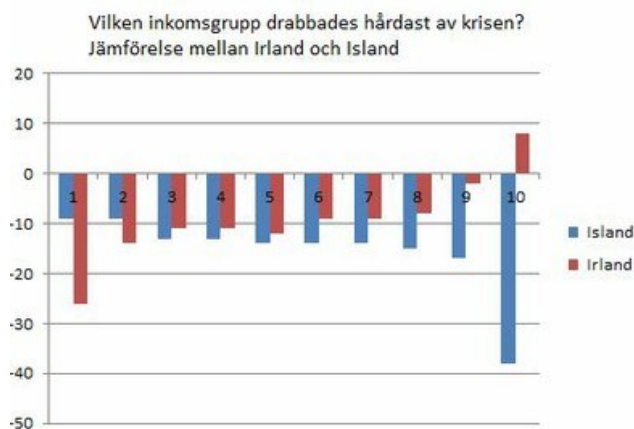
The project, called Nordic Welfare Watch, had three goals:

1. To assess how the Nordic region and other countries handled the economic crisis
2. To assess how the Nordic countries can better prepare for economic crisis and natural catastrophes
3. To develop common indicators for how to measure welfare

The results from the research on the crisis management strategies are presented on a dedicated webpage, [welfarecrisis](#). It allows the reader to compare how different countries like Ireland and Iceland handled the crisis and shows that the Icelanders weren't blowing hot air when they said they were protecting the weakest in society. If you look at the development in disposable income in the two countries during the year of the crisis, 2008, and then look at ten different income brackets where 1 represents the lowest income and 10 the highest, the differences are striking.

In Ireland, people in the bottom income bracket lost 26 percent of their income, while the corresponding group in Iceland only lost nine percent. People in the highest income

bracket in Ireland saw their income rise by eight percent, while the richest in Iceland lost 38 percent of their income.



*Which income group was hardest affected by the crisis?
A comparison between Iceland and Ireland. Source: Stefán Ólafsson: The Icelandic Way Out of the Crisis*

See all articles in theme



How do you communicate only with your hands? Jennifer Joffs from Dansfadder company got the conference hall on their feet

Kick off for "How are you doing in the Nordic countries?"

Kick off in Turku/Åbo for the Finnish Presidency and a great drive for Nordic cross-sector cooperation. How can work, welfare and culture be combined?

THEME

08.02.2016

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO BJÖRN LINDAHL

How are you doing in the Nordic countries? That is the simple question from Finland when it puts water, nature and people centre stage during its Presidency.



"The Nordic region is doing well, despite our current problems both with the refugee situation and with our borders," is the brief answer from Finnish government minister Anne Berner.

She wants to do something about these challenges. Anne Berner is the Minister for Nordic Cooperation. During the Finnish Presidency, she heads the cooperation between the cooperation ministers from the other Nordic countries.

She and her colleagues have initiated a Nordic prime ministerial meeting to allow the prime ministers to discuss how to restore freedom of movement within the Nordic region and at the same time put the refugee issue on a joint agenda - because these two issues go together. Still, she says:

"The Nordic region is doing well. The lives of Nordic citizens are steadily improving, they enjoy better health, schools keep getting better and there is strength in the fact that we enjoy far more gender equality than people in other countries," she points out.

27 January saw the kick off for Finland's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2016 in Åbo/Turku, and the starting point for the cross-sector project "An Open and Innovative Nordic Region with Healthy People 2020 – Equal Opportunities for Welfare, Culture, Education and Work."

Open and innovative

"In 2016 it is 60 years since Finland participated in a Nordic meeting for the first time," said Minister Berner in her opening speech.

"Back then too, welfare was on the agenda. Much has happened since, now the new question is how the Nordic welfare model should develop in the future."



One of the conference's cultural performances was "Dynamic Challenge" with Vilja Parkkinen

New questions and new phenomena need new answers. This is the starting point for the three year long cross-sector prioritisation project, a joint initiative between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Employment and the Economy.

The initiative contains proposals which include political sectors within culture, education, society, health, equality, employment and innovation. Welfare, diversity, gender equality and culturally sustainable development are common themes for the project and for a range of conferences which are to be held during the Presidency. The project will continue during future presidencies.

Nordic added value

The aim is to create a joint vision on a political level for how to maintain knowledge development which brings added value on a Nordic scale. The Nordic political cooperation on welfare is to be strengthened and developed through the exchange of information. Children and youths are a priority.

"We are struggling with issues like sustainability in our welfare services, cooperation between different players and the third sector. This innovation project might allow us to find new ways of doing things and new ways of cooperating.

"The project should support different solutions. Structural challenges are real for everyone in the Nordic region, and especially in Finland," says Minister for Cooperation Anne Berner.

She highlighted the importance of digitisation in the developing of the welfare sector. Digitisation improves access to services, for instance cultural services, and better use of electronic data strengthens scientific cooperation between institutions and countries.

Nordic cooperation on research can contribute to improving the health and welfare sectors, underlined Anne Berner and mentioned research on register data, biobanks and public

health research as examples where better cooperation can improve the research's international standing.

"The way in which we cooperate and make use of digitisation can foster new solutions, and we can help each other going forward."

Social entrepreneurship

The Minister for Cooperation was particularly keen on improving employment in a socially sustainable manner through social entrepreneurship.

"We need new ways of promoting social entrepreneurship in the whole of the Nordic region in order to create welfare and to look after all human resources," said Anne Berner in her opening speech at the kick off for the Finnish Presidency.

"One hundred years ago women were given the right to vote. This meant more justice but it also led to more creativity. Gender equality is important, so is integrating everyone - including the new people coming to the Nordic region."

Nordic freedom of movement

Removing border obstacles and strengthening the freedom of movement between the Nordic countries has been on the agenda since the Nordic Passport Union was introduced in 1954. It remains a key area for cooperation during the Finnish Presidency.

See all articles in theme



"The welfare state looks after our needs, and that is good. But the flip side is that we don't need each other the way we used to. That is why there is a lot of loneliness in our societies. Culture can help bring people together," said Johanna Salander

Art, culture and wellbeing

What if we turned the pyramid upside down and allowed the ministry of culture, rather than the ministry of finance, to be in charge of social development? What would happen if that ministry, which is usually bottom of the hierarchy, could prioritise measures to promote sustainable development? Would it make a difference?

THEME

08.02.2016

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

This image was presented to the participants at the conference 'How are you doing in the Nordic countries' by Efva Lilja, head of Dansehallerne in Copenhagen. She was one of the artists who talked about the importance of art and culture to health, wellbeing and sustainability in the Nordic region.

It is nearly 100 years since Director Johan Throne Holst at the Freia Chocolate Factory commissioned Edvard Munch to decorate the workers' dining hall with 25 monumental works. Critics said this was a waste of time. Throne Holst insisted the art was important for wellbeing, health and productivity.

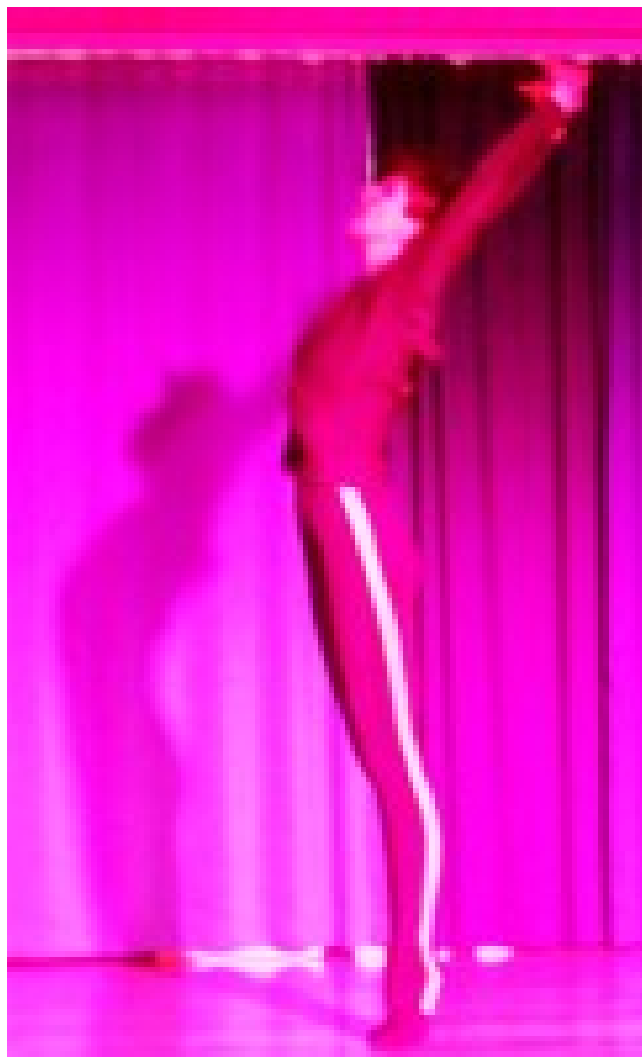
Edvard Munch was not the only artist who was granted this honour, Johan Thorne Holst wanted to engage the greatest contemporary artists.

This resulted in works by Edvard Munch in the dining hall and sculptures by Gustav Vigeland in the Freia park, which was established for the workers' healthy rest and joy. Director Thorne Holst was ahead of his time when it came to the development of occupational health services and the use of art to promote health, wellbeing and sustainability. The Freia dining hall is now listed and the Munch frieze is considered to be one of the artist's most important works. The Freia park is still a green lung in Oslo's east end, and Vigeland's sculptures continues to please workers and visitors.

What should art be? Something only for art's sake, or a tool for something more? The debate was alive 100 years ago, and is still a very topical issue which Efva Lilja highlighted.

Art as a spearhead

Not everything which is called art is considered by the refined elites to be art. Finnish dancer and choreographer Tiina Lindfors used her presentation 'Art spearheading wellbeing' to demonstrate how she would differentiate between rubbish and good art, like van Gogh. At the same time she performed a dance which she had choreographed herself.



The performance touched the audience both because of the dancer's expression and because she literally touched the audience with her hands. This became an encompassing end to the conference, where art and culture took centre stage in the interaction for a sustainable development of the welfare society.

Dance was used to highlight the importance of art and culture to health and innovation in the care sector. A video showed how residents at an old people's home were activated and energised through the use of music and movement, coordinated by the culture worker's movements.

Artistic director Johanna Salander at Ögonblicksteatern (an independent theatre company) from Umeå in Sweden, used a range of examples to illustrate how artistic work could lead the way out of loneliness both for immigrants, people with physical handicaps and people on the edges of society. She told the story of a Syrian choreographer who came as a refugee and had ended up somewhere in northern Sweden far away from everything he was used to in Damascus. His meeting with Ögonblicksteatern gave new meaning both to him and to the theatre group, and showed the way into the new culture and new environment he was becoming a part of.

“The welfare state looks after our needs, and that is good. But the flip side is that we don’t need each other the way we used to. That is why there is a lot of loneliness in our societies. Culture can help bring people together,” said Johanna Salander.

Art heals

The hospital clown has become a well-known phenomenon in all of the Nordic countries.

“We don’t know whether this way of bringing the circus clown into hospitals has a healing effect on illness,” said Nina Svane-Mikkelsen from the University of Bergen. Her talk was called ‘Art heals’.

Yet there is no mistaking the joy that art can give children in hospitals or residents in old people’s homes through the use of clowns or dancers, and the importance this has to people’s health.

Nina Svane-Mikkelsen wants to investigate the existing research on art and healing.



Jennifer Joffs from the Dansfadder company visits different institutions with professional dancers

“Art is not medicine. It is not easy to measure cause and effect. Therefore you need to investigate the importance of art in different ways.”

There is good evidence for saying that memory conversations, music and creative stimuli have a positive effect on people with dementia, for instance.

Another example is the work which the StormP Museum has done with art and inclusion. The museum wants to investigate how art, humor and satire can make a difference to the individual.

The StormP Museum works to bring art and culture out to people who cannot get to the museum themselves. The museum also runs a project to help people who are psychological-

ly vulnerable, which could help them get back into working life.

Music therapy is the art form with the best documented healing effect. The authors of the book ‘Sansernes hospital’ (The Hospital of Senses), written for the Danish Rigshospitalet’s 250 year anniversary in 2007, wanted to highlight the link between medicine, architecture and art. One of the book’s main points is that there is scientific evidence for a link between stimulating surroundings and healing. One conclusion is that moving to a humanistic, stress-free hospital concept further improves the effect of already established medical science. The book’s authors write about how healing music has been used to great effect in intensive care.

Art for equality

Finland has just launched the research programme ARTSEQUAL to look at the importance of art for wellbeing and sustainability. The programme focuses on gender equality, participation and a creative Finland, says ARTSEQUAL’s Deputy Director Kai Lehtikainen, who was one of the speakers on Nordic research initiatives on culture, wellbeing and sustainability.

ARTSEQUAL: The Art as Public Service: Strategic Steps towards Equality is financed by the The Academy of Finland’s strategic research council.

One of ARTSEQUAL’s key ideas is that all people have the right to participate in art no matter the time or place, where you live, your age or your gender. The role of research is to find research criteria for how art and the use of it can strengthen wellbeing and a sustainable development in a systematic fashion, and support the development of creative, socially engaged and responsible people.

See all articles in theme



Finland's Anne Berner: We must not loose the right to Nordic freedom of movement

It has been eight months since business woman Anne Berner became a minister in Finland's new centre right Sipilä government. She plans to stay in politics for one term, which means she has no more than three years and four months to implement her plans. And she has her plans laid out.

PORTRAIT

08.02.2016

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

"Personally I am dedicated to creating an electronic ticketing system which makes it easier to buy tickets when you want to travel between Nordic countries by train. That would mean a lot for the freedom of movement," says Anne Berner.

She is the Finnish Minister of Transport and Communications and Minister for Nordic Cooperation. A joint Nordic in-

tegration policy and the removal of border obstacles are top priorities for the Nordic cooperation ministers.

"I'll ask if there's anything I don't understand," she says with a hearty laugh when we agree that she can speak in Swedish and I can speak in Norwegian.

"My mother tongue is actually German, but Swedish is fine," she says, and goes on: "I am actually an immigrant child of parents arriving from Switzerland."

She is Swiss-Finnish and masters at least three languages, has German as a mother tongue and attended the German school in Helsinki. Since Finland is a dual language country she speaks both Finnish and Swedish, in addition to English and French. My Norwegian is easy enough to understand too.



Anne Berner represents the Center Party of Finland (Centern), sister party to Norway's Center Party and the Swedish Centre Party. She was appointed Minister of Transport and Communications by Prime Minister Juha Petri Sipilä (Centern) when he formed his centre-right coalition in May 2015, with the Finns Party and the National Coalition Party.

A political novice

You were described as a successful business woman and now you are a politician. What happened?

"I really don't know," she says, shaking her head.

What is the main difference?

"Everything is different."

Could you give us an example?

"The main difference?" She pauses.

"I approach the role as a minister like a vote of confidence. With your own background, what you have learned and what you know, you want to use this position to put something back into society. This has always interested me. I have always worked for the third sector and I have always created new projects. I have always been active in that way.

"But politics does bring some surprises. For me, making decisions is something which is based on facts and knowledge, but in politics it doesn't always work like that. Politics is often

based on how things look or on tactical values. This is difficult for me. I can only do a job that I believe is right. I must make decisions based on what I believe is right."

Can you give me an example of what you feel is difficult?

"There are so many. I think it is important in politics not to lose something of yourself, and not to give in to pressure from the public or the media. Sometimes it would be very easy just to give in to the pressure. It is not easy to fight it. It can be tough."

From politics to business, or vice versa

Anne Berner is not the only one who has gone from private business to politics with little political experience, but not many are offered or accept that challenge. She thinks the country benefits from more people alternating between politics and business.

"It is more common in the USA. Both sides benefit from it. It gives a mutual understanding and respect both for how politics and the private sector work. We don't have this mobility in the Nordic region. You need to grow up inside the political world in order to be accepted and then stay on that path. Or you must grow up in business.

"But what I have tried to do with my decision is to show people that you can be a politician for a while and then return to business. We shall see how it goes. We need that kind of mobility."



The minister has given herself one term in politics. That means she needs to work efficiently with the things she wants to see implemented. She gestures how a period in government has a beginning and an end. From the end she can count back to a beginning in order to figure out how much time she has left to achieve various things.

"If I want to see changes to our transport system, or if I want to get rid of these three border obstacles, if I want this to happen I need to know when the legislation must be ready, when

the decision must be made in parliament, when the legislation will be implemented and when I can see the result. Then I can make plans accordingly.”

What are the major issues?

“One is to change Finland’s transport system so that it works. Right now it doesn’t.

“The other is that we need a new financing model for infrastructure. We have not been able to invest in our transport system for years. We need to do that in order to create business opportunities. Our transport system is stuck in a downward spiral. We need growth, and in order to improve public services and to save the environment, public transport needs to become more popular. To manage that we need to change the system, we need more entrepreneurs, we need innovation, we need digitalisation and we cannot do all this if regulations obstruct all change.”

You want more private players on the scene?

“Yes, Nordic societies are small. Their populations are limited and there is a limit to how big the public sector can be. But the public sector in the Nordic countries is large compared to the private sector. We need more growth and we need better services. To manage this we need public sector reforms and better integration between the public and private sectors.

“Private companies must be able to provide more services and the public sector needs restructuring in order to become more innovative and dynamic. To change these structures we need the third sector. The third sector is able to identify weak spots in society. We have now for instance identified weaknesses in the system for receiving refugees. We would not have been able to handle the refugee crisis without the help from the Red Cross and other voluntary organisations. This shows the need for restructuring and a more dynamic public service.”

Immigration a bonus

Has being an immigrant child instructed your view of today’s immigration?

“Yes, I believe it has, the fact that I experienced Finland in the 70s when immigration policies were very strict. I believe it is important not to take too many steps back, but to move forwards. We will always need immigration. It is very valuable for any country. We get knowledge, culture, new points of view, diversity which can help businesses secure better knowledge about exports for instance.

“So I think it is important to distinguish between refugee policies and immigration policies. We need to apply a human approach to refugee policies and help as much as we can. Refugee policies and immigration policies need different political and concrete tools.”

Should there be a tightening of refugee policies?

“The refugee situation does have some elements which are not so good. We have a strict policy because human trafficking is not good, and because we don’t want to inflict more hardships on people. We need a uniform policy, so that we don’t give hope to more people than those who we can accommodate.”

Does that mean you can accommodate more than today?

“In Finland we have said there are limits for how many can come, like in the rest of the Nordic region, that we will struggle with good integration when we are not in control of how many are arriving. That is why it is important that we have a clear and uniform refugee policy which does not accept illegal immigration but which always helps those who need it.”

Nordic minister for cooperation

Finland holds the 2016 Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Speaking at the launch of the Presidency she underlined the need to get rid of border obstacles between Nordic countries. Right now it looks like things are heading in the opposite direction. Border controls have been reintroduced in order to control the flow of refugees. Yet freedom of movement is at the very core of Nordic cooperation.

“Yes! And we must not loose this, and must work to keep it. That’s why we have done three things:

“First of all we need to gather the prime ministers. We must say that a future Nordic region needs freedom of movement and we have to work towards this. We are facing a temporary problem, but the vision must be a borderless Nordic region. We must not loose the right to move freely within the Nordic region.

“Secondly, we have to remove the other border obstacles in order to support the free movement of labour and between businesses. We cannot have border obstacles which limit development.

“Thirdly, we need to work towards a joint integration policy, to avoid the situation we are in right now. We must learn from the examples of good integration policies for the future. We can learn from Sweden which has accepted many immigrants. We can learn from Norway which has a different situation, and a different background, we can learn from Denmark which has a border across which the labour force has wandered back and forth for as long as anyone can remember. So we need to work to make sure things improve.

“With our joint EU policies, even though not all Nordic countries are EU members, we need to work together to improve the EU’s refugee and immigration policies, making sure external borders are maintained so that we avoid having to impose border controls within the union.

“We need to do this in a much better fashion.”

Nordic countries leading the way

She calls herself Nordic and praises Nordic cooperation. Now she wants the Nordic region to play a stronger role, leading the way as a region on an international level.

“The Nordic region has values which must be maintained. The region has a reputation worldwide as a unique entity – a handful of countries sharing values, with a unique welfare state model which allows for unique opportunities. We have our passport union which has been a trail blazer in Europe. We now need to be pioneer in different areas.”

In what way do you think the Nordic countries have been leading the way?

“Digitalisation,” she says enthusiastically as if she was opening Sarepta’s jar.

“We need to create digital opportunities and this also concerns the freedom of movement. Electronic identification which makes it possible to exchange services across the Nordic region. Personally I am dedicated to creating an electronic ticketing system which makes it possible to buy tickets from Norway to Sweden and Finland. That would mean a lot for the freedom of movement.

“It could be about services in the health sector, allowing us to exchange and use data freely, and I think the Nordic region should lead the way in European and create standards for instance for 5G, like we did it for MSM and GSM.”

Women, the Nordics’ advantage

The Nordic region’s greatest strength might be the high number of women in the labour market.

“Absolutely,” she agrees, giving this a thumbs-up.

“The Nordic region has a great advantage in its high level of gender equality. This has been a great strength. Women often apply a different kind of logic, a different emotional basis and different preconditions. Everything is needed, all the different ways of leading, all the knowledge.

“But there are certain obstacles, certain difficulties. There are often more women in the service sector, the social sector, in the public sector, but there are fewer business people and less entrepreneurship. This is something we can improve on. We need more women who are willing to lead the way, we need more women who can bring other women with them. We are still struggling with the problem that women don’t bring other women with them. This is an area where we still need to do more.”

You mentioned you were inspired by an international women’s network?

“This has been a great source of inspiration. I was invited to speak about ownership in the USA, and then they invited me to become a member. I have met women who have made a huge impression on me, and I believe that if I had not met these women and seen their ambitions, their complete openness and their total willingness to help, and their trust, I don’t think I would have entered politics. From the USA I learned that you can be a politician for four years, and then move on to the private sector.

“To achieve something similar in the Nordic region we need women who do the same, who put themselves out there, who are willing to share and who are willing to bring other women with them.

“But if women are not willing to take the risk of entering politics, and it is in fact a risk, if we do not get these examples, we will not get others to follow. And these examples are so important. This evening I am meeting a small network of twenty women who have been part of a mentor programme. I spend quite a lot of time talking to young women. To try see how they can become more self confident and how to become entrepreneurs. I have always said that you need to have a voluntary drive in order to remember why we are doing this.”

Your voluntary work is helping other women?

“My voluntary work is to help entrepreneurs. Recently I have spent a lot of time helping build a children’s hospital. When it is completed near the end of 2017, I have also always had women who I have been mentoring – or I have given them a kick and told them: now you need to move on up.”

The Swedish agreement model's big test

In 2016 the Swedish wage setting model is being put to its biggest test for several decades. Agreements must be made for some three million employees, but the members of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) are split, and different demands from different unions and trades risk breaking a nearly 20 year old tradition where the industry has set the norm for wage increases.

NEWS

08.02.2016

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“It is no exaggeration to say Swedish wage negotiations are facing a crisis, where the model that we know is at stake,” says labour market journalist Tommy Öberg.



He has been covering the labour market for four decades, at Svenska Dagbladet and elsewhere. This autumn he published a book together with another experienced labour market journalist, Anna Danielsson Öberg. In ‘Leading jersey or

straightjacket – the faces of Sweden’s wage setting or the story about how we got there’, he describes how today’s wage setting model has developed, where the so-called industry agreement has dominated labour market agreements since 1998.

That agreement introduced a compromise where trade unions promised to respect the wages in the competitive industry and employers backed down from their attempts to wreck central agreements.

The ‘cost mark’ was the norm

The industry agreement meant the consensus reached between the parties in the export industry became a standard for other wages. They introduced the so-called ‘cost mark’, which meant their agreement became the norm for the rest of the labour market’s wage demands.

“The basic idea behind the agreement, apart from protecting the industry’s competitiveness, was and remains to put a cap on wages in the rest of the labour market. But if the industry’s agreed wage increases are topped by those of a range of other unions or trades, the industry agreement ceases to exist,” says Tommy Öberg.

The model has been successful if you consider real-term wage increases and the absence of industrial action. But it coming under increased criticism. There is growing support for measures aimed at increasing lower wages, especially within female-dominated trade unions like Kommunal (the Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union) and Handels (the Commercial Employee’s Union).

And there is certainly agreement within LO that the pay gap between women and men should be halved by 2028. Yet when it came to real action, like when the 14 LO unions were supposed to agree on common low wage measures, the cooperation fell apart.

Separate wage demands

As a result, LO unions will be presenting separate wage demands during wage negotiations this spring. We already know that several unions will increase their demands to 3.3 percent, which is higher than the 2.8 percent demand from unions representing workers in the competitive industry.

Other unions are also increasingly irritated that industry unions and employers are the norm-setters. Susanne Gideonsson, President of Handels, told the daily Dagens Nyheter that “we are not in the industry’s or anyone else’s pocket. Handels’ role is to make a second ‘mark’ for the wage negotiations: the equality mark, for women and low earners.”

The way employers are increasingly demanding more control over working hours is also being criticised, as are the so-called numberless agreements, which means wages are set locally.

Clumsy government intervention

There is also a new and unexpected aspect to this spring’s wage negotiations. Last summer the government decided to award three billion kronor (ca €320m) to teachers. Their reasoning for entering the wage setting was that higher wages will improve teachers’ status and position in the severely criticised Swedish school system.

The government’s action contributes strongly to putting the wage setting model at risk, where the social partners negotiate independently and agree on wages, claims Tommy Öberg.

“This clumsy intervention with three extra billion for teachers represents a serious threat to wage stability mainly in the municipal sector, but it will also influence the entire labour market and hence society as a whole. We could see demands for compensation spreading across the board and conflicts could become commonplace,” he says.

Push for lower starting wages

As always the wider world plays a part in how the social partners present their demands. This time the refugees have become part of the wage negotiations. Employers are using them as an argument to lower or at least freeze starting wages, arguing this is the only way to get them into work.

“We recognise the pattern. Last time it was young people’s chances of finding work which fronted the same demands. The disagreements this time are therefore not based on formulations or the actual demands, but in the number of new arrivals to Sweden,” says Tommy Öberg.

The question is whether today’s agreement model will survive? It will no doubt be put to the test.

“It is hard to predict what will happen, at least with any degree of certainty. But there is a considerable chance we will end up with a messier and more conflict-prone labour market. A more optimistic or alternative view is that the industry

remains strong enough so that no-one else can shift the cost mark for wage increases,” says Tommy Öberg.

Opening the labour market for vulnerable citizens

One hour's work a week is better than nothing. That is the thinking behind the major drive in recent years to get vulnerable Danes into the labour market. New research shows businesses are ready to create small jobs for vulnerable groups.

NEWS

08.02.2016

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Flexjobs reform, unemployment reform and sickness benefit reform. Denmark has reached a range of major political agreements in recent years aimed at moving vulnerable citizens out of welfare dependency and into work and self sufficiency. The common aim for all the schemes is to link vulnerable citizens with a business as quickly as possible – even if the road to full employment is long.

So far it seems many Danish companies are positive to finding a space for colleagues who might only manage to contribute a little bit to the workplace.

A fresh report in the wake of the reform of the flexjobs scheme shows that it is possible to get people with severely reduced work capacity into flexjobs. Small, private businesses in particular are very willing to create flexjobs for vulnerable citizens who are only able to work for a few hours a week.

The reforms of the early retirement scheme and flexjobs were implemented on 1 January 2013, and one aim was to make it easier for vulnerable citizens to find a flexjob were they could work very few hours a week.

In this the reform has succeeded, according to SFI, the Danish National Centre for Social Research. Its report, "Citizens in flexjobs after the reform" was commissioned by The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment and Reform, which comes under the Ministry of Employment.

Business advantage

Helle Holt is a senior researcher at SFI's research department for employment and social inclusion, and one of the authors of the new flexjobs report. She sees clear signs that businesses are happy to help vulnerable citizens secure even the smallest link to the labour market:

"The report shows that it is not as difficult as you might expect to get businesses to create small flexjobs. Our annual

corporate social responsibility survey also shows that businesses are fundamentally positive to helping contribute to such schemes as long as they are not too complicated and if there is the necessary support from job centres."

She also believes businesses appreciate other benefits of including vulnerable citizens.

"It can improve workplace moral if you are seen to be charitable and helping vulnerable citizens on their way. Flexjobs can also solve smaller tasks, which frees up time for other workers."

Helle Holt has been doing employment policy research for many years, and sees a clear pattern in recent years' major reforms of the flexjobs scheme, unemployment benefits and sickness benefits. They all focus on increasing vulnerable citizens' work capacity.

"Many Danes are passively receiving benefits, and all the reforms have the overarching aim of reducing the number of people taking early retirement by directing more people towards employment.

"That is why all the reforms aim to strengthen the work capacity of vulnerable citizens. Even the smallest of workplaces can be used, and all capable citizens should get into a workplace."

New buzzwords

"Empowerment" and "progression" are some of the buzzwords surrounding the focus on work capacity, explains Helle Holt.

"Empowerment is about motivating the individual to feel in control of his or her own life. This has long been an issue in the social arena, and now too when it comes to the labour market.

"Progression has become a buzzword because vulnerable citizens face so many other challenges other than not having a job, and their road to finding work is dependent on many small steps. It is important to measure that progression."

Flexjobs is in essence an offer for those who function best within the group vulnerable citizens outside of the labour market. Those who are too ill to have a flexjob will usually be offered a so-called resource pathway with a rehabilitating approach.

As of today, only one in ten resource pathways are business-related, but the government wants to change this. One tool which will be used is a new project called JobFirst, which is an offer for 2,400 vulnerable citizens in 16 municipalities.

They will get the chance to try out different work responsibilities and businesses. The project should lead to a better understanding of how vulnerable citizens can gain a place in the labour market.

The government-appointed Carsten Koch committee highlighted the fact that business-related offers represent the most efficient tool for getting vulnerable citizens into employment. The committee has carefully studied employment policies and recommended new solutions, like not trying to solve vulnerable citizens' social and health issues before trying to find them a job, but parallel to that effort.

Only when a vulnerable citizen is too weak both for a flexjob and for a resource pathway, he or she should be offered early retirement.



Rio Tinto Alcan's smelter in Straumsvík, near Reykjavik, Iceland

Labour dispute at Icelandic smelter – a threat to the country's agreement model?

A bitter labour dispute between trade unions and employers at Rio Tinto Alcan's Icelandic smelter Isal is in its second year.

NEWS

08.02.2016

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: RIO TINTO ALCAN

Workers have twice threatened to go on strike, but have pulled back at the last minute because of fears the smelter would be shut down. Six trade unions are negotiating, but most of the 500 employees at the smelter in Straumsvík belong to the Hlíf union.

The unions want wage increases in line with what other trade unions in the industry have achieved. But the issue which

have led to negotiations grinding to a halt, is Rio Tinto Alcan's desire to outsource certain tasks. The company leadership wants to outsource just over 30 jobs. The unions oppose this, arguing that everyone should be paid the same and that this should be made a statute in the new wage agreement.

An agreement from 1972 bans the company to outsource work without the agreement of the unions. Rio Tinto Alcan claims this weakens the company's competitiveness.

Negotiating without the power to do so?

The Icelandic employers' union SA negotiates on behalf of the smelter, but the negotiation delegation is mostly made up by representatives from the factory leadership. The Hlíf union says the negotiation delegation basically does not have the power to reach an agreement with the unions.

"Whenever we believe we are getting close to a deal, the employers' delegation has to make international telephone calls to discuss it with the Rio Tinto Alcan top leadership. They are always told no, and the negotiations stop," says Hlíf's leader Kolbeinn Gunnarsson.

The employers' organisation SA's lawyer Ragnar Árnason does not consider it unusual that the negotiation delegation calls the group's leadership to discuss proposals for a deal.

"Both parties in the labour market have the right to negotiate and present their demands, but no-one is forced to reach an agreement. The employees have the right to strike, and employers have the right to impose a lockout," says Ragnar Árnason.

Locked situation

Icelandic media have launched various theories for why the conflict is so entrenched. One is that the company really is looking to renegotiate the agreement it has with the state energy company Landsvirkjun to buy electricity. The agreement runs all the way to 2036.

"The employees have concluded that the employer would welcome a strike, as that would give them a chance to close the factory," says the union lawyer Ástráður Haraldsson.

"We believe the mother company would not at all be interested in ending a strike. In which case we are locked in a situation which nobody knows how to solve," he continues.

The negotiations have not been helped by the fact that the Rio Tinto CEO Sam Walsh wrote an email to all employees in early 2016 announcing all wages in the gigantic raw material group would be frozen for the whole of 2016. Rio Tinto is one of the world's largest producers of iron ore and prices are record low. This means negotiations have yet again stalled.

Possible sympathy action

Iceland's trade union movement is discussing sympathy actions in order to force the aluminium giant back to the negotiating table. The leader of the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, Gylfi Arnbjörnsson, has said limited strike action, a ban on overtime and export bans are all measures under consideration. Other trade unions can also call for sympathy strike action.

Hlíf's leader Kolbeinn Gunnarsson says Icelandic workers should get a 32 percent wage increase between 2013 and 2018 according to the collective agreement. Rio Tinto Alcan's employees have so far not been part of the collective agreement for aluminium workers, but have had a separate agreement with the company. Now, Hlíf will demand a collective agreement with Rio Tinto Alcan, to secure the employees the same wage increases as Iceland's two other aluminium companies.

Nordic countries fight unwanted consequences of EU benefit rules

The EU's rules on social security benefits need modernisation and the cost must be shared more equally between member states. If not, liberal benefit systems like those found in Nordic countries might not be sustainable, argue Nordic governments as they join forces to push the issue in the EU.

NEWS

08.02.2016

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

Strictly speaking, all member states can decide for themselves who is entitled to claim unemployment benefit, parents' allowance, child benefit and so on. They also decide the benefits' size. There are no EU rules covering these issues. However, there is an EU regulation saying social security systems should be coordinated, without having to be similar.

The aim is to ensure that workers who move between countries do not lose the benefits they have already acquired in their home country. And if they go on to claim social benefits in their new country, these should be in line with what the citizens of that country get. This is all to prevent people losing out by making use of the freedom of movement.

In reality these EU rules are chipping away at EU and EEA countries' self-determination, even if that is not the intention. A country might have to pay benefits which the legislator had not envisaged during the creation of the social security system.

Stay-at-home mum in a different country

One example is that rights belonging to the individual worker according to the member state's own legislation, could be turned into rights covering the entire family when the Court of Justice of the European Union interprets the EU regulation. In practical terms this could mean that a woman who does not herself meet the requirements of the Swedish parental allowance system, might still be able to claim it if her husband has gone to Sweden to work. She might well be a stay-at-home mum in the country where the husband comes from.

Another consequence of EU rules is that a member state might have to pay social security benefits without having received the taxes meant to finance them. This is because you also have to take into consideration the amount of time someone has spent working in other countries, when decid-

ing whether he or she qualifies for benefits in their new country.

That is why a woman, who had only been working in Switzerland and for whom Sweden had never received any social security contributions, was still entitled to the full Swedish parental benefit.

Two statements

These consequences of the EU's social security regulation are particularly obvious in countries with advanced welfare systems. But now this regulation is due a review. In light of that, Nordic governments have agreed to strengthen their cooperation on social security matters. They have presented a range of conditions that the revised regulation should fulfil.

They begin by underlining that the regulation is an important tool for supporting the freedom of movement for workers in Europe and the Nordic region. The Nordic countries do not wish to limit the freedom of movement. In that sense they differ from the UK, which right now is trying to negotiate a deal where citizens from other member states are not entitled to any social benefits until they have been working and paying taxes in the UK for four years.

They argue the regulation on coordination of social security systems needs to be developed and modernised to mirror the current situation and the Nordic countries' welfare system. You need to secure a balanced distribution of costs and solidarity between the member states.

Gender equality important

The government ministers responsible for health and social affairs underline the importance of gender equality to Nordic social security systems. Therefore, they argue, the EU regulation should as much as possible build on individual rights and mirror today's family situations and the work/family life

balance. The definition of family benefits must be just and fair.

The statement from the Nordic labour ministers centres on unemployment benefits. They point to the fact that there are considerable differences in wages and living conditions between the 32 EU/EEA countries. They argue that any coordination of unemployment benefit systems must take this into consideration. The regulations must also not undermine the use of active labour market measures which Nordic countries have been using for years.

Today unemployed people can keep their unemployment benefit for three months while looking for work in other countries. One proposal put forward in the debate, is to prolong that to six months. That is not necessary, argue the Nordic governments. Recruitment processes have changed and people use the Internet and modern communication technology to apply for jobs across borders, the labour ministers write.

They might not spell it out, but the entire statement suggests they suspect there is quite a bit of fiddling going on. That is why EU rules must support the use of an active labour market policy, which links benefits to the applicant being active and available. They must also make it easier for member states to check that people who carry their unemployment benefits to other countries are actually actively looking for work.

The coordinated regulation must not undermine some of the countries' high benefit levels, the labour ministers conclude.