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Theme: A good working environment – the Nordic region's strength

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Contents

Why working life is key

The thinking surrounding the working environment is changing. Demands for new knowledge and increased productivity, an ageing population and not least the unfathomable costs of a bad working environment are all factors that call for fresh thinking. What works? Paying your way out of the problems, or putting work's content centre stage? And what happens in the new labour market which is now emerging?

EDITORIAL
23.10.2017
BY BERIT KVAM

Work-related accidents and injuries costs the EU €476m every year, according to figures presented by the ILO at the international working environment conference in Singapore recently. On a global level the number of fatal accidents continue to rise, despite a parallel rise in declarations and resolutions aimed at improving the situation.

That is why Finland's initiative of turning good intentions into reality got a lot of attention. Right there and then the first step on the road to creating a global working environment coalition was taken, as the Nordic Labour Journal describes in this month's theme: A good working environment – the Nordic region's strength.

The working environment is one of the Nordic region's strengths. But this has not happened in a vacuum, and it is not without challenges. The story From soot to sun highlights the long fight against disease and injuries caused by bad working environments. The good news is that it no longer is the same materials that represent the biggest threat today. Improvements in working environments have been successful, threats change over time, and each era has its challenges.

Today the sun is centre of attention. More than half of reported work-related deaths were caused by cancer, while heart and coronary disease is behind one in four deaths. Workplace accidents only represent two percent. German cancer researcher Claas Ulrich is one of those who point to the major challenges and issues that need to be addressed in this area.

The sharing economy is but one example of how new technology changes and challenges working life. The Danish government has presented a strategy as their first step towards regulating the country's sharing economy. The social partners say more than that is needed if you are to create safe frameworks for people working there.

The new labour market with greater cross-border mobility is also a double-edged sword for the working environment. We see this in Iceland where the need for labour has created a wave of foreign workers finding jobs both in tourism and in the construction industry. It helps Iceland's economy grow, but also creates language problems which can increase the risk for workplace accidents and injuries.

The thinking around the good working environment has become blurred recently, believes the Director General at the Norwegian National Institute of Occupational Health. The Nordic region is good at change, but you need to focus on the right issues if you are to achieve your goals of for instance increased productivity. Many associate a good working environment with good welfare and profitability, and not so much with how to prevent work-related illness or injury. That is why Pål Molander focuses on the good things about the Nordic working life. You need an organisation which allows the individual to thrive and do a good job. The Nordic region must not forget the true meaning of a good working environment, he says.

Maria Albin echoes his thoughts. In the face of current demographic challenges, she focuses not only on the challenges facing individual people, but on the actual nature of the work. The professor from Karolinska Institutet is the keynote speaker at the European working environment conference in Bilbao in November. She will talk about the challenges of an ageing workforce and how to make it easier for people to retire later, as she explains to the Nordic Labour Journal.

Workplaces must take the ageing workforce into account

When the workforce ages, workplaces face new challenges. This is particularly true for occupations where physical work makes up nearly all of the working day, according to Maria Albin, the keynote speaker at a European high-level conference on the working environment to be held in Bilbao in November.

THEME
23.10.2017
TEXT : BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: ULF SIRBORN

Maria Albin is Professor of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Karolinska Institutet, and spent two years on the Commission for Equal Health, established by the Swedish government in 2015. Its task was to propose measures for how to bridge the health gap in Swedish society. On 21 November, Albin is the keynote speaker at the Health Workplaces for all Ages, organised by the European Agency for Safety and Health at work, EU-OSHA.

"In Sweden we work into old age, in Norway they work even longer and the Icelanders are world leaders. This development is necessary, because we live longer and must finance the pensions," says Maria Albin.

"Yet at the same time we see the problems arising out of this development. Especially within physically challenging jobs. The mental capacity is rarely a problem when people get older, but after 40 their physical strength quickly fades."

Muscle mass halved

A 90 year old only has half the muscle mass of a 20 year old. When you turn 50, your muscle mass is reduced by one to two percent a year due to natural processes. This development could accelerate due to factors like a bad diet, a lack of physical exercise and chronic inflammation.

"In many occupations you use your physical strength nearly to the limit, like in the care sector and construction industry. When you have to work until you are 60 to 65, and preferably until 70, in order to maintain a decent pension, it becomes too exhausting," says Maria Albin.

She sees the need for a 'mid-life conversation', where people talk with their employer about how to adapt their working situation. If not you risk an elder generation which no longer manages to fulfil the demands of the job, resulting in lower retirement pay and bigger social gaps.

"We need a planned career path, because these are predictable problems. We need better matching between the individual's abilities and work demands. If not people will be asked to do things they cannot do. In certain occupations, like cleaning, this both means making the job easier to per-

form, and looking after the skills which the individual possesses. Older people might be good in other areas, they can be mentors or work with planning."

A need for skills improvement

Society as whole needs to contribute too, says Maria Albin:

"We need a safety and training package where you can improve your skills in mid-life."

If employers fail to see the importance of looking after the older workforce, legislation might also be necessary.

The Netherlands has introduced rules limiting the number of hours older people can work with waste collection. For the rest of the time, they have to drive the waste truck or do other tasks. But this does not solve the problem of the gap between people increasing with age. That is why it is better to make it easier to introduce individually adapted solutions in workplaces.

"For older people it is not only important to reduce the amount of physical work. You also need to give them more hours to recover."

There is, however, risk connected with introducing individual rules for older workers. If this is not done in cooperation with the social partners, such rules can further increase age discrimination.

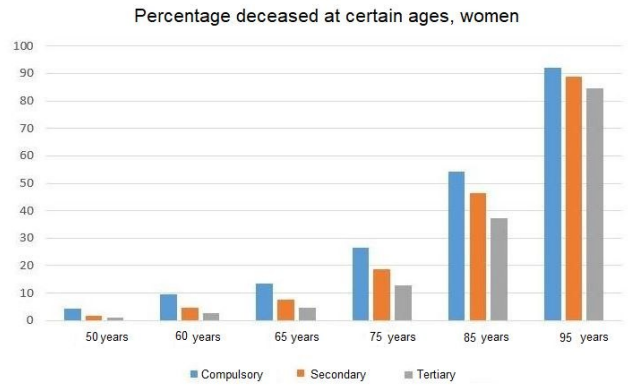
"The way workplaces adapt to the ageing workforce will be different in different countries, and between different workplaces. But systematic measures are needed to stop differences increasing even more."

A large health gap

The Nordic countries enjoy high levels of income and are considered to be very egalitarian, yet there are still major differences when it comes to health. One way of looking at this is to note the life expectancy in different groups of people. Since this continues to rise, the 'normal' age to die is also changing. In Sweden the normal age to die is 89 to 90 years for women, and between 85 and 90 for men, regardless of education levels.

If you compare groups with different levels of education, those with a higher education live longer on average than those with only upper secondary education. There is also a gender difference – women live longer than men in all education groups.

After reaching 30, women with only secondary education live on average another 51.4 years. Women with further education live on average five years longer, another 56.4 years. For men the difference in further life expectancy is even larger between people with lower and higher educations – a full 6.4 years.



Another way of looking at this is to see how many have died at a certain age. In the bar chart above the number of women who have died are divided into three different education groups. The taller the bar the higher the mortality.

"There is a debate around whether these differences stem solely from the fact that people with higher educations get jobs that are less staining and risky, or whether the education itself has an impact on life expectancies," says Maria Albin.

"The idea is that people with a higher education are better equipped to handle a complex workday, and that this has a positive effect on their health."

But do any studies show this? Do highly educated immigrants who only get low-skilled work live longer than immigrants with a low education who drive a taxi?

"It is impossible to say, since not being able to work according to your education also has negative effects," answers Maria Albin.

When the commission for equal health finally presented its recommendations, they were not so much focused on how the health care sector should be reorganised or improved. If you want to eradicate the differences in health, you need to broadly and systematically improve things from the beginning of people's lives – with well-developed maternal health care, improved education and – as a result – better chances of finding a job.

"There simply are no shortcuts when you want to reduce the health gap. To bridge that gap you need to take many steps going in the same direction, through a process where you create ownership for the parties concerned," the commission concludes.

One of the suggestion the commission made was to establish a new, national centre for knowledge about and the assessment of working environments.

Pål Molander: The Nordic region must not forget the importance of a good working environment

A good working environment is good for business, says Pål Molander, Director General at the National Institute of Occupational Health. What is more: The Nordic countries have successfully adapted the working environment in the face of a changing labour market. The working environment has been a strength in the past, and must remain so in the future, he says.

PORTRAIT
23.10.2017
TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: CALIAS PHOTO, EIRIK LINDER ASPELUND

People have become less aware of the importance of a good working environment, and what a good working environment is, says Pål Molander.

In social settings he often asks people what they associate with 'a good working environment'. He says more and more often people mention good welfare, the ability to exercise during working hours and the flexibility to take time off to sort out private issues.

"We are forgetting that the working environment is a about organisational issues, and that this influences the entire busi-

ness in good and bad ways, all of the time. It is, and must be, part of the whole, all of the time. A good working environment is not a coat you can wear when you feel like it, but a basic way of organising work."

STAMI, the National Institute of Occupational Health, does not work directly with businesses, but provides research in cooperation with the social partners and other parties like the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority, occupational health services and trade associations.

The Director General is also a member of the working group which focuses on strengthening the execution of The Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life (the IA Agreement). Molander has also been asked by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to lead the expert group which will evaluate models for the future occupational health service.

There are many networks and many meetings. Pål Molander travels a lot and is often away from the office. So much so that he misses his favourite office chair and conversations with colleagues. He is very sociable. His infectious laughter very probably helps keep the STAMI working environment healthy. The average retirement age there was 68 in 2016 – the official Norwegian retirement age is 67.

Still, he worries that all the meetings he has to attend mean he cannot contribute enough in the office, and that he loses the personal contact with the life on the inside.

Working environment for sale?

"In Norway we have reached the conclusion that the term working environment has become too wide," says Pål Molander, referring to the debate between the social partners and in his networks.

"There are many myths around health and safety. There is a growing belief that you can buy yourself a good working environment. It is becoming more and more common for businesses to buy private healthcare for their staff, for instance. But according to figures from the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) it has had zero impact on sickness leave numbers."

Molander thinks there has been too much focus on health.

"Since reducing sickness leave has been a goal, various methods have been tried out to achieve this. We've seen everything from offers of psychotherapy to training and activities during working hours. It has had no effect. The problem is often that those who are in danger of falling outside of the labour market rarely make use of these benefits. On the contrary – people of good health and those who exercise anyway are the ones using them.

"Mindfulness is another example. It's good to chill out, but it does not lead to a better working environment.

"There is far too much focus on health," says Pål Molander, who represents the medical profession himself. He wants focus on prevention:

"The working environment is all about the job. As an employer you have to prevent stress by taking organisational action which can lead to change, for instance when it comes to how workers experience demands and control over their own working situation.

"Norway has Europe's highest levels of sick leave, but also the most inclusive working life. When many people with chronic diseases or reduced functional abilities are included into working life, we need to take into account that sick leave levels might rise," says Molander in his capacity as a member of the working group for the IA agreement. The tripartite agreement on a more inclusive working life has three main aims: to reduce sick leave, include into working life more people with reduced functional abilities and get people to retire later. Yet the work to include more people with reduced functional abilities has so far yielded no results.

Not enough focus on women and violence

STAMI has just presented a survey which compares working environments in Norway and the EU. It shows things are not so good in certain areas in Norway. Work has become more intense and more people feel they have less control over their own work situation. What is your comment?

"This comparative survey has a somewhat shallow basis. The way things are measured varies between countries. This makes it difficult to compare, but the numbers you quote for Norway speak clearly enough. This is what engages me – the awareness of the working environment has deteriorated. This is not good."

The survey also shows that Norwegian women are more exposed to violence and sexual harassment in working life.

"This has a lot to do with the gender-segregated labour market. More women work in relationship-based occupations where they are more exposed to violence. We do not focus enough on the increase in violence.

"We will do something about this."

Good at change

With all the technological and demographic change, working life has become vulnerable. Molander reminds us of the Norwegian government's Long-term Perspectives on the Norwegian Economy. It calls for higher productivity in the labour market in order to maintain the current level of welfare. The working environment is the most important tool to make that happen.

"Norway is at the forefront when it comes the changes in the labour market. This is a positive thing. If we are to maintain

the gold standard which we have enjoyed in the Nordic countries, it is important that we know how."

That is why Pål Molander wants to change the narrative of what the working environment should be, and increase knowledge of what a good working environment is. And right now, things are changing a bit faster than before, so it is important to influence the organisational factors. When Molander is on the road, this message is well received and embraced by everyone, because it will have an effect on our competitiveness.

He highlights the tradition inherited from the pioneers within research and practice, and talks about what the ideas of a man like Einar Thorsrud, the first head of Oslo's Labour Market Research Institutes from 1965, contributed with – including the trials of cooperation between the social partners, LO and the employers' organisation NAF, the precursor to NHO.

The action research helped prepare the ground for the development of new ways of cooperating, an industrial democracy and participation in the labour market. The cooperation trials were pushed forward by the need to document the link between a good working environment and productivity. This also formed the basis for the first working environment act.

The psychological work demands for a good working environment, as described by researchers Einar Thorsrud and Fred E. Emery in their book 'Towards a new industrial organisation' ('Mot en ny bedriftsorganisasjon'), are still as relevant as then he thinks: The need for meaningful and varied work; the need to learn something at work and to keep on learning; the need to have some authority and make decisions within your own field of expertise; the need for human support and respect; the need for meaning and to see the link between the job you perform and the bigger picture; the need to experience the job as being of value; the need to be able to step back and have space to yourself. The need for a democratic level of influence, to be seen, to be fairly treated and to be shown respect.

Prevention in the field

Pål Molander is keen to focus on preventative measures. The occupational health service is important here. Whether today's solution works satisfactorily has been subject to debate. There is also some doubt surrounding what is the responsibility of businesses and what is the responsibility of the occupational health service. These are some of the issues the working group that he leads will look into.

"The working group has been given an exciting mandate. We are working to develop several different models for how the occupational health service's work can be adapted. Businesses should still be obliged to seek help and advice when risk levels demand it. One important part of this work is to investigate the pros and cons of the different models. This will form the basis for the ministry's further work with finding the most efficient and targeted solutions which benefit the Norwegian labour market the best," says Pål Molander.

The Labour Inspection Authority is another authority which STAMI provides scientifically based knowledge to. They help the authority decide where and how to perform their risk-based inspections. Around 50 percent of the Labour Inspection Authority' capacity is linked to preventing labour market crime. With that in mind, it is important that risk-based inspections of businesses are based on knowledge.

Costs undervalued

The link between a good working environment and productivity – and the other way around, how much is costs to ignore the working environment – is not a new thing. But it gets more and more attention.

At the recent World Congress on Safety & Health at Work in Singapore, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, EU-OSHA, together with the ILO, presented an estimate that showed work-related accidents and injuries will cost €476m a year.

"We are no doubt in a phase where the focus on the costs of bad working environments is increasing," says Pål Molander.

But in addition to calculating the losses to society, it is also important to focus on the individual businesses' losses – and the gain too, when you succeed. That is when the numbers in question quickly increase.

"This is a new field of research. You need to estimate the effect of interventions, the effect of optimising the working environment. This is a growing field. The main effect is win-win.

First step towards a coalition for safety and health at work

Fresh global statistics from the ILO shows both workplace accidents and work-related disease with fatal consequences increased during the 2010s. This could explain why Finland's September initiative to make good on all lofty declarations on improved working environments and health got such an enthusiastic welcome around the world.

THEME
23.10.2017
TEXT: MARCUS FLOMAN, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

It was pushing 30 degrees in Singapore during the four September days of the World Congress on Safety & Health at Work 2017. There seemed to be a long mental distance between the hyper-modern glass conference centre Sands Expo to underpaid workers doing overtime, fatal accidents and workplace injuries.

Or in the case of migrant workers: The threat of being deported if they demand fair pay and tolerable working conditions. These underpaid, suppressed workers are found around the world, but also in Singapore. The venue for the ICOH congress was not a coincidence – the country has been working hard to build on strategies aimed at solving workplace issues. Just like in Finland.

The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has for many years helped calculate global statistics on workplace accidents and work-related diseases for the International Labour Organisation. Fresh figures show the deaths of 2.8 million people per year can be linked to workplace accidents or work-related diseases.

Finnish initiative

During the 2000s Finland has also been working hard to introduce preventative measures in the fights against workplace risks. At the world congress in Singapore, Finland's Minister of Social Affairs and Health presented an initiative for a global path towards a better working environment.

"Both in the speeches I gave and in bilateral talks during the congress, I highlighted the Finnish initiative of putting words into action when it comes to employment protection. I believe it was very important that the initiative expressly came from a government minister," says Pirkko Mattila, Finland's Minister of Social Affairs and Health.

There was preliminary support from several key players, including the ILO, the World Health Organisation, the EU and the European social partners.

How do you take that big step from words into action?

"Of course, this will not be a simple task. The real tools needed to achieve change exist in the legislation of individual countries. During international meetings you tend to commit to the changes, and we also have the ILO which can apply pressure. It is up to national lawmakers to impose sanctions in order to give more substance to employment protection," says Mattila.

Sanctions or cooperation?

Pirkko Mattila is asked how employers, especially multinational companies, should be encouraged and pushed to guarantee liveable working conditions for employees.

"In the Nordic countries things are mostly good, and we have a dialogue between employees and employers. There is also the principle of working towards a zero tolerance of workplace deaths. But there are of course big differences in how business operate around the world. For many, safe and tolerable working conditions are also part of preserving their reputation as a business," says Mattila.

Mika Poikolainen is a Finnish trade union representative who participated in the Singapore working environment congress. He is a working environment expert with the Finnish Industrial Union.

"Looking at the companies which are breaking the law in both Finland and globally, I believe we need considerably stricter punishments. There is a need for harder sanctions and stricter government control. I believe there is a need to

boycott companies and states that stomp on workers' rights. We must not accept companies that profit from blood money," says Mika Poikolainen.

He underlines how important it is to remember how dangerous substances can lead to deaths long after they have been banned.

"During the conference, one of the things trade union representatives talked about was how the unions have been pushing and succeeded in banning asbestos in many countries. Yet in our country people are still dying because they worked on buildings which contained asbestos. Asbestos is still being used in many countries and people in many occupations are exposed to it. A lot of work and global cooperation is needed to ban asbestos globally," says Poikolainen.

During the interview, Mika Poikolainen several times points to preventative work – being one step ahead – as being the key to progress.

One of the major risk factors when it comes to workplace safety is when people work too long hours. Tired workers are more at risk of injuring themselves or colleagues.

Protect the workers!

"Sometimes it is easy to forget why we have working hours legislation. It is there to protect the workers! Employers often say there is a need for flexibility and open borders. But people working too much really represent a risk, we need limits on overtime," says Poikolainen.

Speaking of overtime, Singapore is again a good example. According to the Singapore-based charity Transient Workers Count Too, nearly 70 percent of foreign construction workers work so much overtime that they are in breach of legislation limiting overtime to no more than 72 hours a month. One in three construction workers work more than 12 hours straight in a 24-hour period.

The work going forward

Wiking Husberg, Ministerial Adviser at the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, has been working with these issues for a long time. He too is very much aware of the fact that spreading good practice globally will not be an easy task. He knows that improving working environments is a complex issue. It covers reducing the risk for accidents and illnesses, dangerous exposure, improved ergonomics and psycho-social issues as well as promoting humane contracts and types of work.

"One very important point is that if businesses and working environment specialists base their work on the so-called vision zero (no injuries, no accidents, no work-related diseases), it has an effect on all the different areas. Fortunately this vision zero has broken through on a high level, including among G7 countries, within the ILO and on company levels. I could mention Finland as an example: We have a vision zero forum with more than 400 participating businesses," says Wiking Husberg.

This autumn work is underway to gather as many countries, associations and partners as possible to come together in a kind of coalition for a better working environment and for better working health.

"Those who join sign up to work to help each other and begin adopting all the fine principles in the many declarations in real life. We are now working globally to increase the number of partners who are willing and interested in taking part and contribute to this work. This kind of major coalition does not get off the ground during a four day long congress. A small working group together with the ILO is preparing a global meeting where interested countries and organisations can confirm their commitment and lay out which resources they can offer," says Husberg.

From soot to sun – the long fight against occupational disease

Has the 250 years' fight against occupational disease come to its end? Today's risk factors are not soot, radon or asbestos, says the EU work safety agency. The top risk, is in fact ordinary sunlight.

THEME
23.10.2017
TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN, QUEENSLAND HEALTH DEPARTMENT

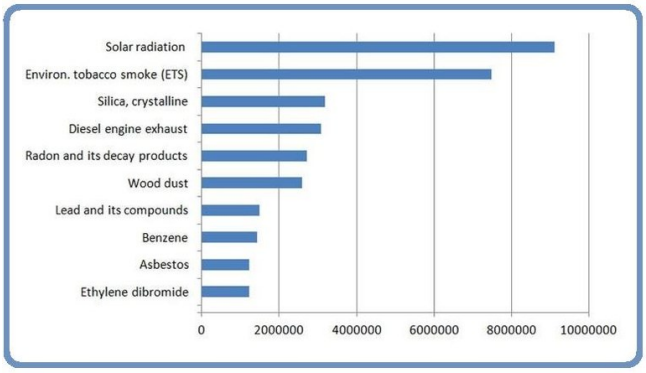
Measures to improve the working environment have had some success, and as a result miner's lung, hearing and vibration damage or more modern ailments like repetitive strain injury (RSI) no longer count among the most common occupational diseases. Top of that list now is cancer.

52 percent of all deaths related to occupational diseases in the EU are caused by cancer, according to the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, EU-OSHA, statistics. Coronary heart disease represents 24 percent of the 106,000 annual deaths, while workplace accidents make up only two percent. All other diseases make up 22 percent of deaths.

Skin cancer is the most common of the cancers. The most common cause among workers – by a great margin – is exposure to sunlight during outdoor work.

The high number of sick workers is not, however, a result of what people are being exposed to today, since many types of cancer develop over a long period of time. The greatest impact on the statistics is the type of working environment people had 10 to 30 years ago.

The main cancer-causing factors as listed by the CAREX cancer database for 15 EU countries between 1990 and 1993 are these:



If you include all of the EU 28 the number is even higher. 14.5 million EU workers are exposed to solar radiation during 75 percent or more of their working hours. That is 7.4 percent of all workers.

Between 1990 and 1993, 7.5 million workers were exposed to passive smoking, which was then the second largest risk. Since then, smoking bans in workplaces and restaurants has reduced the number of people exposed to this.

Respirable crystalline silica (very fine dust containing quartz), diesel fumes and wood dust were relatively equal. 2.5 to just over three million workers were exposed to these hazards.

Strong correlation

The International Agency for Research on Cancer IARC, part of the WHO, concluded that there was "sufficient evidence in humans for the carcinogenicity of solar radiation" as early as in 1992.

There are three types of skin cancer:

Malignant melanoma is the most dangerous kind. It develops gradually from skin cells that start to grow uncontrollably. In the last stage, it creates metastasis which spread to other parts of the body.

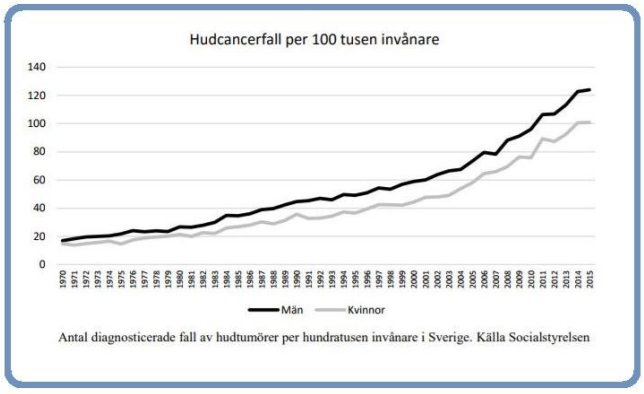
Squamous cell carcinoma is an external cancer which attacks the most sun-exposed skin. Survival rates are good if treated early.

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer. It does not spread and treatment is nearly always successful.

Malignant melanoma can also have genetic causes, but researchers say an obvious link between UV exposure from the sun and the risk of developing both squamous cell and basal cell carcinoma has been known at least since 2011.

Summing up the research, the German skin cancer researcher Claas Ulrich and researchers from ten other countries write: "It is unfathomable that many EU member states have yet to translate that knowledge into adequate strategies to prevent the disease."

The skin cancer rates among fair-skinned people in Europe, Australia and North America have grown by three to eight percent year on year for the past 30 years. These are statistics from Sweden:



The number of skin cancer cases increases among people with fair skin. Statistics from Sweden

Despite the large number of skin cancer cases, this is not an occupational disease which gets the attention it deserves, according to Swen Malte John, Professor of Dermatology at the German Osnabrück University, and Nikos Manaras, Senior EU Affairs and Media Coordinator at the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology.

"Affected workers go unnoticed, un(der-)reported, unscreened, uncared for and uncompensated," they sum up in an opinion piece in Euractive.

The main reason is that the UV radiation people are exposed to at work is no different from what they are exposed to in their spare time. Then there is the added dosage which is self-imposed by those who use tanning salons or who holiday abroad.

Sun radiation has different effects on different skin types. Researchers divide sensitivity into four groups. On a beach in Spain you can easily spot the differences – and the way different people use more or less protection

Employers can argue that holiday-related sun exposure is the determining factor, but an employee should not be treated differently because he or she has fairer and more sensitive skin than their colleagues.

"People are insured 'as they come'. This means those with heightened sensitivity can become ill at lower levels of exposure than the average person," writes Birgitta Meding in a chapter on skin disease as occupational damage, in one of the standard texts about occupational diseases.

Tanning salons increase risk

In 2009, UV radiation from other sources expect the sun were also included – to the great disappointment of tanning salons. Studies had shown that sunbeds, where you are exposed to sun radiation three times stronger than the midday sun at the Equator for shorter or longer periods of time, also considerably increase the risk of developing cancer.

The risk was directly linked to how often people had been using a sunbed. Those who had used one 10 times or less were 34 percent more likely to develop malignant melanoma, the deadliest type of skin cancer. Those who tanned themselves 100 times or more saw their risk increase by 272 percent.

Only a few European countries have so far accepted UV radiation from the sun to be a valid reason for receiving compensation for work-related damage. Denmark was one of the first countries to do so in 2005.

Since then, however, only some 50 cases of work-related skin cancer as a result of solar radiation have been reported in Denmark. It is the same in several other countries. But Germany stands out. Within 12 months of work-related squamous cell carcinoma was categorised as an occupational disease on 1 January 2015, 6,000 cases of this type of skin cancer, or preliminary stages of it, were reported.

"The most affected industrial sectors are agriculture and construction with a wide spectrum of other outdoor branches, including public services. The case of Germany undoubtedly gives a first impression of the challenge ahead of us," writes Claas Ulrich.

Different attire for outdoor work – workers in Oslo and in Queensland, Australia, where the worker wears long sleeves, sunglasses and a sun hat

When assessing a work-related injury in connection to the possible link between exposure to UV radiation and skin cancer in Sweden, the exposure at work must be greater than exposure during non-working hours.

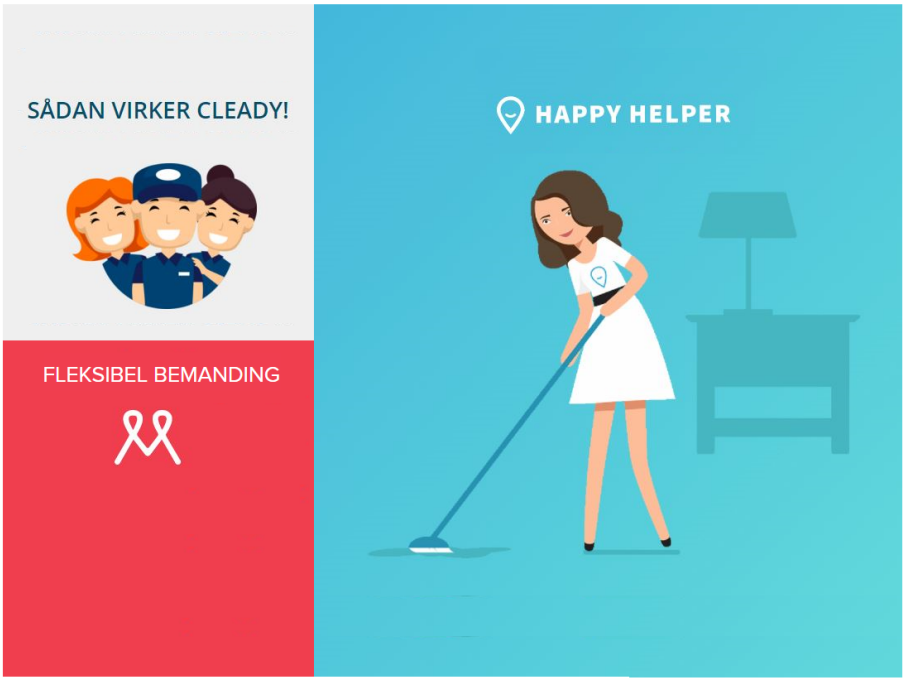
Germany has taken a different approach, where UV radiation at work must be at least 40 percent of the total dosage. The dosage is calculated in units called SED (standard erythema dose):

The table below shows how many years you need to work outdoors in order to qualify for compensation:

Age	50	60	70	80
Lifetime dosage accumulated, (SED)	6500	7800	9100	10400
Work-related dosage	2600	3100	3640	4160
Years of compensation-entitled outdoor work	15	18	21	24

The annual non-work-related sun dose in Germany is estimated to be 130 SED annually, 170 SED if outdoor work is included. Source: JDDG

After retirement, the amount of non-work-related sun exposure increases. As a result, in the German system the number of years you need to have been working in order to be entitled to compensation increases.



Danish sharing economy strategy just a first step

The government's long-awaited sharing economy strategy is a first, small step towards regulating the sharing economy in Denmark, but the social partners agree more needs to be done.

NEWS
20.10.2017
TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

With its 22 proposals, the Danish government's new sharing economy strategy says a lot about taxation and a little about workers' rights. The aim is to give the sharing economy room to grow in Denmark.

Presenting the strategy, the Minister for Industry, Business and Financial Affairs Brian Mikkelsen (Conservative Party) said there was a need for more and larger sharing economy businesses. He also wanted more Danes to be able to benefit from the opportunities the sharing economy brings. This would stimulate development and growth which would benefit the environment, society as a whole and private individuals' economy, he said.

Central to the strategy is to make it easier to be a citizen as well as a sharing economy business. The government wants to lower taxes on income generated from renting out accommodation or cars, when the activity happens via a platform which makes sure that revenues are being reported to the tax authorities.

A new website will make it easy for citizens and businesses to find answers to their questions about the sharing economy, and the government wants to create a partnership with the social partners to discuss how the labour market best can prepare for the future challenges which the sharing economy might bring.

Taming the wild west

The social partners have reacted positively to the invitation to a dialogue. The Confederation of Professionals in Denmark (FTF), which represents 450,000 employees, welcomes the fact that the government invites employer and employee representatives to jointly investigate the sharing economy.

If we want to create safe frameworks for people working on the digital platforms, employers, employees and the government need to work together, commented Bente Sorgenfrey, the FTF President.

She thinks the sharing economy has so far been a "wild west with no regulation of working conditions or taxation", and she is happy that the government with its strategy aims to make sure sharing economy income is being taxed. She would have liked to see the government go even further to secure tax revenue.

The Danish Chamber of Commerce also compares the sharing economy to the wild west.

The sharing economy has great potential when it comes to securing a better use of resources and giving consumers opportunities that they like. But we must avoid a wild west which operates outside of normal rules, said Geert Later Christensen, Deputy Director at the Danish Chamber of Commerce in a press release.

He joins the FTF President in praising the government's sharing economy strategy for preparing the way forward in terms of revising rules covering the sharing economy, and to secure the taxation of revenues. But he underlines, just like the FTF President, that the strategy is not enough. These measures represent a step in the right direction, but it is crucial that they are now put into action, he says.

Clarification needed

Around one in five Danes have used sharing economy services, and in 2016 the sharing economy grew by 7.5 percent, according to surveys from Nordea. But so far the sharing economy has only made a small contribution to the national economy.

The Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs estimates that the total revenue for car sharing, private car hire and private accommodation rentals in 2015 was around half a billion Danish kroner (€67m). The sharing economy counts for much more than renting out cars and houses, however, and the sharing is not only between private individuals.

The term also applies to digital platforms which make it easy to find people who can carry out a particular task at a particular time. These are often run by commercial companies which avoid permanent staff by hiring labour and skills according to demand.

Danish LO and a range of media therefore feel the term 'platform economy' is more accurate than the sharing economy. The weekly Mandag Morgen writes that it is time to agree on the rules for a labour market where digital platforms play a central part:

"When more and more people work via the platforms, there is an urgent need to clarify rights and responsibilities and to

adjust the way in which the welfare state's support and social services are being funded. This is a part of the 'sharing economy' which the government's strategy by and large does not address."

Smells of employer

More than 20,000 Danes are offering their labour via the five largest sharing economy platforms that link those who need labour to those who offer it, according to a survey published in early 2017 in the weekly Ugebrevet A4. It looked at the business concept for five different platforms, which according to the Danish Ministry of Business can be categorised as platform economy businesses: Happy Helper, Handyhand, Cleady, meploy and Jobbi.

The five platforms offer cleaning and gardening in particular, but also other services. According to Ugebrevet A4, none of them considers themselves to be employers, but experts quoted in the publication disagree. One of them is Per Kongshøj Madsen, Professor Emeritus at the Department of Political Science at University of Aalborg, and contributor to the Nordic Council's analysis of the platform economy in the Nordic labour markets. He thinks the platforms have elements "that smell of employer":

He told Ugebrevet A4 that the kinds of platforms that facilitate jobs, systematically exploit well-known judicial grey areas between salaried work and other types of employment, in order to develop their business concepts.

A majority of Danes fear that the platform economy can lead to a society with more temporary workers suffering from low pay and bad working conditions. This is also suggested in a survey made for Ugebrevet A4 by Analyse Danmark. 58 percent agree that sharing economy platforms lead to lower salary levels, while just nine percent disagree.

Native language disappearing from Icelandic workplaces

Iceland is experiencing enormous growth. Every year thousands of foreigners arrive to help Icelanders in the labour market. Tourism represents the largest area of growth, but the construction industry has also grown enormously. The English language is increasingly being used within both trades. Many Icelanders are worried about the Icelandic language's position in the multicultural society.

NEWS
20.10.2017
TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: FRIÐRIK FRIÐRIKSSON AND SIGRÚN JÚNÍA MAGNÚSDÓTTIR.

Benedikt Hilmarsson, head of construction firm Fjarðaverk, has employed Polish workers for some time. The working language is mostly Polish, he says. He needs foreign workers and feels it is best if all the construction workers come from Poland. He has one Polish worker who is married to an Icelander, who works as a workplace interpreter. But colleagues do not always listen to younger people's instructions. Benedikt Hilmarsson has at times felt so frustrated with the communication problems that he has considered learning Polish.

"It's the only thing missing. If I was 30 years old I would do it, but I have turned 60. It's a bit late now," he says.

Icelanders get edgy

Sigrún Hólm Þórleifsdóttir runs the N1 petrol station in Egilsstaðir in the east of Iceland. She is in charge of hiring staff and explains the difficulty of finding people since there is nearly no unemployment in Iceland. Right now she has staff from Germany, Sweden, Poland, Hungary and Moldavia. She has previously hired people from Ireland and Azerbaijan.

Head of service and petrol station N1 i Egilsstaðir, Sigrún Hólm Þórleifsdóttir, together with her staff

Sigrún Hólm says Icelanders sometimes become edgy and rude, even aggressive, when service is given in a language other than Icelandic. But most of them are understanding.

"It's a difficult situation since we don't have enough domestic labour. We are forced to employ foreigners in order to manage in high season," she says.

The right to get served in Icelandic

It is often said that all Icelanders speak English, but Professor Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson at the University of Iceland says older people do not always understand English and do not dare speak English. He also believes Icelanders consider it their right to speak Icelandic in Iceland. Icelandic is after all their mother tongue, so they can get irritated when they are not being served in Icelandic.

Professor Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson believes Icelanders have not been good enough when it comes to teaching foreigners Icelandic. Language classes are limited, there are not enough language teachers and the teaching material is inadequate. He also criticises the fact that highly educated immigrants study Icelandic together with immigrants who completely lack a formal education.

No need for Icelandic

Sigrún Hólm Þórleifsdóttir at N1 does not see how she can teach her staff Icelandic, since most of them are only staying in the country for short periods of time. They speak English with each other, and so they do not always have a need to learn Icelandic.

"We send staff on language courses if they are staying for at least six months in Iceland," she says.

Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson also points out that people working 10 to 12 hours a day do not want to spend their spare time learning Icelandic.

Language barriers too great

Sveinn Reynisson is used to foreign workers in his Norðanmenn construction company. He has previously hired people from Eastern Europe, but no longer does. He thinks the language barriers are too great. He believes Eastern Europeans speak too little English. People working on Norðanmenn's construction projects must be able to understand what Sveinn says, or else he might get trouble.

"They are good labourers, but their working methods are different from ours. When they don't speak the language we cannot cooperate," says Sveinn Reynisson.

They only work there

Benedikt Hilmarsson at Fjarðaverk mainly hires Poles, but also Icelanders sometimes. He says he knows nothing about the Poles except the fact they are working for the company. He knows nothing about their private lives. They are always very nice when he visits the construction site, but his contact is for obvious reasons only with the Icelandic-speaking foreman.

"It is sad to visit the lunch room and meet ten men, only to be able to talk with one of them," he says.

A vicious circle

Þorbjörn Guðmundsson, executive officer of the Federation of Skilled Construction and Industrial Workers (Samiðn), is worried about foreigners being paid less than Icelanders while being forced to pay more in rent because they are so dependent on their employer.

Professor Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson is worried about a two-tier society, with highly educated Icelanders in high salary jobs, and immigrants with low educations who speak poor Icelandic and become stuck in a life-long poverty trap, a vicious circle with bad pay, low education and limited opportunities for workplace advancement.

He is also worried the language criticism could represent a growing level of racism in Iceland.

TBU at 50: Wage formation – the Norwegian model's unique attribute

The basis for the Norwegian version of the Nordic model is a shared understanding of reality before the parties begin wage negotiations. The result has been few conflicts and narrow pay gaps.

NEWS
05.10.2017
TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: JAN RICHARD KJELSTRUP/ASD

The Norwegian Technical Calculation Committee for Wage Settlements (TBU) discusses the "real financial situation" and identifies the room for manoeuvre ahead of wage negotiations, in light of competitiveness and a just division of incomes.

"For me, the Technical Calculation Committee represents the core of the Norwegian model," Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion Anniken Hauglie said in her speech at the TBU's 50th anniversary.

"I can't imagine what it would be like to negotiate if we disagreed on the facts," the Director General of the Norwegian Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise told the Nordic Labour Journal.

"TBU has clearly played a very important role when it comes to creating a shared understanding of finance policies," summed up Øystein Olsen, Governor of the Central Bank of Norway.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has asked Eivind Thomassen and Lars Fredrik Øksendal to write the history about the TBU. The book's title is 'Model builders. The Technical Calculation Committee for Wage Settlements 1967 – 2017'.

Lars Fredrik Øksendal and Eivind Thomassen

In their conclusion, the historians describe the mandate and how this has been followed up over the years:

'The Technical Calculation Committee for Wage Settlements' task is to gather the best possible background knowledge before wage negotiations, and present this in a way which will minimise any disagreement between the social partners on "the real situation". This has been central to the mandate since the beginning in 1967 until today.'

The authors have 'not assessed "the real situation", but studied what kind of reality the Technical Calculation Committee has tried to create agreement on, and the effect this understanding of reality has had on the attempts to coordinate wage formation in Norway between 1967 and 2017.'

'The model of understanding which has been the basis for the Committee's work, has been expressed through the *hovedkursteorien (the main course theory)*. *Hovedkursteorien* considers the wage negotiations to be a balancing act between the need for a just division of incomes and the need for maintaining competitiveness, or stability in the foreign economy,' the authors write, and '...that the members of the Technical Calculation Committee have had considerable seniority within their respective institutions and have contributed to creating trust in the reports and the model for understanding.'

Prepares ground for responsible wage settlement

"It has been important for the social partners and the society as a whole to have a committee with professional gravitas which prepares the ground for Norway's wage negotiations, so that the partners do not need to spend much time to discuss facts when they approach the wage negotiations," the Minister for Labour and Social Inclusion Anniken Hauglie told the Nordic Labour Journal.

"This is of course important for me as government minister, because it prepares the ground for good wage negotiations and a responsible wage settlement."

Facts you can trust

The Director General of the Norwegian Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, Kristin Skogen Lund, says Norwegian businesses agree.

"The Technical Calculation Committee is crucial, because it secures our joint understanding of reality and our agreement on what constitutes the facts. This is a very important step on the road to arriving at the actual wage agreement."

She believes what has been learned from the TBU can be useful to others too.

"I think there is much to learn here, because the TBU works extraordinarily well. We have very good facts which we can trust and which allows us to make very good estimates. I believe it allowed us to adjust the course very rapidly when we saw the fall in oil prices.

"We have had moderate and conflict-free wage negotiations in recent years, and I believe this is proof that the model works, and that the social partners prove themselves to be responsible."

A coordinated wage formation

"The Committee's role is linked to the coordination of wage formation which we have had in Norway," says Øystein Olsen, Governor of the Central Bank of Norway and head of the TBU between 2005 and 2010.

Øystein Olsen, Governor of the Central Bank of Norway and former head of the TBU

"So the key word is coordination of the wage formation, but the partners must take responsibility for the actual coordination. The TBU is a committee of experts that provides the facts which everything is built upon, and there are many considerations that must be taken into account in order to arrive at a joint model for understanding," he says, and continues:

"If you jointly agree on the basic facts, you have brought the social partners a lot closer to coordinating the wage formation while focusing on the issues which are important in a

small and open economy like Norway's. That is one way of describing the Committee's role."

The Committee follows the hovedkursteorien*, what does this entail?*

"This basically says that Norway is a small and open economy, and since we compete in an international marketplace, foreign cost developments will have strong effects – which to a certain extent should determine what kind of cost development and wage development we should expect at home. That is the brief version.

"Another important aspect is the division of wages. Because here too there is the belief that in order for a small country like Norway to be sufficiently competitive, we also need to be prepared for a just distribution across social groups and between labour and capital."

Øystein Olsen headed the committee between 2005 and 2010, and is in no doubt about its importance. Since 2000, Professor Steinar Holden at the University of Oslo has led three committees looking at the coordinated wage formation. He also underlines the important role the TBU has played and continues to play in the wage formation.

"The TBU helps coordinate the wage formation. The fact that the Committee establishes a joint understanding of the situation based on professional arguments, helps create trust between people and organisations.

"Coordination is also important in order to make the economy more adaptable to shocks, like the one we saw when oil prices fell in 2014.

"Coordination probably leads to increased investments and higher productivity and better solutions in the labour market, and it builds trust. Trust is a symptom of the fact that there is a reason to have trust," argues Holden.

Steinar Holden also notes that Norway is not alone when it comes to having coordinated wage formation. Sweden and Denmark, for instance, have a *frontfagsmodell* similar to the one you find in Norway. This model allows competitive industries to negotiate first, and the result then forms the norm for the general wage growth. Denmark has a statistics committee which is similar to the TBU. Sweden has a slightly different model. The Swedish National Mediation Office is in charge of wage statistics, while the social partners are responsible for describing the financial situation.

A necessary expansion

The Technical Calculation Committee creates a joint understanding of the basic facts. It is then up to the social partners to negotiate wage and labour conditions. The *frontfag* industries go first. That means competitive industries negotiate first and create a norm for coming negotiations.

Since the beginning in 1967, the social partners comprised the Norwegian Employers' Confederation (N.A.F.), later the Norwegian Confederation of Business (NHO) on the one side, and the Norwegian Trade Union Confederation (LO) on the employees' side. From 2000 all the main employers' and employees' organisations were included.

Before 2000, changes in the labour market and the big occupational groups which had emerged were not included in debates on the Norwegian economy and the room for manoeuvre the social partners had agreed should create a framework for the coming wage negotiations. This irritated those who were kept outside.

This was also because the white-collar groups in the industry which were supposed to be setting the norm, got pay rises far outside of the framework for industry worker wages. This made it meaningless for higher educated employees in the public sector to keep within the agreed framework for the wage settlement covering industry workers. As a result, the framework for the wage settlement would also include industry white-collar workers, and the Technical Calculation Committee was expanded. Øystein Olsen's view of that expansion:

"If the *frontfag* sectors are to negotiate first and safeguard the discipline in relation to foreign competition, and if this should be the industry – and even narrower – the industry worker, this is turning into a small group, which is not representative of Norway's workers. Over time, of course, if white-collar groups start sliding in local negotiations, this puts pressure on the model. This has been an important reason for expanding the Committee and to welcome other groups into the fold. The Committee has also increasingly focused on women's versus men's wages."

The author's view

'The continuity in this model is unique for Norway,' write historians Eivind Thomassen and Lars Fredrik Øksendal in the book they have called The Model Builders.

Why Model Builders?

"It reflects the fact that one of the central questions we try to answer is whether the Calculation Committee has contributed to maintain certain model characteristics of Norway's coordinated wage formation, primarily expressed through the *frontfagsmodellen*. Since we do not put a question mark in the title, we indicate that the Committee more or less has contributed in this manner," Lars Fredrik Øksendal tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

What level of support does the model enjoy today?

"It is probably stronger than ever. Widening the *frontfag* term to include industry white-collar workers has been important for creating legitimacy within organisations which have been outside of the traditional LO/NHO symbiosis. The 15 good years preceding the oil price drop, with historically

strong real term wage increases for broad groups of people, no doubt reduced friction and increased support for the model."

What challenges lie ahead?

"In the short term I think the Calculation Committee and coordinated wage formation stand strong. In the longer term there could be considerable challenges. One thing is a fall in union membership combined with structural changes in a labour market where much of the growth will probably come in the private sector service industry. Another thing is the fact that in the coming years there will probably not be room for the kind of real term wage increases we got used to between 2000 and 2014. With less cake to share, there will probably be more friction and both employee and employer groups will see incentives to take a more opportunistic approach."