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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Berit Kvam

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.arbeidslivinorden.org

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Innovation – a must for inclusion

The economy is improving across Europe, giving hope to Europe's young. But it is not enough: To include young people in work and education, change is needed. The Nordic Labour Journal illustrates how fresh knowledge combined with structural changes can give vulnerable youths the chance to blossom and young entrepreneurs possibilities to grow.

EDITORIAL

08.02.2018

BY BERIT KVAM

When Ylva Johansson addressed the Swedish media on 31 January, the good news was that newly arrived citizens now manage to enter the Swedish labour market faster than before. According to the most optimistic estimates, that time could be halved in the coming years, if things carry on as now.

This is much due to the Dua initiative, based on fresh ideas for what is needed for a successful inclusion of vulnerable youths into the labour market. The basic principle has been to make changes to established structures in order to create long-term cooperation between municipalities and the Swedish Employment Service on a local level.

Norway's new government announced very early on that it wanted to pave the way for a *dugnad* for integration. *Dugnad* is a word which resonates with the Norwegian national soul. It stems from the Viking era and means getting together for a voluntary effort which benefits the community. When a *dugnad* is called, everyone contributes to the best of their abilities. And no-one has publicly declined the government's call to action. There is perhaps just one uncertainty – are there enough workspaces for everyone?

Our opinion piece writer has also put another dilemma on the agenda. After many years of research in this field, he believes there are many reasons for why young people become outsiders: "They have more than holes in their CVs. They have holes in their very lives. And at school they learned this: You are not good enough. As a result, they no longer believe they are [...] Vulnerable youths, who lack experience in mastering things and who do not have safe people who care for them, do not always possess enough motivation to overcome the obstacles in life."

What is needed then, is comprehensive structural changes, long-term thinking and better links between schools and the labour market. Denmark is often held up as an example. Danish vocational schools focus more on in-work learning and a closer relationship between schools and work, com-

pared to for instance Norway. Yet they still struggle to help pupils overcome obstacles and throw themselves into an unknown world in order to gain valuable practical experience from a foreign country.

Finland has spent the past two years trying out a system involving private investment funds, Social Impact Bonds, to further social development and include more people into the labour market. The fund is now the largest of its kind in Europe. So far results have been moderate: 150 people have found jobs via the fund, while the aim is 2,500 by 2022. Yet the Epicus company remains optimistic and is expanding the programme.

Many young people find their own ways into working life. Start-ups like No Isolation and Blueye Robotics represent companies which create jobs and come up with innovative solutions to today's challenges; like social isolation and polluted oceans.

Will there be jobs for everyone? It is impossible to foresee. Young people's engagement and desire to innovate go a long way. But those who need help to get into the labour market depend on measures that actually work. Research from the EU and Norway shows it is necessary to assess the quality of the jobs and measures which are being offered to young people. If not, their job applications risk ending up at the bottom of the pile.

Swedish cooperation could half time it takes youths and newly arrived to find work

It takes foreign born jobseekers less time to enter the Swedish labour market than it used to. But some, especially women and people with lower education, still face major challenges. Cooperation on a local level between the Employment Service and municipalities could help.

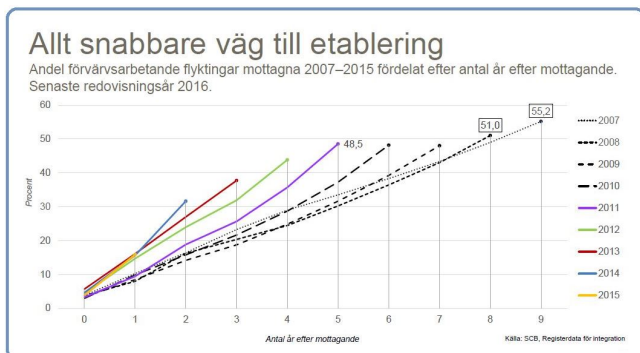
THEME

08.02.2018

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“The good thing is that things look much better now, and if this trend continues the time it takes foreign born people settling into the labour market will fall from between seven to ten years down to five. But there are still considerable challenges,” Sweden’s Minister for Employment Ylva Johansson told a press conference on 31 January.

Funds were also made available to help municipalities and the Employment Service figure out how a cooperation might function, before giving economic support to concrete measures. From February 2017, the delegation’s mandate was expanded to include cooperation when it comes to newly arrived citizens.



The Y axis shows the percentage of refugees who are in paid work, and the X axis shows the number of years since their arrival in Sweden. The time it takes to find work has fallen: For half of the refugees arriving in Sweden in 2007, it took eight years to find a job. Those arriving in 2014 appear to manage in three years

When the current government came to power in September 2014 it quickly expressed a desire to improve cooperation between municipalities and the Employment Service, primarily in order to fight youth unemployment. In December that year, it was decided to establish *Delegationen för unga till arbete* (the Delegation for young people to work), or Dua. Its task has been to support local agreements between the Employment Service and the municipalities. The idea was that labour market measures aimed at young people would be more efficient if they were localised.



“There has always been some cooperation between municipalities and the Employment Service, but for several years the Employment Service was asked to prioritise cooperation with the private sector,” says Lil Ljunggren Lönnberg, who has led Dua since the beginning.

Long-term cooperation preferred

After the 2014 elections, Ylva Johansson visited municipalities and took part in a range of meetings. One of the questions for the municipalities was: "Do you want to cooperate with the Employment Service?"

"The answer was overwhelmingly positive, as long as the cooperation would be long-term and strong. That is why it has been important to show that the cooperation has been serious. It should form part of daily operations, and there should be structures for cooperation. We have prepared the ground for this, and we see that time is ripe for cooperation," says Lil Ljunggren Lönnberg.

Dua created models for cooperation, analysed what might have to be done to support the young and created support tools which could be used locally. 287 out of Sweden's 290 municipalities have entered into agreements with the Employment Service to help unemployed youths. This has allowed them to draw up education contracts and later apply for money for particular development projects. In 2017, Dua granted municipalities a total of 104 million kronor (€10.5m).

When the delegation was also tasked with promoting cooperation for newly arrived citizens, new agreements were signed expanding the cooperation to include them. From 1 March there will be around 250 such agreements. The Employment Service has also strengthened its staff with over 100 new company advisors, and Dua has provided a government grant for municipalities, enabling them to increase support to companies.

"Many employers want to include the newly arrived, but need a 'back office'. That means they need support and help," says Lil Ljunggren Lönnberg.

Local job tracks

Municipalities will participate as early as during a newly arrived person's first conversation, and together with the Employment Service and the individual they will create a roadmap which leads to work or studies. There should be a continuous process where the newly arrived very quickly starts learning Swedish for immigrants, SFI, and some other things.

"The whole idea is to speed up the process, and because cooperation has already been established, this also works for the newly arrived," she says.

The cooperation has resulted in a range of so-called job tracks. They are built on local employers' needs for skills, and should make it easier for the newly arrived to get into work quicker. The job tracks empower the newly arrived to learn the skills needed within a certain trade, for instance through workplace training combined with a Swedish language course.

There are many examples. In Ljusdal municipality there is a job track aimed at forestry, where the newly arrived are taught plantation, forestry, crane operation and how to use a chainsaw. In the tourist resort of Åre there is a restaurant track which includes various competencies needed to work in a restaurant kitchen, and where SFI training is combined with vocational Swedish.

Åre also has a nursery track which comprises basic pedagogy, conflict solution and the common values in primary education. Common for all the tracks, which can last up to two years, is that they should lead to seasonal employment.

"We also see that the cooperation between the Employment Service and the municipalities is better than we had hoped for. So far we have established a system for how to work together. Now we want to follow up the things that have led to results," says Lil Ljunggren Lönnberg.

Still challenges ahead

Youth unemployment has fallen in Sweden in the past year. Numbers presented by the Minister for Employment Ylva Johansson on 31 January also show that the time it takes newly arrived citizens to find work has fallen from between seven to nine years down to five. It is difficult to pinpoint the reason behind this. The booming economy could be one explanation, but the minister also says the way in which refugees are now integrated plays a role, and that there are more education measures in place.

Yet even if things are moving in the right direction, Ylva Johansson pointed out that major challenges remain. One is foreign born women, who are less represented in the labour market than foreign born men. The other is people with low levels of education. It is difficult to enter the Swedish labour market with no upper secondary education, and this applies to both native and foreign born citizens.

"We must find ways of including those who are far removed from the labour market – people with physical handicaps and those who struggle with the language. If the economy turns, they take the first hit and the worst hit. We need to establish seamless access to Komvux (municipal adult education) for young newly arrived citizens, to make sure they get their upper secondary education, while managing economically," says Lil Ljunggren Lönnberg.



How private investors could make money from integrating immigrants in Finland

Finland is the first Nordic country to adopt the model where private investments are being used for social programmes. So-called Social Impact Bonds, or SIBs, also help private investors fund employment programmes for immigrants. If the private players manage to do better than the public sector, they will be rewarded.

THEME

08.02.2018

TEXT: MARCUS FLOMAN, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

The Finnish SIB programme for integration is the largest of its kind in Europe, worth €14.2m. The aim is to find work for 2,500 people by 2022. So far 150 people have got a job.

The initiative for the SIB programme came from the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy in cooperation with Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund. But the programme

is administered by Epique, a fund manager specialising in social investments.

That means the state has outsourced both the execution and the financing of the trial to the private sector. The public employment and business services (previously known as the labour market services) are still playing an important role as parties to the programme, however. The hope is that the pro-

gramme will make money for the state in the form of more tax payers.

From lottery to language training

The SIB programme complements existing public integration pathways available to asylum seekers and immigrants. The main difference is that taking part in SIB is voluntary. When an unemployed person agrees to take part, he or she is entered into something akin to a Green Card lottery. 70 percent are selected for the programme while 30 percent are allowed to apply for jobs through other channels.

Those accepted into the programme will then be given Finnish language training with a focus on a vocational vocabulary. This can last from a few days up to four months, depending on the individual's needs. Later, participants can target the trades they would most like to work in.

Jama-Farhan Abdi arrived in Finland just under nine years ago from Somalia, and has been studying Finnish via the SIB programme since September 2017. He is one of those who has succeeded in finding a job, albeit in a different trade than what he had hoped for.

"In Somalia I worked as a barber for more than six years, and I'm good at it. But here in Finland it is not so easy to start a hair salon. You need a lot of permissions and startup capital," he says.

"When I heard about the SIB programme I was initially looking for jobs in the construction industry, for instance cleaning properties. But there were no such jobs for me. So instead I have been working as a kitchen assistant," says Jama-Farhan Abdi.

150 jobs so far

Nearly ten Finnish companies are part of the SIB integration programme, offering labour matching services. At Epikus AB, the administrators for the entire programme, Jussi Nykänen, underlines that the aim is not to create new jobs.

"With the help of investors' money we buy services from a range of service providers. Their task is partly to offer tailored language and cultural training to immigrants who have been chosen for the programme, and partly to find jobs. From the very start we map which skills and interests people have," Jussi Nykänen.

So far around 150 people have found a job. The aim to employ a total of 2,500 people by the end of 2022 might look tricky, but at Epikus they believe the number of employees is rising since the programme is being expanded to include four new regions this year.

"Right now nearly 500 people are involved in our programme. Those who are not in employment yet, take part in our training. They will hopefully find work in the very near future," says Nykänen.

One of the companies that have signed up with the programme is Hanken & SSE, which offers education, workplace training and helps academically educated immigrants find work. Biisoni is another, which focuses on finding work for jobseekers in the service sector.

Tatu Lintukangas is vice president at Entry Education. They are responsible for language training for immigrants trying to find jobs through Biisoni.

"The greatest advantage with the SIB programme is its flexibility. It allows us to tailor educations to meet the individual's need. If we see that a person on the programme does not need four months of language training, we create a different model for him or her. Personally, I met someone doing language training for one day, whom I could employ in my own company as a trainer.

"The common thing to do is to try to organise as many job interviews as possible for our participants. Our partners at Bison might have learned about a company which needs labour. They will then tell us to 'choose five people who might be suitable, and we will recruit 0-3 of them'."

Labour matching sometimes works, sometimes not

As I arrive at the Entry Education's offices, Finnish language teacher Laura Pietiäinen is going through the last exercise for course participants in today's lesson. Kurdish Yadgar Hussein was told about the SIB programme by a contact at his local employment and business services office. He has been with the programme in just over a year now.

"I worked as a truck driver in Vuosaari Harbour, via a work training programme. But that work ended. My aim is to train for a particular trade. I wouldn't mind driving a truck, or work in a warehouse or get a job as a security guard," says Yadgar Hussein.

"I would like to continue working at the harbour, but there were no full-time jobs there – only individual days. So now I am attending courses to find a job somewhere else."

Jama-Farhan Abdi from Somalia takes part only in the tailored Finnish language lessons once a week, since he has now found work. The job as kitchen assistant for a catering company serving lunch restaurants in schools and workplaces was preceded by a few weeks' education and a short period of workplace training. It is a tough job.

"I have to work nearly every day in different lunch restaurants, it is very tough. In the morning, an app tells me about an offer to work the next day. I can then accept it – if I am ill or something else has come up, I say no."

Jama-Farhan Abdi says he often has to get out of bed at six in the morning in order to find out which busses or trains he needs to take to get to that day's place of work. Abdi moved

to Helsinki less than a year ago, so to him most of the city is unknown.

“Sometimes I get to work for several days in the same restaurant, but that is the exception.”

Have you asked your employer about the chance of staying in the same workplace together with colleagues you know?

“Yes, I have spoken to them; they say ‘we feel you – we understand’, but the need for manpower in different restaurants changes all the time, so they can’t promise anything.”

He tells us he is on a temporary contract.

“The pay in my current job is not good, so I am also applying for other jobs, as a cleaner.”

Money as a driving force

Bluntly speaking, all the businesses taking part in the SIB programme have one very strong motivation: Money. The quicker a person on the programme finds a job, the better for the service provider.

“It is of course good for the immigrants who find jobs, that is the primary goal. But we get money per employed individual. After that, another person can join the education programme.”

Tatu Lintukangas’ company Entry Education is set up to prepare participants for the trades that many low-skilled people need as an entry point to the labour market – like restaurants, cleaning, the foodstuffs industry and the postal service. The jobs, as Lintukangas puts it, demand “the right attitude”, and good enough Finnish language skills to make it safe to work.

“But we do not guarantee any jobs. We are talking about real jobs in the real labour market. What we can promise is to organise job interviews,” says Lintukangas.

Who benefits the most from this type of integration?

“Our model does not suit everyone. It is best for a person who is motivated for learning Finnish and who wants to build a career starting in some of the labour market’s entry-level trades. But for those who have a clear idea of a dream job with a particular exam as a goal, well for them the traditional language and education pathways into working life are far more suitable,” says Tatu Lintukangas.



No Isolation – creating new jobs to cover ancient needs

There is a reindustrialisation taking place in the middle of Oslo. Three young people have started their own business, making products as well-designed as anything coming out of Apple.

THEME

08.02.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL, NO ISOLATION

The glass facade of the house in Christian Kroghs gate looks out over the Akerselva river. This is where industrialisation took hold in Norway in 1840. Water from the waterfalls powered factories. Today the electricity is everywhere. The air is full of wireless communication on a nearly unfathomable level.

But the needs are the same as they were 180 years ago.

Nobody wants to be lonely. The company we are visiting call themselves No Isolation.

“We didn’t start out with an invention. We started with a need that had to be met,” says Matias Doyle, one of three founders at No Isolation.

62 new jobs

He is a systems developer and sits among a small ocean of computers on the floor which No Isolation has hired. 18 months after launching their first product, a robot which can be used by sick children to help them stay in touch with their school class, 42 people now work for them in Oslo. In Amsterdam they have 14 people, plus three in London. A total of 62 jobs have been created.



Matias Doyle and Anna Holm Heide, holding AV1

Anna Holm Heide, head of communications, welcomes us and gives us the tour. She was the founders' first hire. She explains how the white robot heads, which we can see on table tops around the office, work.

"We call it an avatar," she says.



Avatar is a computer game term, the character which you control in the game.

"When we talked to the children, they told us what they missed the most was being present in the classroom."

It is easy to think robot when you see the white plastic head. But the avatar does not have its own intelligence, it is purely an instrument for communication. The child who is ill can use it to see who is in the classroom.

"The child controls the avatar from a smartphone or tablet with a finger sweep. That makes the head, and the camera, turn sideways, up or down. Those who are in the classroom can hear the child in the hospital. When the child wants to 'put their hand up', a small light on the head is lit."

Something happens when it becomes concrete

You could achieve the same kind of communication with an iPad and a communication programme like Skype. But something happens when the child is being represented by an object, which at the same time is solid enough to be taken out during breaks.

"We have named the avatar AV1. It is a slightly boring name, but that is on purpose. The letters simply stand for Audio and Video, or avatar," says Anna.



This is what it can look like when communication robot AV1 is being used in the classroom. Photo: Estera Kluczenko/No Isolation

"But children name the avatar themselves. A girl named Oda called her avatar Roboda, and so on."

Right now, No Isolation has 370 robots placed in schools in eight different countries. The business idea is for schools or municipalities to hire the robot. It costs 24,000 kroner (€2,470) a year, plus a 1000 kroner (€103) monthly support charge. Private individuals can hire a robot for 19,000 kroner (€1,960) a year.

"The robot can also be used outside of school. One thing children in hospital tell us is that they miss driving around in a car with their parents, so some put the robot in the passenger seat and talk to the child on their way to work."

6,000 isolated children in Norway alone

The time spent away from school varies from child to child, and there are many reasons for their absence; cancer, ME, major operations, cerebral palsy and so on. But common for most is that they feel the isolation is worse than their actual illness.

“There is a child with a long-term illness in one third of classrooms in Norway. That is 6,000 children in Norway alone. In Europe there are hundreds of thousands. We get requests from all over the world. It does not matter whether you live in Peru, Canada or Taiwan. Isolated children represent a problem everywhere.

The two other founders alongside Matias Doyle are Marius Aabel and Karen Dolva.

“Karen Dolva is the Chief Executive Officer for the group. Yes, we can call ourselves a group now, since the company in the Netherlands is organised as a daughter company,” Anna says proudly.

Her background differs from those of the three founders, who have specialised in software, hardware and design.

“I studied social sciences and have mainly worked with media and organisations. I was the leader for the Norwegian student organisation, and also spent one year working with the Winter Youth Olympics in Lillehammer.

“I have done a lot of work constructing completely new businesses, so I thought it was fun to be asked for advice. But I never thought things would move this quickly,” she says.

Marius and Matias used to work together in the oil sector. Karen joined because they saw that many of the gadgets being made were not very user friendly or good looking.

“The basic business idea is to create technology which is targeted at small groups.”



Anna Holm Heide demonstrates the next product for launch

Another product has just been launched. KOMP is a computer screen which can be used by elderly people who live alone or in a care home, to keep in touch with their families. This too has been made to be as user friendly as possible. There is only one button – an on/off switch which doubles as a volume control.

Messages can be shown on the screen in large, white letters on a black background, or it can display the family members calling the elderly relative. An unlimited number of people can be linked to the communications system, and share the same information.

“Could your technology not equally well be used by businesses for board meetings?” we ask.

“Many have suggested that, but we don’t want to enter into that market,” says Anna.

The reason being that the competition would then be some of the world’s largest companies. As long as the avatar and the screen remain niche products, they are protected against the risk of a far cheaper Chinese product taking over.

“We have patented our solution to be safe. In order to protect people’s personal data, all audio and video is encrypted at both ends. No data is being stored and the actual avatar is password-protected.

“But the main reason we can stay ahead of the competition is that we constantly work to develop the products. We don’t get stuck in one track, we always try to make the products more user friendly.”

The company’s technology group hold their morning meeting in a room which looks like an IKEA play den. Anna points out that the gender division is not very good in this particular group.

“But in total, the company consists of 46 percent women,” she says.

In a separate room, Øyvind Hodneland is designing a new circuit board.



“The advantage of doing it ourselves is that it goes much faster. When the circuit board is finished, it is assembled in a factory at Tau outside of Bergen,” explains Øyvind Hodneland.

Several 3D printers are lined up on a shelf.

“We were able to make a prototype very quickly thanks to 3D printers which we could buy for a few grand. Earlier it would have cost many thousands,” says Matias Doyle.

Keeping as much of the production in Norway also has an ethical side to it.

“We don’t want a product which is being used by sick children to be made under questionable conditions. The only thing we have had made in China is the plastics covering the avatar. We needed it quickly, and it was mid-summer and all Norwegian producers were on holiday.”

How big are you in a few years from now?

“Hard to say. But we will probably be three times as large, approximately,” says Anna.

When we ask Matias Doyle what his advice would be for people wanting to start a business, his answer comes quickly:

“Start looking for money early on. And try to get more than you need. Things always move faster than you think!”



No more space around the lunch table. In a couple of years the company could have three times as many employees



Blueye Robotics: The people's underwater drone bringing knowledge about our oceans

“Something happened to me when I went from collecting shells on the beach to finding more and more plastic and rubbish,” says Christine Spiten. She is one of four entrepreneurs who set up Blueye Robotics in 2015.

THEME

08.02.2018

TEXT: BERIT KVAM

Their story shows how caring for the environment and love for the sea can reverberate. Blueye now employs 19 people, and Spiten is on the 2018 Forbes 30 under 30 list for Europe.

“Two thirds of our planet is covered with water. Without healthy oceans you do not have a healthy planet. It shouldn't be called Planet Earth, but Planet Ocean, and still we know less about the oceans than about the surface of Mars,” says Christine Spiten.

Her title is now Co-Founder and Chief Global Strategist, and she travels the globe to create new contacts and networks.

Everyone at Blueye share a passion for the oceans and bring top professional skills to develop an underwater drone which will make everything under the surface accessible to children, youths and adults – and not least provide crucial ocean data for researchers.

“The greatest bottleneck researchers face today is access to data which allows them to create models and say something about what is happening. We know changes are taking place, some are due to climate change, some come from traffic and pollution from humans. It is important to understand this better in order to take the best possible action,” says Christine Spiten.

An eye in the deep blue

She is interested in monitoring ecosystems and marine species, but she also wants to see what kind of pollution they are exposed to.



Christine Spiten carrying the underwater drone, above

“When plastic is washed up onto our beaches, it is important to pick it up. But it is equally important to find out what has sunk to the bottom, and removing it before it ends up in the food chain. The underwater drone can be our eye in the deep blue.”

Blueye Robotics and Christine Spiten was among the companies presented at the 2018 Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise NHO annual conference ‘The Value of Work’. We met her at Mesh, The Nordic Creators’ Community, one of the first co-working spaces for independent entrepreneurs and startups in Oslo. This is where she wrote her master’s thesis on the market potential of underwater drones.

After securing her Master of Science degree, studying international entrepreneurship at UC Berkeley, spending time at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and work-

ing as an intern at Kongsberg Oil and Gas, she got in touch with the place she considers to be world-leading on underwater technology, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (NTNU).

“That’s where I met Erik Dyrkoren, the co-founder and CEO of Blueye. He shared my thoughts and ideas of making the seas more accessible, and to democratise the subsea space.”



They decided to join forces and approached two researchers at AMOS (Centre for Autonomous Marine Operations and Systems) at NTNU. Christine Spiten moved to Trondheim where the four entrepreneurs launched Blueye Robotics in the autumn of 2015. In 2017 the company counted 19, and aims to double that in 2018. Their first product is ready. Production of the underwater drone starts in the summer of 2018, and will ship in the autumn. They already have several hundred orders, and are working on new models which are at once more advanced and simpler. They all share the same digital platform which allows users to share videos and data collected by the drones.

Need for competencies

“In 2017 I have been travelling a lot. I have been to Australia twice and delivered a prototype to The Great Barrier Reef Legacy, which is doing research on the coral reef. They use the prototype for their expeditions.

“There is a reason why we employ 19 people, development is enormously challenging; you’ve got hardware and software, mechanical design, control systems, electronics, and it is very expensive. As a group of four we had no chance of taking the project all the way, so ever since starting at the NTNU in the autumn of 2015 we have been on the lookout for the competencies we do not possess ourselves. Out close links to the NTNU have been very important. Clever people from around the world come here to recruit clever heads.”

They have also cooperated with Eggs Design and won several design awards with them.

Christine Spiten delivered her Master’s thesis in the spring of 2015. Blueye started up that summer. One of the first things she did was to take off on a research expedition. She joined 13 other women and sailed from Senegal to Brazil. They crossed

the Atlantic and brought the first Blueye prototype with them to map marine pollution along the way.

“During the expedition we gathered data and took water samples which were later sent for analysis at the University of Georgia, where they are looking into the link between marine pollution and human health. We were sailing in an area where nearly no one has gathered data before, between two gyres in the Atlantic. Gyres are circular ocean currents where plastics and other waste gather.

“We were sailing between the two gyres, trawling the ocean surface for microplastics, taking water samples and using our onboard lab. We used Blueye’s underwater drone to film what we saw – especially along the coast of Brazil when we arrived there, where we also organised beach cleanups and gave lectures in schools.”

After the expedition, she travelled to the Paris climate summit to present experiences from the project and the opportunities an underwater drone presents as a tool to map and inform about the status of our oceans.

Blueye is teamwork

“Working in a startup is a bit like that. Everyone has an area of expertise, yet we still work closely together and are on top of each other’s work. But that will change going forward. It is our ambition to double our staff by the end of 2018. We are now building the foundations for what will be a large company.”

The foundation means establishing a good company culture and an identity which all the employees are part of, understand and support.

“That is how we do things. And everyone should know what it is, what the company stands for. Where we want to go. The company culture is coloured by openness and trust. As founders we have enormous trust in all of our employees. We have been working very fast with a global focus since day one, which means quite a few trips overseas. When the CEO, or me or one of the other founders are travelling to work with our partners or clients, we know the team in the office are working as hard as they can and as correctly as they can.

“So there is openness and trust, the curiosity for the sea and the desire to create a tool to make it accessible to more people – based on a pure passion for the sea which is the basis for all of us.”

The environment is a driving force

“That is what has helped us build the team which we have today. It is an important part of Blueye’s identity which also gives us a backbone and a compass for everything we do. Including when it comes to our choice of partners, like Hurtigruten.”

Hurtigruten has expedition vessels taking guests around the world – to the Arctic, the Amazon, along the Norwegian coast. They also have expedition teams onboard with marine biologists who talk about vulnerable ecosystems.

“Hurtigruten wants to offer guests underwater drones as an activity. They want to show live video of what is going on under the surface on the onboard screens, so that you can see and experience the world under the sea too. So for us it is exciting to work together with them. They travel to wonderful natural areas which few people ever get to visit. The underwater drones will go there too.”

Popular research

The drones are equipped with a camera and powerful lighting. The more advanced models will also have several sensors which can measure temperature, pH and other parameters which are important for understanding what is going on in the sea.

“We can create a community for popular research by giving a tool like this drone to tourists and people who are out in boats, allowing them to collect data and share the information via a smartphone app or on their PC. This way, researchers and authorities, business, schools and private individuals can gather data when they want and use it for what they want. The aim is for far more people to learn about the seas and understanding it better by making it more accessible.”

Have you managed to get past the obstacles often faced by entrepreneurs trying to scale up their production?

“We have received support from Innovation Norway and the Research Council of Norway. We have also done some crowdfunding and have got support from several solid investors. We are now in the last round of investments before production. That means we are getting the resources we need in order to enter the market in the summer, while we also expand the company. We seek investors who share our vision, and who can stay with the company in the long term.”

With the sustainability goals as starting point

Christine Spiten wants innovation to serve society’s needs. Her advice is to use the 17 sustainability goals as a starting point.

“I believe society is facing plenty of challenges, and that should be the starting point when we want to create something or innovate. Blueye covers at least four of the UN sustainability goals:

“Number 14, of course; protecting marine resources, and 13; in the future the underwater drone can collect data to help us better understand climate changes, 4; because we want Blueye to be an educational tool, 6; clean water and good sanitation, because there are many areas where Blueye can mea-

sure water quality, and of course 17; to achieve all this by creating good partnerships.”

These days Blueye and the Norwegian broadcaster NRK are making a miniseries about looking after the oceans. An underwater park will open in Oslo at the end of February, where they will use underwater drones for filming. Christine Spiten and one of her fellow founders of Blueye are also on the advisory board of the research vessel REV (Research Exploration Vessel), where Nina Jensen, former head of WWF Norway, is the project leader.

What is needed to include vulnerable youths into the labour market?

Norway's government is calling for a joint initiative for youth inclusion. A laudable initiative. But government ministers should also look at the underlying structures if their measures are to achieve more than papering over the cracks. Perhaps we need to think differently about how to combine education and work.

COMMENTS

08.02.2018

KJETIL FRØYLAND, RESEARCHER AT THE WORK RESEARCH INSTITUTE (AFI), OSLOMET

More and more people fall outside of the labour market. Some because of ill health. Others because of high competency demands or tough competition for jobs. Many despite of their desire to participate. It is particularly worrying that an increasing number of young people seem to struggle with finishing their education and finding work.

That is why Norway's government has called for a *dugnad* for youth inclusion. *Dugnad* is when a parties with a common interest come together, volunteering to accomplish a common goal. It is a laudable initiative which is easy to support. It says employers must join the team. Workplace training for young people with "holes in their CVs" must be linked to possible permanent jobs.

"We must focus more on results, rather than counting the number of measures," says the Prime Minister according to Aftenposten (30 January 2018). This all sounds good, but is it good enough?

During my recent PhD work I met several early school leavers who ended up in a downwards spiral, who lost their networks and their confidence to be with other people. The most exposed are those with psychological challenges, ADHD, substance abuse, tough childhoods, physical handicaps or other health issues.

They are called 'exposed youths', 'problem youths', 'NAVers' – a lost generation? They stay up all night playing online games. They struggle with their motivation and psyche. Many lead isolated lives, eat unhealthy food, have few friends, have family issues and little hope for the future. They are experienced in this: achieving nothing.

They have more than holes in their CVs. They have holes in their very lives. And at school they learned this: You are not good enough. As a result, they no longer believe they are.

And they do not know what it is that they want. Vulnerable youths, who lack experience in mastering things and who do not have safe people who care for them, do not always possess enough motivation to overcome the obstacles in life. Someone needs to walk that mile with them. It could be a friend, a youth worker, a NAV guide:

"She is my security, that is what is most important," a young woman said about her helper. "That he has, like, pulled and pushed you all the way; You won't give up today," said another.

Employers are important. I agree with the government ministers here. A shop owner put it this way:

"From being withdrawn and shy in the beginning, they lift their heads after a while, look people in the eye, and become active participants in the work environment too. They go from being insecure to being secure. It is fantastic to witness, they perhaps do not realise it themselves, but we see an enormous difference."

But employers cannot solve this alone. Young people with complex experiences need support in the workplace. In order for work placement to be successful for this target group, you need well-functioning support services which make sure you get "place and train" and not "place and pray".

The Nordic welfare states are among the best in the world, yet it is still difficult to get all relevant authorities to pull together and deliver 'seamless' and 'efficient' support. Many who have tried will know this. One youth worker put it this way:

"The youths are not the problem. We'll always get them on-board. It is more difficult with all the helpers who must come in and contribute..."

Indeed, this challenge is so tricky that it has been called “a wicked problem”; something nearly impossible to solve. As a result, people with holes in their CVs often fall between two stools when approaching the support system. A *dugnad* is good, but will it get to the core of the challenges?

The sociologist C.W. Mills said something like this: *If one in ten thousand is unemployed, we can treat it as an individual problem. But if a thousand in ten thousand people are unemployed, we can safely say we are facing a structural problem.* If we apply that maths to how many students finish their upper secondary education, we see that nearly 3,000 out of 10,000 Norwegian youths leave school early, ending up with holes in their CVs instead. Are the young people themselves to blame?

The Norwegian welfare state has been constructed like a motorway for all. It leads us to upper secondary education and on to the good life. Those who finish, live a better life and put more back into the community. This has been shown through evidence-based research. There is no doubt that education is a good thing – and most do finish it.

The links between finishing school and a later career have been documented in several studies. But not everyone learns in the same way. The system is good enough for most people, but for those with extra needs it is not flexible enough. For some, this becomes the road to exclusion.

The need for unskilled labour at sea or in industry is not as great as it used to be. The armed forces also no longer represent ‘a second chance’ with a strict but welcoming structure for aimless young men. These days only those with no holes in the CVs get in. Has anyone looked into what effect that has?

A *dugnad* is great. I support it. But the government ministers also need to look at the underlying structures if the measures are to achieve more than papering over the cracks.

For young people, school is important. And it is possible to create workplace learning for the most exposed youths – who not only struggle in class but who also lose the fight for the internships. They “don’t function” some teachers say, and fear that these youths – if they are allowed in – can ruin the trust which the teacher so carefully has built up with the employer through years of delivering students who do “function”.

Perhaps we need to think differently about how to combine education and work. How? By giving the education system the competencies and resources needed to be able to use ordinary workplaces, so that the students who struggle the most are given roles and tasks which *they* can master, while they also bring value to the employer. This is how you build self-esteem and motivation.

Being able to work alongside people who “have lived long enough to not have a need to stigmatise” – as one boss put it – but who find joy in helping a “young person adrift”. Straight talking, room to fail and learn, good follow-up, inclusive care. As well as good support from a guide, a youth worker or the school pastoral team.

Both the employer and the youths need following up. NAV should contribute here, like they used to do before someone invented the word ‘naving’ and reminded us that benefits could be exploited. They were right, but it meant a reduction in opportunities for some of the most vulnerable. Those who do not have money for restaurants or the cinema.

By lengthening the basic education period and making the education system more flexible, you could avoid labelling one in four youths as outsiders with holes in their CVs, simply because they did not finish their education in five years.

This is where government ministers need to focus their attention. A *dugnad* might well be helpful, But it must be more than a short-term knee-jerk reaction in order to “get done what we have been thinking of doing for a long time, but which nobody has had the energy to confront”. There are no shortcuts here. We need permanent solutions.



Ásmundur Einar Daðason: Time to overhaul the social safety net

Iceland's Minister of Social Affairs and Equality Ásmundur Einar is also responsible for labour market issues. He met the labour market parties already the first week after becoming a government minister. Right now two issues are extremely important, he believes: To maintain the good relations with the labour market parties and strengthening the trust between the ministry, the government and the parties.

PORTRAIT

08.02.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR

“The labour market should be able to trust that the government minister or the government keep their promises. That is the key to stability in the labour market,” he says.

Ásmundur Einar Daðason is a classic welfare politician who wants to improve the situation for families with children and eradicate poverty in Iceland.

Ásmundur Einar is only 35 years old. Yet he has been a member of the Icelandic parliament, the Althing, since 2009 – first for the Left-Green Movement (VG), later for the centrist Progressive Party. He is now a member of a government led by his old party VG, and Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir.



Ásmundur Einar explains that he decided to leave VG after the economic crisis in Iceland nearly ten years ago. Back then he felt that VG was too far to the left. At the time he was the leader of an organisation called Heimssýn, which gathered Iceland's EU opponents.

"I have always been against EU membership for Iceland. I have not changed my stance on that," he explains.

On that particular point, there are no disagreements with Katrín Jakobsdóttir, who is also an EU opponent.

Ásmundur Einar feels it is time for Iceland to strengthen its welfare system. The country must not lag behind on welfare policies, he believes

Mapping poverty

His to-do list is long. Poverty in Iceland is to be mapped before the government decides what to do with that problem, and how to do it. The government minister believes it is important to improve the welfare system, especially for families with children through child allowances, but also the health system and the country's social safety net.

Ásmundur Einar is planning changes to parental leave, both in order to strengthen gender equality and to support families. The plan is to increase parents' allowances and to allow new parents to stay at home for longer. He does not know the exact details yet, but he will approach this in his discussions with the labour market parties in the run-up to the 2018-2019 collective agreement.

Young people become inactive

Ásmundur Einar is also worried that more young people will become inactive in the labour market. Increasing numbers struggle with mental issues, and risk falling outside. Society is changing fast, parents have challenging jobs and things are speeding up. New technologies impact on social developments.



Ásmundur Einar believes young people are being overrun by new technology and different impressions, some of them become ill as a result. He thinks children need more support in the new society, and parents need help to be able to look after their children better.

The labour market is key

Labour market policies will play a key role in Iceland's economic stability over the coming two years. The way things develop can become central both for the government's political survival and people's quality of living. In order to settle the collective agreement, the government is happy to suggest various measures. Or legislation.

The minister also says he has already met the labour market parties during his first week in office. He intends to keep up the good contact while also strengthening trust between the ministry, the government and the parties. The labour market should be able to trust that the minister or the government keep their promises. That is the key to a stable labour market, he says.

"What happens next is a different matter. Here at the ministry we look after social insurance issues, housing issues, welfare issues and labour market issues in general. Many issues can influence how the labour market develops, not least housings market legislation," he says.

Introducing an equal pay standard

Iceland has attracted international attention because of its new legislation on an equal pay standard which aims to make sure women and men are paid the same for doing the same work. The ministry will soon start preparations for the implementation of the equal pay standard. In the coming years the standard will be introduced in Iceland's largest companies, but smaller companies will also have to follow the standard after a while.

Iceland has an unexplained gender pay gap of five to seven percent, despite efforts to get rid of it. Ásmundur Einar explains that everyone in Iceland believe it is important that both sexes are paid equally for equal work. According to him the equal pay standard should become obligatory. If not, companies will remain passive and fail to adopt the standard.

“This is important, not only for the political image but also for gender equality and society as a whole. We believe that strengthening gender equality will strengthen the economy too,” he says.

Large family in Norway

He has previously been active on a Nordic level. The Nordic cooperation is important, he believes, and according to him Iceland has always held that cooperation in high esteem – both when it comes to working life, sport and culture.

“As a member of the Nordic Council of Ministers, I got to know about the Nordic cooperation,” he says.

Ásmundur Einar has relatives in Norway. He used to live in Stavanger and speaks fluent Norwegian.

Father of three daughters

The Minister of Social Affairs studied agriculture and comes from a farming background via his father’s farm in north-western Iceland, which he used to visit during his childhood summers. As a child he moved around with his mother, but always spent summers with his father in the countryside.

“I have always been very active in various organisations too. I became politically active at an early age. I have always kept in touch with my roots,” says Ásmundur Einar Daðason.

Gender equality is important to Ásmundur Einar. He is the father of three daughters, and the debate about men and women’s different opportunities resonates with him. It should not be the case that your sons have better opportunities in life than your daughters, he believes.

“If I had three sons, they would probably have exactly the same opportunities as everybody else. But our daughters do not have the exact same opportunities as boys do, and that is something we must address,” says Ásmundur Einar.

Responsible for the washing at home

The young government minister is happy in his role of leading the way for society’s development. He underlines that he is an ordinary bloke who does the clothes washing at home. He does not like to be put on a pedestal. He just wants to be equal to everybody else. But he likes being able to get engaged and to lead the development.



Norway's blue-green government with a labour market focus

The Liberal Party is the new party in the Norwegian government coalition. Prime Minister Erna Solberg has also reshuffled some of her government ministers. Five out of six main points in the new government's political platform are about the labour market.

NEWS

08.02.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

"It has been 12 years and three months since we were last in government," said Liberal Party leader Trine Skei Grande after having been made Minister of Culture.

She received a lot of flowers as she emerged from the Palace after the new government had held its first meeting with King Harald. The Liberal Party has also got the Minister of Cli-

mate and Environment as well as the Minister of Research and Higher Education.

The government's most controversial politician, Sylvi Listhaug from the Progress Party, has also been given more power. In addition to being responsible for immigration, she is now also Minister of Justice. But she has had to hand inte-

gration issues over to the Conservative's Jan Tore Saner, the new Minister of Education and Integration.

The Liberal Party and the Progress Party are diametrically opposed when it comes to immigration policies. That conflict has now moved into the government, whose main task – according to the negotiated political platform – will be to “adapt Norway's economy in order to create new growth, new jobs and create a more diverse economic platform”.

One of the new government's aims is to improve labour market integration. Since the Progress Party has mostly been keen to put the brakes on immigration, it might be an advantage that a different party gets the responsibility for integration.

Anniken Hauglie carries on as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. She wants to rewrite the tripartite agreement on an inclusive working life, the IA agreement, which the government reached with the social partners. The agreement has three goals: Lowering sick leave, getting older people to work for longer rather than retire and to get more people with physical handicaps into work. There has been particularly little progress on the last point.

“The government will call for a *dugnad* for inclusion in order to get more people into working life,” reads one of the points in the political programme.

Dugnad is the Norwegian word for when everyone helps out in order to reach a common goal.

Labour Party's deputy leader has had to resign, together with the Progress Party's parliamentary leader. The Conservative Party has had to deal with the former leader of the youth party, who has had sex with a heavily intoxicated 16 year old girl, among other things.

The same day as she became Minister of Culture, the Liberal Party leader Trine Skei Grande said in an interview that she “is not an abuser” after rumours emerged about her in social media.

“All new government ministers must present all important issues which might damage the government. I have been speaking to Trine Skei Grande about the rumours. What was said remains between the two of us, but since she has now been named Minister of Culture, that should answer any questions,” said Erna Solberg.



Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Minister of Culture Trine Skei Grande

Yet to start off, the new government will need to show determination in a different area: How to handle the many complaints of sexual harassment directed at central politicians

Half of the press conference where Erna Solberg presented her new government ministers was given over to the #metoo revelations which have hit several political parties. So far the



Students in Danish vocational schools need to expand their vision

19 year old Marcus Brask Nielsen spent four weeks in London studying and in an internship as part of his vocational education. It boosted his self-confidence and gave him courage to work abroad. Many other students in vocational training stay at home, and this worries schools and the social partners.

NEWS

08.02.2018

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: PRIVATE

Vocational school student Marcus Brask Nielsen was an introvert and shy young man when he was given the opportunity to study and an internship period in London in 2017. On his return he was far more extrovert and had gained a lot

of self-confidence. That is why he encourages all vocational school students to dare take a step out into the wider world.

“I was very shy before this, and not very good at talking to people I didn’t know. I am much more self-sufficient now, be-

cause I have crossed some borders and discovered that I can manage more than I thought,” says Marcus Brask Nielsen.

He has just finished the theoretical part of the basic course for the vocational education EUX handel, a basic education for sales, purchasing and logistics, which he is studying at Tietgen, one of Denmark’s largest educational institutions with more than 3,000 students and 350 employees.

Tietgen, situated in Denmark’s third city Odense, offers a range of vocational courses and pushes hard to make their vocational students spend time abroad during their studies, explains Bo Ravn, headmaster at Tietgen Business:

“We seriously encourage our students to travel abroad, and we take an active part in European educational cooperation. Globalisation is here to stay, and all of our students are preparing for jobs where you need a global vision,” says Bo Ravn.

Out of their comfort zone

Tietgen has partnered with several educational institutions and businesses in other European countries. This means Tietgen Business students have the opportunity to study and spend time doing internships with businesses abroad. A stay typically lasts for four weeks, and the students get much of their expenses covered by the EU programme Erasmus+. Yet it is still difficult to get students to go, says Bo Ravn:

“It is challenging to convince our students to travel, even though they can do so without paying much themselves. Some vocational students are unwilling to leave their comfort zone, which is unfortunate because a foreign stay inspires and provides a greater vision and edification.”

Bo Ravn believes a lack of self-confidence and less support from home prevents some students in vocational education from daring to go for a stay abroad, unlike students in general upper secondary education.

Marcus Brask Nielsen agrees that it is difficult to leave your comfort zone as a student in vocational education. He initially said no thank you when Tietgen Business offered him the London stay. But both his teacher and parents managed to convince him to go, which he is happy about today:

“I was not crazy about the idea to have to face something foreign and being forced to look after myself, and I didn’t think my English was up to it. But my parents saw it as a good way of forcing myself out of my comfort zone – and they were right.”

Broadening his vision

He and two friends lived privately with a British host family and had to manage everything themselves. That was both fun and instructive, says Marcus Brask Nielsen. The best experience was perhaps a one week internship for a British company.



Markus Brask Nielsen really got to exercise his English skills and was forced to talk to people he did not know. The workplace was a department store, where he was expected to talk to both staff and customers.

Several of Marcus Brask Nielsen’s fellow students said no to a foreign stay, and they have missed something important, he believes. For him, the world has become smaller, and job opportunities more plentiful:

“I have broadened my vision and perhaps improved my chances of finding a job. Everyone says that employers prefer job seekers who have been working abroad, and it is also no longer impossible for me to look for work abroad when I finish my studies. So I now have more opportunities.”

The next phase of Marcus Brask Nielsen’s vocational education is a traineeship, so right now he is looking for a company that might take him on – preferably one that is selling clothes, as this is something he is interested in.

Educate for the future

The Tietgen vocational students are far from the only ones who hesitate to leave the country. It is a common phenomenon in many Danish vocational educational institutions and in some general upper secondary schools. The Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science says only a small percentage of students in vocational schools spend time abroad during their education. Students in general upper secondary

education and in higher education are far more likely to make use of the opportunities of studying elsewhere in Europe.

This inequality is problematic, according to the Advisory Council for Initial Vocational Education and Training (REU). Students gain important competencies by taking internships in companies in different European countries, or during stays at a vocational school in a different country. This benefits both students themselves and the companies that hire them, REU says.

REU advises the Danish ministry of education on vocational educations and works to improve the desire among vocational students to travel – including appealing to vocational schools to do more to encourage students to spend time abroad.

Bo Ravn, head teacher at Tietgen Business, agrees: More needs to be done in order to get more vocational education students to travel. Schools, businesses and the social partners all believe this to be important. It is not good enough the way it is.

“There is a certain conservatism. Businesses focus on which competencies their employees should have today and tomorrow, but not next week. Both businesses, vocational schools and the social partners must be alert enough to try to define what an employee needs to know in the future global labour market.”

Norwegian employers: applicants with in-work training end up further down the pile

Being unemployed as a young person has a stigmatising effect that can last for years. This is underpinned by comprehensive research. But is it always better to work, no matter what quality job you can get? Could it actually be better not to? Could a labour market course worsen your chance of employment?

RESEARCH

08.02.2018

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

So far it has been a widely accepted fact that having a job is better than not having one, and that a labour market course can improve unemployed people's skills.

"The most used labour market measure for young people in Norway is in-work training. Newer analysis have documented that young people who have taken part in this are less likely to enter the labour market," says Christer Hyggen, a researcher at the Centre for Welfare and Labour at OsloMet, the Oslo and Akershus University College.

Previous studies have shown the chances of getting hired fall by as much as 35 percent, compared with an unemployed person who has not taken part in any in-work training. But other things besides labour market measures can be stigmatising too. Jobs known as 'deskilling' can have a similar effect. These jobs are so simple that they make any skills obsolete. A study from Norway and Switzerland shows that this is the case. Some employers in certain trades think it is better to be unemployed than to have worked for several years in a call centre.

What is less known, is the reason why the chance of getting a job shrinks because of in-work training or the wrong kind of job. In both cases it has partly to do with a locked-in effect – those taking part in in-work training or sit in a call centre are busy doing just that, and will not be applying for jobs as actively as those who are unemployed.

But could it also have something to do with employers' attitudes? That hypothesis has been tested in an EU research project called NEGOTIATE, which has just ended. A total of 20,600 CVs were sent to 1,920 employers across five different trades in four European countries. The employers were asked how they would have classed an application from a person who had sent a CV like the one the researchers sent.

The employers were chosen because they had been advertising a service. They were first invited to class the applicant's merits from a scale from zero to ten, where zero meant it was nearly impossible to hire such a candidate. Then they were asked to compare the three top candidates.

The fictitious applicants' qualifications varied in experience, education, periods of unemployment and gender.

Since the four countries – Norway, Switzerland, Bulgaria and Greece – all have similarities and differences, the researchers could compare how different profiles were judged under different conditions. One hypothesis was that the stigmatisation stemming from having been unemployed is greater in countries with lower unemployment than in Greece, where it reached 50 percent for young people after the economic crisis.

At the same time the risk carried by an employer when hiring someone varies according to how strict the labour legislation is. In a country like Norway, where it is difficult to fire people, it should feel more risky for an employer to hire someone with a doubtful past than in Switzerland, where employment protection is not as strong.

One result from the study showed that Norway is the country where unemployment, defined as a period of 10 to 20 months, resulted in the highest level of stigmatisation. The candidates with a CV like that were ranged 1.1 points lower than others. In Switzerland the number was down 0.7 points. In Bulgaria and Greece the effect was so small that it boarded on being statistically insignificant, at 0.4 points and 0.3 points.

Unskilled work was defined as candidates having worked for five years in a call centre. Here the effects were considerably greater than for the shorter period of unemployment. The ef-

fect was still biggest in Norway, where candidates with a CV like that plummeted, losing 3.4 points. Bulgaria came a surprising second, down 3.3 points. The effect in Switzerland was down 2.4 points and in Greece 2.2 points.

In the study, Norwegian employers were also asked how they judged résumés indicating the candidate had taken part in labour market programmes organised by NAV, Norway's Labour and Welfare Administration.

This too was interpreted by employers as being negative rather than positive. Such candidates were given 2.8 points less than those who had not taken part in any public labour market programmes.

In other words, according to Christer Hyggen's analysis, when you measure the effect of in-work training it proves to have a significant negative effect on how employers assess that candidate.

"You can draw the conclusion that it is also important to study the supply side, i.e. the mechanisms on the employers' side, and not only focus on the individual. It is also important that labour market measures are designed to allow you to also look at the quality of the jobs that are being offered," says Christer Hyggen.

His research has led to a debate in Norway. Sigrun Vågeng, the NAV Director, believed the picture painted in the media was imbalanced:

"We can always improve, and labour market measures are no exception. But a lot of people do actually find jobs after starting in-work training," she writes.

"We need more research on what works and what doesn't, so that we can adapt the measures accordingly.

"Measures are no magic wand, but the right measure for the right person at the right time has a positive effect," she wrote in an opinion piece for NRK Ytring.



EU youth unemployment: Some jobs are worse than being unemployed

Nine years after the start of the economic crisis in Europe, several EU countries are struggling to lift millions of youths out of unemployment and idleness. The youth guarantee, which the EU promised would get young people back on their feet, has so far produced no miracles.

NEWS

16.01.2018

TEXT: TERESA KÜCHEL, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Young people in Europe were among the hardest hit by the financial crisis, from which we are only just emerging. In Greece, the number of unemployed youths between 15 and 24 skyrocketed to 60 percent during the catastrophic year of 2013. In Spain that year, the number was 57 percent, in

Ireland more than 30 percent. One in four European youths were without jobs as the financial crisis climaxed.

As a result, getting young people into work became a burning hot issue for several years of EU summits in Brussels. EU countries agreed to invest six billion Euro in a so-called

“youth guarantee”, which was to guarantee young people a job, internships or education within four months of registering as unemployed. Funding for the guarantee gradually grew with a further two billion Euro, provided by various EU funds.

“I cannot and will not accept that Europe is the continent of youth unemployment,” EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker declared with great pathos in one of his major speeches on the future of the EU.

But between EU countries there remains a big gap between lofty rhetoric about saving Europe’s “lost generation” and concrete political proposals and investments in young people’s futures.

Politicians, EU civil servants, researchers and representatives for various organisations, trade unions and European cities recently gathered for a two-day seminar in Brussels to discuss how governments in different parts of Europe have implemented the youth guarantee, four and a half years after it was introduced.

Not enough money being awarded

“Some countries have simply handed out money to employers so that they can hire young people for a certain period. But this is a short-term gain creating some temporary jobs, but with questionable real gain in the form of knowledge and competencies for young people,” Professor of Sociology Bjørn Hvinden from the Oslo University College told the Nordic Labour Journal during the seminar.



Hvinden has been heading the EU Horizon 2020 project NEGOTIATE (‘Negotiating early job insecurity and labour market exclusion in Europe’), which looked at short- and long-term effects for young people with uncertain links to the labour market; which “scars” do they get from getting stuck in low quality, temporary and often underpaid jobs – in different European countries, including Norway?

The study unveils worrying links between unemployment, cannabis use and mental illness among young people. In

mainly southern and eastern Europe, long-term unemployment or uncertain, temporary forms of employment also contribute to falling birth rates.

“If young people do not dare to believe there is a good, safe future for their children, they may simply chose not to have a family and children,” explained Bjørn Hvinden in Brussels.

Employers sceptical to casual work

One of the study’s conclusions came as a surprise to many of the seminar participants. Employers in several European countries are more sceptical to hiring people whose CV lists several jobs considered to be low-quality – like call centre, or people who have been ‘job hopping’, i.e. changing jobs often, or people who have received training organized by the public employment service; than to people who have been totally unemployed during the same period of time. So, some activities are worse than no job at all, according to some employers.



Rodrigo Ballester, a member of the EU Commission Cabinet for Education, culture, youth and citizenship, underlined during one of the many panel debates that the right to education is the key to high-qualitative jobs and that today’s youths must be prepared for new labour markets:

“Young people must become more flexible and adaptable. We must review educations, but also young people’s attitudes, for instance their will to start on their own,” Ballester told the seminar.

“We must teach them entrepreneurship early – when they reach 17 or 18 it might already be too late to learn,” said Ballester.

The Commission civil servant also pointed to the importance of young people learning several languages in order to be able to move across borders and find jobs in other EU countries.

How flexible can you be?

His panel colleague, UK Labour Party MEP Julie Ward, who works with education issues in Brussels, challenged him. Ward criticised the austerity measures introduced in many EU countries during the years of economic crisis; a policy, which according to her not only forced the closure of safe and inspirational gathering places for young people, like libraries and youth clubs. She said it also led to what we see today – young people being forced to accept uncertain, low-paid jobs, or even to work for free, in an endless row of non-paid internships.

“Young people say they are tired of not getting paid. I am tired of young people not getting paid. I hear the work innovation, but young people are already innovative. How much more flexible do they need to be?”

“We need dignified jobs for young people. You should not need to hold down three jobs in order to pay the rent. If we gave them a secure income and the opportunity to meet, we could learn from them, and not them from us,” said the MEP.

Ignacio Doreste from the European Trade Union Congress, Etuc, had a similar message:

“We want quality jobs, also at the start of a career. We oppose the narrative that in order to cut youth unemployment you have to lower the standards and wages of young people’s jobs.

“Ireland, Spain and the Netherlands, for instance, have introduced youth salaries – in the Netherlands young people today can earn as little as four euro an hour. When you look at the cost of living in Amsterdam, this means these young people need at least two full-time jobs in order to survive,” said Ignacio Doreste from Etuc.

Last spring the European Court of Auditors warned that the youth guaranteed had had a very limited effect, and that the EU countries so far had not succeeded in fulfilling their promise of finding meaningful employment for job-seekers below 25 within the agreed four months time limit.

The guarantee lacked real strategies and methods to reach individuals who need help to find jobs, and what is more, the auditors wrote. There was a risk that certain EU countries would ditch their own initiatives and investments in young people’s futures and just rely entirely on the guarantee money from the EU; money which was meant as a help and not as an all-encompassing solution.

The Court of Auditors encouraged the EU Commission to present more realistic expectations of the youth guarantee, and asked the individual EU countries to work harder to find jobs for young unemployed people.

“The EU must maintain the pressure”

Bjørn Hvinden from the Oslo and Akershus University College thinks the EU Commission could put even more pressure on EU countries:

“The EU must maintain the pressure at all times and give the youth guarantee a more prominent place in the European semester,” Hvinden told the Nordic Labour Journal.

The European semester is the term for the EU Commission’s annual review of, for now, twelve EU countries’ economic policies. The reviews result in written recommendations – and occasionally reprimands – for how each of the participating countries can better keep their budgets in check or adjust their labour market or tax reforms, for instance.

Bjørn Hvinden recommends that the EU Commission’s reviews should point to the gap in how the youth guarantee money is being used. Publicly naming and shaming countries that do not address youth unemployment in any useful way is one way of forcing them to face the problem, the Professor believes.

“The youth guarantee should not be considered to be a special interest, outside of other economic issues. On the contrary: The future of Europe depends on young people finding jobs,” underlines Hvinden.

“If young people lose trust in the EU and in their own government, and lose their hope in the future, we are opening the door to all kinds of extremism, populism, and xenophobia,” Hvinden said.