

Theme

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Comments

Editorial: Youth on the edge

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Editorial: Youth on the edge

Youth unemployment is a problem to which the open Nordic labour market should be part of the solution. 'Jobbresan' (the Job Journey) organised by Nordic exchange programme Nordjobb is an exciting attempt at removing the remaining obstacles.

COMMENTS

28.06.2012

TEXT: DEPUTY EDITOR BJÖRN LINDAHL

Since the start in 1985, Nordjobb has given young people between 18 and 28 the chance to work in another Nordic country. It has expanded the experience through various cultural activities and the togetherness which is created between Nordic workers, contributing to strengthening the open Nordic labour market.

Nordjobb is mainly financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, Föreningarna Norden, participating employers and national labour authorities. Since the start, 21,000 Nordic youths have found summer jobs thanks to Nordjobb.

Yet so far neither those finding work through Nordjobb nor the youths who move countries on their own accord have come from a pool of unemployed people. A mapping of Nordic cross-border commuters showed only 1.4 percent of Swedish youths who moved to Denmark and Norway were on some kind of unemployment benefit.

This summer Nordjobb has tried to also help youths who are unemployed to benefit from the open Nordic labour market. Together with the public employment service and the Swedish municipality of Söderhamn, 300 kilometres north of Stockholm, Nordjobb is giving 80 youths the chance to travel to Oslo and look for work. Before they go they receive a four week course and they get free accommodation for the first few weeks in Norway. After that they must stand on their own two feet.

This is one of the projects which should be included in a data bank of good youth employment projects which the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has been commissioned to establish. The report 'Youth on the edge' highlights one of the biggest challenges: young people who don't have work and who are not in any kind of education. That group now represents 5 to 10 percent of all Nordic 15 to 24 year olds.

There are big differences between the Nordic countries when it comes to how youth unemployment is being fought politically. Denmark is perhaps the country with the most compre-

hensive and intensive youth policy. Yet youth unemployment has risen steadily there too, trebling in four years. Negotiations between the social partners for a 'youth initiative' have broken down, reports Marie Preisler from Copenhagen, but the government still promises action.

We wish all of Nordic Labour Journal's readers a very good summer!



Jonas Åberg, David Andersson and Jimmy Löfstrand talk to José Pérez Johansson, the Oslo project leader for Jobbresan (the Job Journey)

Swedish youths' first job in Norway

Anyone moving to another Nordic country must have some money - the first pay check doesn't come immediately, but the living costs do. In Norway you normally have to pay a three months' deposit on top of the first month's rent - enough to stop many young people in their tracks.

THEME

28.06.2012

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

"There have been several schemes to transport unemployed Swedish youths to Norway in busses. Most get offered jobs, but only a few manage to accept it because the threshold is too high," says José Pérez Johansson, project leader for *Jobbresan* (the Job Journey) - a project aimed at helping young people move to another Nordic country to find work. It is run by Nordjobb, a Nordic exchange programme.

What is often needed is to have a friend already in place, with a sofa or a bed you can sleep on during the first few weeks. In Oslo there is now a market in apartments where young people can live together. But the leap becomes bigger the further away you live.

In Söderhamn municipality, population 25,000, there are few contacts towards Norway. The municipality lies on Sweden's east coast, 300 kilometres north of Stockholm. A couple of large employers have scaled down or left, including an air force base and an Ericsson factory.

Youth unemployment: 21 percent

Over the past ten years the population has shrunk by nearly 2,000 people. Youth unemployment has been as high as 30 percent but this summer it fell to 21 percent.

"*Jobbresan* helps a bit, but there is also another explanation: a cistern with 800 cubic metres of pine oil sprang a leak and the oil escaped into the sea. Many young people got temporary jobs helping clean it up," says José Pérez Johansson.

Resurscentrum is the department within the Söderhamn municipality which provides labour market measures, including *Jobbresan*. It is a cooperation between the municipality, the public employment service and the social insurance agency.

Before travelling to Norway the youths attend a month-long course in how to apply for jobs and they learn a few important Norwegian words. They get advice on how to get a Norwegian ID number and a bank account, and on how to find a place to live. The first month in Oslo they stay at Anker Hostel.

Temping agencies key to get jobs

Temping agencies represent the most important contact for those looking for jobs. Tone Schanche Moe is an advisor at the Personallhuset in Norway's Romerike region, one of the five largest temping agencies in Norway and part of global facility service provider ISS.

"Half of all the job seekers we han



dle are Swedes. There's a great need for labour because Norway's unemployment stands at only three percent," she says.

Romerike district comprises 13 municipalities between Oslo and its main airport Gardermoen.

"So there are many storage companies in this particular area."

We are sat on a bench with José Pérez Johansson outside EMO A/S, a big storage facility for office products at Skjetten, some distance from Oslo. Workers passing by tend to recognise Tone and say hello. We have also agreed to meet three of the Swedish youths who have got jobs here: David Andersson, Jonas Åberg and Jimmy Löfstrand. David and Jonas arrived in Norway at the beginning of May, while Jimmy came a few weeks earlier on 9 April.

"At the job centre someone asked if anyone was keen to go to Norway, and I said yes," says Jimmy, who also worked in Germany for a short period of time.

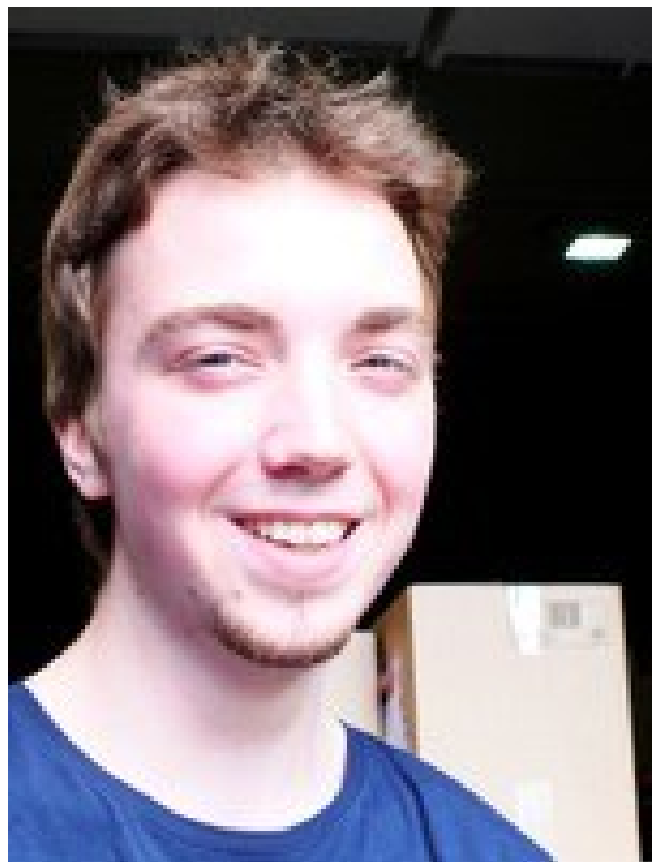
In Söderhamn the only jobs are in call centres. This is more fun," says Jonas Åberg.

"I have a brother who used to work in Norway. But it would have been difficult to come here on my own, with no help," says David.

The first pay check

He has just been to the bank together with Jonas to collect their first pay check. Personallhuset pays twice a month, which makes things easier.

All three got a licence to operate a forklift truck from Sweden before coming here.



"The job is to drive around with a list of goods that we gather together and load onto trucks. It varies a lot how much we

must gather, but sometimes there are 100 rows of items on the list,” says Jimmy.

Swedish workers have the advantage of understanding what is written on the boxes, even though each product has a number.

“In the beginning the hardest bit was to understand what Norwegians were saying, especially if they speak a dialect and talk fast and not clearly. When I’m not sure what it is that they mean to say, I ask them to say it in English,” says Jonas.

Happy to work

Both Tone from the temping agency and José from Nordjobb are sat with them, yet it is with genuine happiness the three of them talk about how happy they are to work here and how exciting they think Norway is. Norway’s constitution day also impressed them.

“On 17 May there were ten times more people than I ever saw in Söderhamn.”

When the Nordic Labour Journal asks them to describe Norway in just a few words, they say:

”People everywhere” (Jonas).

”Expensive but nice” (David).

”A nice country with nice people” (Jimmy).

They are not sure how long their Norwegian stay will last. Jonas and David talk about a few months, while Jimmy seems prepared for a more permanent move.

“How nice it was to see them! They have really grown in this short amount of time,” says José as we drive back to Oslo.

“This is what makes this job so much fun.”

Nordjobb offers the same cultural activities as they have done since the beginning in 1985 to all Swedish youths participating in *Jobbresan*.

“If this continues to be such a success it will turn into another permanent platform for Nordjobb,” says José.



Nordic report: 'Youth on the edge' the greatest problem

Nordic youth unemployment figures between 10 and 25 percent are bad enough. Even more alarming is the fact that 5 to 10 percent of Nordic 15 to 24 year olds are not in education, work or training. This problem has risen during the latest economic crisis.

THEME

28.06.2012

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

This group is often referred to as NEET - '*neither in education, employment or training*'. A new report commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers has put it more simply: 'youth on the edge'.

"These 'young outsiders' represent a large section of a generation which faces a very poor or non-existing connection to labour life for much of their adult lives. This could also lead to social problems and conflicts," says Bjørn Halvorsen at the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, which has been tasked with looking at how the Nordic countries can learn from each other when trying to tackle this problem.

The report summary can now be read (in Norwegian) at Norden.org: Youth on the edge. About the inclusion of exposed young people (Nord 2012:004). The main report will be published in July.

Not enough attention

"It could look as if young people on the edge aren't getting as much political attention as ordinary unemployment figures do," says Bjørn Halvorsen.

The move from college to working life is in his view the most critical phase for young people.

OECD statistics detailing how many young people finish college in the usual five years show Nordic countries lag far behind Israel and the USA (90 and 88 percent). Finland comes out top of the Nordic countries with 78 percent. Denmark, Sweden and Norway are slightly lower with 65 to 69 percent while Iceland is lowest with 49 percent.

Some slack can be regained

Some of the youth will to a certain degree regain their losses by going back to school at a later stage. This is particularly true in Sweden. The dropout is lowest among 20 to 24 year olds in Sweden and Finland, where 8 to 9 percent have not

graduated from college. At this stage dropout is still high in Iceland (26 percent), followed by Norway (20 percent) and Denmark (16 percent).

"I think young people realise the importance of finishing their education in order to enter the labour market. What's important is not to allow them to lose their belief in themselves," says Bjørn Halvorsen.

Around 2 to 3 percent of all 20 to 34 year olds are already outside of the labour market, on early retirement/disability allowance/support allowance. The percentage is quite similar across the countries, but highest in Iceland followed by Sweden.

"2 to 3 percent might sound little but this represents a dramatic increase. In ten years it has risen by around 50 percent. We are talking about people who live all or most of their lives outside of the labour market."

Internships important

Bjørn Halvorsen says internships are important, as are teachers with working life experience. It is also important that vocational training does not become too theoretical. Finding enough internships is a problem.

"Many employers feel they take a risk if they offer internships. I have a personal example. My brother in law runs a small electrician's firm. He has had a couple of bad experiences with interns who have made mistakes installing electrical equipment. This could have grave consequences - the worst case scenario is a fire or a fatal accident."

That's why it is important to reduce companies', employers' and middle management's insecurity, ignorance and fear of extra work and extra costs connected with training, testing or hiring young people - not least young people who are "struggling a bit".

“One idea could be to make it easier to hire people on a trial basis, traineeships or in temporary jobs as part of their entry into the labour market,” says Bjørn Halvorsen.

Idea and experience bank

He and his co-authors Ole Johnny Hansen and Jenny Tägtström suggest establishing an online Nordic ‘idea and experience bank’, where examples of ‘good practice’ can be gathered alongside evaluated trial and method development projects for the inclusion of young people in education and work in the Nordic countries.

There is a plethora of internship and trial projects with good ideas and promising results as well as exciting ways of approaching things in all of the Nordic countries. Many focus on new and untraditional ways of establishing contact, mutual trust, contribution and motivation among young people, and they look at ways of coordinating measures from various institutions. These are some of the examples from the report:

- Youth workshops/production schools with vocational training and traineeships.
- Help and guidance to choose the right education and job. Personal ‘coaching’ or mentorship with adult professional role models.
- Cross-sector and cross-trade cooperation between schools, working life, labour market services.
- Individual ‘matching activities’ between what the young person wants and the plans and opportunities that exist in the local labour market.
Real involvement by the young person.

The distance from word to action is not always very far. Before the main report has left the printers the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has been asked to establish an idea and project bank based along these lines.

Denmark's rapidly growing youth unemployment must come down

Unemployment among young Danes has trebled in four years, and the government promises action despite an initial breakdown in negotiations between the social partners on a youth initiative.

THEME

28.06.2012

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Denmark's youth unemployment is far too high and must be cut, says the Danish government which has launched a so-called 'ungepakke' (youth initiative) aimed at fighting youth unemployment. It includes plans for education and further training to make it easier for young people to secure internships.

A new survey from The Economic Council of the Labour Movement shows Denmark's youths suffer the highest unemployment figures and are the ones who are hardest hit by the economic crisis.

Since June 2008, when unemployment figures were at their lowest, unemployment among 16 to 24 year old Danes has trebled to 13.3 percent in April 2012. Among 25 to 29 year olds unemployment has risen almost as much. 12.6 percent of them are now without jobs. This is a far greater share than among the population as a whole, where unemployment currently stands at 6.2 percent.

'Ungepakke' despite breakdown

That is why this year's tri-partite negotiations between the government and the social partners focused so much on initiatives aimed at stemming youth unemployment. Despite a breakdown in negotiations on 8 June 2012, the government has said it will still push through a youth initiative against youth unemployment.

What this initiative entails is still not known and probably not decided yet either, but the government promises it will include an offensive education and further training plan aimed at improving the quality of vocational training and at securing a long-term and solid solution to the great lack of internships for students in vocational training.

"Central to our plans is to tackle the challenges many young people face," said the Minister of Finance Bjarne Corydon

(Social Democrats) when commenting on the breakdown in tri-partite negotiations.

Ministers promise action

The Minister for Economic Affairs and the Interior, Margrethe Vestager (Social-Liberal Party), promised concrete action:

"Far too many young people have no jobs. We want to do something about it. The government is keen to help the many young who cannot find work or get into education. This is completely unacceptable for the individual and for society as a whole, and we want to present a range of concrete initiatives for the parties in parliament," she said.

The Minister for Taxation, Thor Möger Pedersen (Socialist People's Party) also assured young people they would get help from the government:

"We won't let young people down. It is expensive both for society and for the individual when young people are outside of the labour market. The government will keep working to improve the education guarantee and to secure internships, helping everyone who wants to get their vocational training."