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Finland extends parental leave

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Vulnerable young people – how best to find them jobs and a place in society?

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Theme: AI and the Nordic labour markets



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Björn Lindahl

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.nordiclabourjournal.org

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What is “real” work?

Our need to be seen and appreciated is often as important or more important to us than pay. But what happens when the boss is an algorithm? Our theme this time is artificial intelligence, AI, and the Nordic labour market. That is quite a lot to chew on, so we only have space to take a few bites.

EDITORIAL

22.09.2022

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

- Which opportunities does AI bring to the Nordic countries? A report looks at strengths and weaknesses across the Nordics.
- How do you develop computer programs that make worker management decisions without risking workers losing control over their own jobs? The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has been looking at this.
- What happens when AI is used in recruitment? Why did researcher Moa Bursell’s study show that the use of AI resulted in less diversity when the aim was to recruit from a broader selection of people?

To contrast the current changes, we have visited the former manufacturing town of Fiskars, 90 kilometres from Helsinki. Fiskars used to make famous tools here, but the production has since been moved elsewhere and abroad.

In its place, jewellers, bakers, artists and authors have now gathered in an “urban town”.

The area welcomes 200 000 tourists a year. There are 600 permanent citizens and 50 companies employing 200 people all year. One thing struck me about how the old factory workers reacted as I read the text:

“Two different worlds collided. They mostly disagreed on what constituted work. They could not quite understand that culture and tourism was real work.”

While AI takes over many tasks that humans perform today, will we see a similar reevaluation of what constitutes real work?

At various stages of life, it can be particularly important to either get a job or to get time off from work – in order to take care of a newborn child for instance.

We write about what is needed to get vulnerable young people included in working life. A new Nordic report looks at what actually works.

We also continue our series on the many types of parental leave, this time in Finland and Iceland.

Finally, we also take a look at how the Swedish election might affect Sweden’s labour market after Ulf Kristersson and his Moderates were asked to form a centre-right government. We also investigate the claim that often emerges towards the end of a Swedish election campaign: Do the overseas votes really sway the election?



AI – threat or opportunity?

In a new report on artificial intelligence for worker management, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work warns against what could happen if the technology is misapplied in workplaces. At the same time, AI is considered crucial for digital green change both in the Nordics and the Baltics.

THEME

22.09.2022

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: TORBJØRN TANDBERG/KDD

There is still no commonly accepted definition of what AI is. Researchers' philosophical discussions about what constitutes intelligence have been going on for decades. Can computers really think? In working life we can skip the philosophy, however, and use a simpler definition of AI: **AI is to programme computers to make decisions that humans used to make.**

AI systems being constructed now are gathering information, often in real-time, about employees, the work they carry out

and which digital tools they use. The information is then fed into AI-based models that make automated or semi-automated decisions or provide management with information which helps them make decisions about the labour force.

Reducing risk

The report from the health and safety agency says AI can be used to minimise the risk of burnout or to prevent accidents. A truck driver can for instance be monitored continuously to see how often they blink, yawn or look tired. The driver gets a

warning when the risk of falling asleep at the wheel is considered to be big, or the truck will stop by itself and park where it is safe.

Warning a worker who has forgotten to bring safety equipment to a high-up job sounds reasonable, but some of the AI tools mentioned in the report – which are considered to possibly have a positive effect – still create some unease.

"Additionally, AIWM systems (AI-based worker management) that can listen in on workers talking and that are able to analyse this information can identify and detect cases of bullying or sexual harassment," the report says.

In the same way, AIWM can analyse emails or other text. A research report describes an AI system that can analyse the relationship between certain personality traits and potential online sexual harassment behaviour.

Negative consequences

The negative consequences of AI might never have been intended, but can arise because the employee can no longer control the tempo and fashion in which a task should be completed. Some of the dangers highlighted in the report include:

- Increased work intensity.
- Workers losing control over their jobs.
- Workers are forced to behave like machines, or the "datafication" of workers – treating workers as collections of digital data.
- The border between work and private life gets blurry.
- Personal integrity is threatened when for instance information about toilet breaks is gathered.
- Customers can "punish" workers by giving them service performance points.
- AI systems make workers less motivated and work appears meaningless.
- Workers can be isolated and feel lonely since most communication happens through a computer and not with colleagues.
- Trade unions are weakened as a consequence.
- A lack of transparency about why decisions are made.
- AI systems do not work and put workers in dangerous situations.

We are still talking about AI systems which are developed and introduced with the aim of improving workflow and helping both workers and companies. This is, however, not always the case.

Anti-union mapping

"Trade unions' efforts to organise labour has been a central goal for predictive technology surveying and categorising social media. For instance, such technology has been used to anticipate labour unrest in Walmart stores," says Gabriel Grill, a researcher at the University of Michigan, who has

published several reports about how AI is used to map and thwart legitimate political protest.



Gabriel Grill, who does research on how AI is used to suppress trade union work. Photo: Björn Lindahl

He points to the fact that a company like the Pinkerton detective agency has been hired by Amazon to fight attempts to unionise workers. Google, Apple and Facebook have denied using Pinkerton, but have hired people you used to work for the agency.

Earlier this year, the company Clearview AI was fined 10 million dollars by the UK's Information Commissioner's Office. The company specialises in facial recognition and one of its customers is the UK police force. The company's databases contain 22 billion images of people, gathered from social media. The company was also told to delete all images of British citizens.

Security services' focus has changed from gathering information about enemy countries for analysis to trying to predict whether their own country's citizens are planning terror attacks. The Norwegian Police Security Service recently asked for easier access to information from psychiatric and health institutions in order to identify people who are both radicalised and mentally unstable.

Another issue is how AI will affect cyber security. IBM's annual report on data breaches shows that 83 % of the 550 companies across 17 countries that they surveyed had suffered more than one data breach. The average cost of a data breach was 4.3 million dollars. Health companies have seen the fastest growth in cost per data breach – between 2020 to 2022 it increased by 41.6 % and the average cost was 10 million dollars.

How do you fight hackers?

But what is the best way of fighting increasingly sophisticated cyber-attacks?

“More openness,” answered Kristjan Järvan, Estonia’s Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology, at the Digital North conference held in Oslo on 7 September. The conference is part of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation on digitalisation.



Kristjan Järvan, Estonia’s Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology.

“Estonia is now the last country to be the victim of new virus attacks because the hackers know that we will immediately share information with other countries.”

Estonia was the victim of a massive cyber-attack in 2007 in relation to the demolition of a Russian war monument.

“We took a real hit to the face and some of our digital services that our citizens had become used to had to be shut down. But we have learned from what happened and work night and day to improve our security. When Nato established a cyber defence centre of excellence in 2014, it chose Tallinn.”

Its own digital embassy

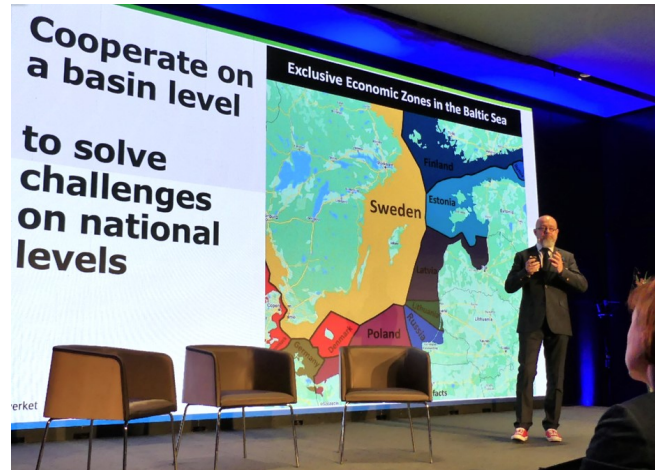
Estonia has even established its own “digital embassy” in Luxembourg where the country’s most critical and secret information is held in case Estonia were to be occupied.

Estonia has also helped Ukraine by sharing information about how the country should defend itself against cyber-attacks.

“Digitalisation is happening very fast in Ukraine now because the government can make decisions it would not be able to make in peacetime. Citizens of Ukraine can now access 160 public services through their mobile phones,” says Kristjan Järvan.

This year’s Digital North conference focused on how the Nordic and Baltic countries should share more information, especially when it comes to the management of the Baltic Sea.

“It is not possible to have a sensible administration of fisheries and other resources when the Baltic Sea is divided in this way, if not all the countries share their information,” said Njål Tengs-Hagir, head of marine infrastructure at the Norwegian Mapping Authority, and used a map to show how divided the Baltic Sea is.



Njål Tengs-Hagir with a map of the Baltic Sea, divided between nine coastal states: Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Finland (with Åland as an autonomous area). Photo: Björn Lindahl

But how do you solve the challenge with more open information, where for instance researchers and civil servants could gather information from databases in a neighbouring country while protecting yourself from data breaches and virus attacks? The answer lies in the architecture itself, said several of the speakers.

“If we cooperate on the construction of a secure system for sharing information across national borders, a system that solves the technical issues about how this can be done securely while taking into account the legal aspects and how to regulate the system, we open up for enormous opportunities,” said Kristjan Järvan.

X-Road for digital information

Estonia already has a system, X-Road, which is used to share information within the country. It is described as Estonia’s digital spine. In order to secure all information sharing, all outgoing data is given a digital signature while also being encrypted. All incoming data is authenticated and logged.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work ends its report with several recommendations, but the most important one is that AI-based worker management systems must be designed, implemented and handled in a way that makes them secure and transparent. Workers must be consulted and have access to the same information as the developers on all levels so that humans and not machines are in control at all times.

Danish businesses lack AI knowledge

Many Danish companies do not know how to use AI. Despite state AI development support, Danish businesses are lagging behind according to a Nordic report.

THEME

22.09.2022

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Denmark is taking the lead internationally in using AI ethically and in deploying it in the public sector, but private businesses need to catch up. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up the bulk of the private labour market, lack knowledge of using AI and struggle to recruit IT specialists.

This is detailed in a new report written for the Nordic Council of Ministers as part of the drive to make the Nordic Region a leader in digitalisation, ethical use of AI and the responsible use of data by 2030. The report maps how the Nordics use data and AI and also suggests ways of strengthening the individual Nordic countries and the Nordic cooperation's approach to AI.

The report also highlights problems in Denmark which have been identified repeatedly in other reports in recent years, yet remain to be solved: Businesses do not know enough about AI and as a result, only work with AI in a limited way.

“Our research shows that many SMEs struggle with the digital transformation and have problems with using their data correctly, partly because they do not have the necessary resources or competencies. So they do not prioritise AI and struggle to make a business case for AI,” writes the consultancy firm EY which compiled the report on behalf of Nordic Innovation, an organisation under the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Major state support

Various Danish governments have prioritised making Denmark a global leader in AI, and SMEs are important in order to succeed. Two-thirds of private sector workers work in SMEs, and in 2019, Danish SMEs made up 63 % of the total private sector wealth creation. Considerable sums of public money have therefore been set aside to stimulate SMEs' use of AI. Yet so far, this support has not got the AI development into gear.

Businesses in other Nordic countries share many of the obstacles, but there are some that are specific for Denmark, including the lack of:

- Staff with the necessary technical know-how to develop and use AI
- Investments
- Data maintenance

Denmark also has “a particularly noticeable gap” between AI competence in businesses in rural areas and in the four largest cities – Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg.

The report does see some signs that thanks to the major state support, Danish SMEs have begun to move slightly in terms of digitalisation and AI adoption. The industry has come a bit further in the use of data, and new, small businesses are way ahead when it comes to developing or using AI.

The report also identifies best practice in each of the Nordic countries' work with AI. The state-supported development programme AI Denmark is held up as a good example thanks to its work with promoting AI in SMEs. AI Denmark supports 120 selected businesses that want to do more and better work with AI, and all this happens in close cooperation with researchers in Danish universities.

Denmark's public sector takes the lead

In 2019, Denmark launched a national AI strategy with the ambitious goal of becoming a front-runner in the responsible use and development of AI, and the report concludes that Denmark has stood out in terms of measures to promote the ethical and responsible use of AI:

“Denmark's public sector is particularly strong when it comes to AI development,” and the report praises Denmark and Danish businesses for focusing on developing and using AI “with fairness and transparency.”

The report points to the Danish D-seal as an example of best practice in terms of ethical AI. This is a voluntary labelling programme developed by Danish industries together with the Danish Consumer Council. The seal can be used by busi-

nesses that live up to a range of rules for IT security and the responsible use of data.

“Denmark has a strong digital foundation, however, the country still faces several challenges hindering it from becoming a frontrunner within AI,” the report concludes.

Calling for improved Nordic AI cooperation

The report also identifies five areas where the Nordic countries could benefit from increased cooperation:

1. Sharing national data in important areas like health, taxation and employment. Sharing these data for the use in ethical AI could improve the Nordic countries’ international competitiveness and create better and more efficient welfare services.
2. Nordic cooperation on the development and branding of ethical AI use. This could attract international attention and investment.
3. Raise the AI and data competency level among organisational leaders in the Nordics, allowing them to prioritise investments in AI.
4. Support partnerships between businesses and research institutions with the aim of solving AI and data challenges. This would benefit both sectors.
5. Sharing knowledge and best practice between the Nordic countries.

The report provides two concrete proposals for Nordic AI cooperation projects:

- Systematic learning between Nordic countries of how SMEs increase their use of AI, by for instance sharing national data between countries.
- Nordic workshops for Nordic decision-makers and the leading players in AI and data use, allowing them to work together to find ways of making the Nordic region a leader in AI.

AI in recruitment – a double-edged sword?

More and more businesses use AI – artificial intelligence – in recruitment. Is this new technology an efficient tool to find the best-suited candidate and to increase the inclusion of marginalised groups? The first study into this gave unexpected results.

THEME

22.09.2022

TEXT: FAYME ALM

More and more businesses use AI – artificial intelligence – in recruitment. Is this new technology an efficient tool to find the best-suited candidate and to increase the inclusion of marginalised groups? The first study to look into this gave unexpected results.

What happens when businesses incorporate AI in their recruitment process? So far there has been no empirical research into this. But now, the study *“Algorithmic evaluation in the recruitment process – does it increase diversity in organizations?”* has compared the results from a survey where an AI project ran parallel with a traditional process. It turned out the AI process amplified existing patterns.



Moa Bursell at the Institute for Future Studies. Photo: Cato Lein

“We already know that discrimination occurs during recruitment. People with foreign-sounding names are often not chosen. We wanted to see whether automating the process might improve the pattern or make it worse, in order to gauge what social consequences this new technology might have

for inclusion in the workplace,” Moa Bursell tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

She is Associate Professor in Sociology and research leader at the Institute for Futures Studies in Stockholm. With support from the Swedish Research Council and in cooperation with Stockholm University, she is studying the use of AI in recruitment processes.

Cooperation between technology and humans

Studien gjordes vid ett av Sveriges största dagligvaruföretag. Ett företag som redan har god mångfald, men vill bli ännu bättre på att få en blandad personalstyrka och därför ville undersöka hur AI fungerar när ny personal ska anställas, berättar Moa Bursell.

The study was carried out at one of Sweden’s largest food retail companies, which already has a high level of diversity but wants to improve its mix of staff. That is why the company wanted to find out how AI works during recruitment.

“I mainly wanted to see how the recruitment process handled applications from people with non-European-sounding names, but the study also looked at the number of women and older people – those over 40 – who were called in for an interview,” says Moa Bursell.

The automated process used by the company took care of the actual screening phase. Applicants were asked to fill in a questionnaire with mandatory requirements, a personality test and in some cases also a problem-solving test. Then, an algorithm calculated how well the applicant met the requirements. The resulting names of qualified candidates were collected in a list which was handed to recruitment managers.

Disproportional and proportional selection

HR departments list many positive effects as arguments for introducing AI in the recruitment process:

- Saves time and reduces costs

- Enhances productivity, certainty and control, as well as fairness and impartiality
- Leads to employment based on real merits rather than the recruiter's gut feeling

But the study shows that despite using AI in the recruitment process, you might not get the desired results. Because when the list of AI-chosen candidates was handed to recruiters, people with non-European-sounding names had not been given the same opportunities to attend interviews as other applicants, including women.

“What was most striking was that these people did not have worse test results compared to other applicants. So they were proportionately represented in the list compiled with the help of AI, while recruiters disproportionately discarded many with non-European-sounding names,” says Moa Bursell.

“This difference did not apply to women applicants. Recruiters invited them to interviews proportionate to how many of them were on the list.”

Since Moa Bursell also had access to the results from the traditional recruitment process, she could compare the results from both processes.

“We saw that when recruiters were in control of the entire process, the diversity was greater than when they only controlled a list that had been collated automatically. In other words, the recruiters acted in a way that was less inclusive with a list created by algorithms than when they owned the entire process themselves,” says Moa Bursell.

The study does not identify the reason why the recruiters discarded a disproportionate number of people with non-European-sounding names, as it was only looking at numbers. But Moa Bursell says it is possible that recruiters create diversity in their own way through the traditional process, even if this is not in the most meritocratic manner.

More research needed

The academic discussion provides both optimism and pessimism regarding the possible impact algorithms might have, writes Moa Bursell in her report.

She tells the Nordic Labour Journal that research on algorithms and recruitment needs to be expanded since there are more aspects to explore.

“When you change your recruitment process, it is crucial at some point to find out what happened after the introduction of algorithms and what the results have been,” says Moa Bursell.

She suggests starting by looking at how the new technology was introduced, there is always a context in which it has to function.

It is also necessary to look at what kinds of tests applicants have to take – personality tests or cognitive tests – and

whether the test is best suited for the type of staff you are looking for. For this study, it was mostly people working in checkout and warehouses.

Moa Bursell points out that it is necessary to highlight the fact that tests might create structural obstacles. If similar tests are to be used on a grand scale, and the result is that fewer people with foreign names are hired, you risk amplifying existing patterns of discrimination.

Or if older people do worse on online tests because they have lower “online skills”, skills that might not be relevant for the job per se. It is also necessary to see whether the algorithms work and actually contribute to more or less fairness.

Moa Bursell hopes her own and other research will provide answers to the most pressing questions.

“When does the change from humans to algorithms lead to better judgements and decisions? When does it have negative effects, and for whom? When we find the answers to these questions we will know which tasks to delegate to the algorithms. And whether to delegate at all,” says Moa Bursell.

The research time scale is 2020 to 2024.



Fiskars – the manufacturing town that changed its spots

The Fiskars ironworks was in decline but became a culture and tourism town. Here, the idea of labour has really changed – and it has paid off.

NEWS

22.09.2022

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, FOTO: CATA PORTIN

Fiskars is Finland's best-known brand, famous for design, scissors and now also porcelain. Fiskars is linked to good craftsmanship, design and functionality.



But beyond the brand, Fiskars is also the name of one of Finland's oldest manufacturing towns. There has been manufacturing in this small town 90 kilometres west of Helsinki since 1649.

By the mid-80s, the large Fiskars company grew too big for its home town and could not keep up with the times. The foundry closed and production of ploughs and other products that were no longer needed stopped. The knife factory moved to the neighbouring town of Billnäs.

A tired historical backdrop got new lease of life

In 1983, most of Fiskars' works were sold to the municipality – including living quarters and factory buildings. After that, the area started falling apart.

What remained was a historical backdrop – but it has become increasingly popular as new craftspeople have been taking over. Yet the changes have not been problem-free.

Rauno Sairinen owns one of the many old houses. He wanted to write a history book about the house but ended up doing a lot more than that.



Rauno Sairinen on the steps of the house he bought in Fiskars. He is holding a spade that Fiskars made many years ago.

Sairinen wrote the book "Fiskars on aina Fiskars" ("Fiskars Will Always Be Fiskars") – about working life in a manufacturing town. It has already been published in Finnish, but will now be translated into Swedish, which was long the dominant language.

Fiskars has a varied history, often as a trailblazer. Ups and downs are part of that history, accelerated by global events and demand. It is a town where people have always worked hard, with many conflicts between workers and the gentry.

It is also a town rich in industrial history, design development and advanced craftsmanship, which is still alive today. Jobs have gone from father to son for many generations. New craftspeople are now moving there to keep traditions alive. A lot has happened since the old ironworks closed and production moved elsewhere. Instead of iron and copper manufacturing, it is now a centre for art and tourism.

Six families moved to where 48 had lived

Rauno Sairinen first visited Fiskars in the summer of 1994. He fell in love with the place and gathered six families who bought three old timber houses in Kulla. They had no special knowledge of renovating houses but took part where they felt they could contribute something and they knew who else to ask for help.

Houses had been built for people who started work at the new roller mill in Fiskars in 1859. Later, widows and pensioners also moved in.

At that time, there were 48 flats in those three houses, with one family in each room. Today there are two to three families living in each house.

Rauno Sairinen almost sounds a bit surprised over how well things have gone in the houses that had been empty for 15 years. His own flat has many original features in floors and ceilings. There is hand-painted wallpaper in several rooms and wood stoves that come from similar houses.



Rauno Sairinen's house retains many original features.

The flats are roomy with space for the home offices which became necessary during the pandemic.

An urban town with service was tempting

Rauno Sairinen used to work in Helsinki, an hour's drive from Fiskars. Now, his commute is considerably longer. For some years now, he has been a professor of environmental policy at the University of Eastern Finland. He works in the city of Joensuu a couple of days every other week.

Professor Rauno Sairinen shows us around Fiskars where he has been living since 1998. He clearly enjoys and appreciates Fiskars and its surroundings. He had had the idea of renovating a house while he was still living in Helsinki.

Yet he was not yet fully surfing the green wave. He did not want to move to the countryside, but to a town with good services. He fell in love with Fiskars, a society undergoing a lot of change.

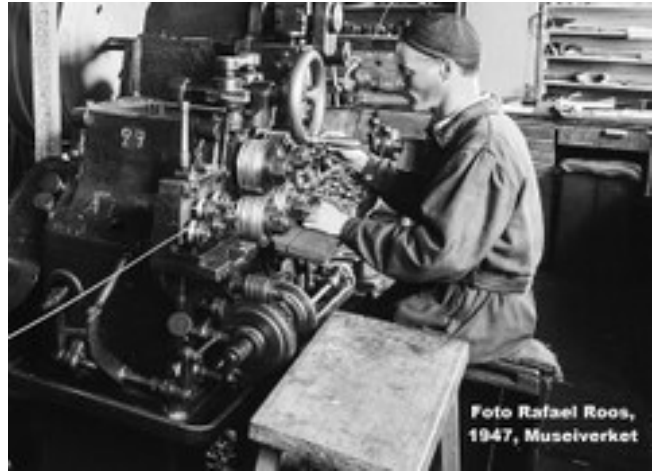
At first, many young artists and craftspeople started arriving. Later came researchers, journalists and others with alternative lifestyles. Rauno Sairinen talks about an urban town where people of all backgrounds fit in.



The building known as Gamla Mekaniska Verkstaden now houses a furniture maker.

Cultural crash

When Rauno Sairinen moved to Fiskars, many of the original workers from the Fiskars factory still lived there.



“It wasn’t easy to get to know them. Two different worlds collided. They wondered what kind of people we were, moving there with our own culture and other habits than what they were used to in the factory town.”

They mostly disagreed on what constituted work, says Rauno Sairinen. They could not quite understand that culture and tourism was real work.

Later, Fiskars’ progress changed the old Fiskars citizens’ views. They now seem convinced that real work of real value is taking place. There are new types of activities and businesses, but they are appreciated because they bring income.

None of the original industry remains. Fiskars’ factories are ten kilometres away in Billnäs. But the old manufacturing town of Fiskars has some production, furniture makers and craftspeople in the jewellery business in addition to tourism.

Change paid off despite opposition

Rauno Sairinen became active in local politics and was a city councillor for the Green Party for 12 years.

“The first period I thought that environmental issues would become my thing.”

But Rauno Sairinen ended up as a business politician during the first years. This was the time the old manufacturing plants were facing major structural changes – they were being emptied and needed to be filled with something else. He tried to convince the other politicians and the citizens that all business was valuable and welcome.

This has brought progress despite opposition also from the council. Fiskars Group now proudly showcase its roots and has a high-class shop where visitors can buy all their designer products.



The tourism season has been extended in Fiskars, and cultural life has become richer. There are people living permanently here. So there is more to the place than tourism. But summers are when most things happen.

After two years of Corona, big audience events have again started up. The Slow Food Festival could be held again in early autumn. In November, the traditional Christmas markets will be held in Fiskars Village.

The smell of fresh bread sells

The smell of freshly-baked bread spreads inside a small café in the old knife factory. It is an efficient sales pitch.



Kirsi Forsberg-Walls is behind both the bread and a selection of cheeses. She also makes butter from milk from the cows on her little farm. In the summer, she works every day and the rest of the year, she keeps the store open at least every Saturday.

The food producers started their business three years ago in Fiskars and that is also when Kirsi Forsberg-Walls opened her place here. In the summer, there are crowds of tourists and long days.

“I make a profit somehow. I don’t pay myself much but I manage and there are customers all year round. Christmas food secures my income in the winter,” explains Kirsi Forsberg-Walls.

The civil war left wounds

Anyone writing a book about working life in the manufacturing town cannot avoid the Finnish civil war, which has also been called the freedom war, the citizens’ war or the revolution.

It was fought in the winter and spring of 1918 and resulted in victory for the “whites”, after some 38 000 people had been killed. Two-thirds of them supported and fought for the red Socialists. Most were executed or died in prison camps after the war.

The civil war has often been called the worst trauma in Finnish history and it also hit Fiskars hard. Around a hundred workers ended up in prison camps after the war, and tens of them died there. But some were rescued when the factory management appealed for the release of the most important workers. Many of the management had been active fighting for the whites.

“Afterwards people just carried on working side-by-side,” says Rauno Sairinen, somewhat amazed.



The grand villa is known as "Stenhuset". This is where the factory boss lived. The house is still closed to the public, and is being used by Fiskars Group for representation.

The plants in Fiskars and Billnäs had a reputation for being conservative and opposing workers’ rights and trade union membership. The country’s oldest political organisation, the Social Democrats, were established in the area in 1899. But employers in Fiskars and Billnäs banned their workers from joining both the Social Democrats and unions. Outside agitators were viewed as trying to wreck the consensus that had existed in the factories.

Work was heavy and hot. Many workers died young. There were many widows. But there are also stories of radical factory owners who voluntarily introduced eight-hour-days and constructed housing, hospitals, schools and libraries for their workers.

So did Fiskars think about the workers, or that progress would improve takings?

Sairinen mentions some workers' protection measures that were quickly introduced. As soon as machines that sucked away fine metal dust from the grinding machines were invented, they were put to use in Fiskars.

Business management clearly demonstrated what was dangerous and where workers needed protection, says Sairinen.

He has not gone through the company's financial records, so he cannot say how profitable Fiskars factory has been through the centuries. But he knows that Fiskars has been exposed to international market movements and demand on the domestic and international markets.

The 1827 Great Fire of Turku, for instance, resulted in a boost in household utensil production. Fiskars has often been saved by its forestry properties, which the company still owns. Today, the majority of Fiskars Group shares are owned by the big finance family Ehrnrooth.

Environmental policy

In his book, Sairinen does not touch that much his own area of expertise, environmental policy. He has not found many historical facts about green agendas or environmental protection in Fiskars.

The river that runs through the town has played a central part in the town's history and life. People have been swimming here and washing clothes, while all waste from agriculture, cow sheds and factories also ended up in the river.



“It has certainly been very polluted at times. There are sediments on the river bed that are probably best left undisturbed,” says Rauno Sairinen.

But Fiskars is a beautiful place with its own microclimate and own flora. It was a tourist destination as far back as the 1800s and had many visitors. Descriptions from back then paint a scenic picture, even though it was Finland's most industrialised town. So there could not have been too much factory smoke or foul-smelling waste in the river. But people clearly did not share today's view of environmental protection, points out Rauno Sairinen.

In 2005, Fiskars was nominated for the Nordic Council Environment Prize. The winner, in the end, was Norwegian biologist Ann-Cecile Norderhaug.

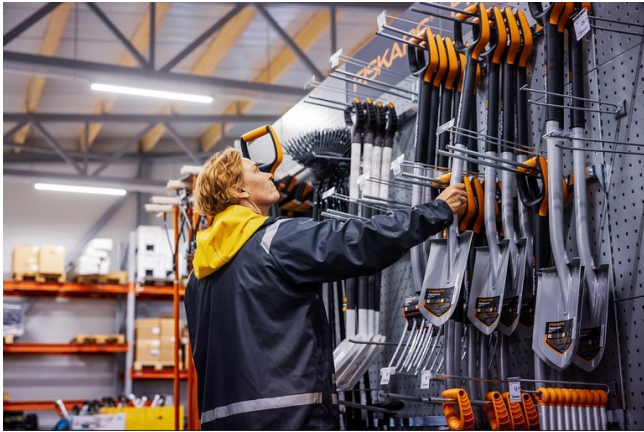
“Despite growth and internationalisation, Finland's oldest industry company Fiskars has never forgotten its roots” the nomination read. The brave and targeted drive using millions of euro on making the area appealing in order to attract new, creative citizens worked, it said.

10 % of the land areas are also protected nature reserves. The nomination also pointed out that short-term economic considerations had not prevented Fiskars from successfully highlighting, maintaining, using and administering valuable

cultural landscapes in the Nordic region, so that natural and cultural values could be maintained and developed.

The hardware store

Helena Rautakorpi works in the hardware store Karis Järn as a horticulturist and is responsible for the Fiskars products that line shelves and walls in the new store.



Fiskars has a flagship store in the old factory area. Heidi Mutka demonstrates some of the tool selection. There are also Mumin cups, Royal Copenhagen, Rörstrand and Wedgwood – and Fiskars' most luxurious axe in hickory wood.

There are products linked to seasons. The time for autumn garden work is nearly over, so gardening tools are being put away. All kinds of spades and shovels come out. The rush to buy tools for snow clearance is just around the corner.

Fiskars tools have a good reputation for being durable. An axe is often passed down through the generations.

During the pandemic, there was a clear increase in sales of Fiskars products. Finns had more time to spend in their cabins and perhaps wanted to look after it better while they had all that extra time. Many spent more of their days there, working from home and taking an interest in gardening tools, irrigation products, knives and scissors.



It is, of course, possible to buy Fiskars tools in the little hardware store too.

Helena Rautakorpi believes the functional design combined with the aesthetically pleasing look is what makes Fiskars products so popular among amateur farmers.

“There is also a hometown pride. Many here have been working at the Fiskars factory or have older relatives who did. People buy Fiskars products even though they are no longer made in their hometown. It seems people have always supported the Fiskars factory and its products. There are other Finnish manufacturers making similar products – and of course foreign ones – but in Raseborg, where the factory is, people buy from their own manufacturer,” says Helena Rautakorpi.

The jeweller

Timo Mustajärvi is a master jeweller and designer. He came to Fiskars to meet colleagues who had moved there. There was room for more jewellers, it turned out. This was in the summer of 2002, so he has now been here for 20 years.



Timo Mustajärvi.

He has a small atelier and shop in Suomenlinna, an even more popular tourist town outside of Helsinki, with Unesco status.

“In Suomenlinna there are more customers, but also more uninterested picnic tourists. In Fiskars you get fans of art and design who look for experiences and who are also interested in buying things,” explains Timo Mustajärvi.

In Fiskars, he could rent a good atelier and home. He swapped a one-room apartment in Helsinki for four rooms and a kitchen and some apple trees in Fiskars. He did at least not lose anything by moving, he says.

But does it pay? When you have studied for 11 years you live off small takings, also as a business person, explains Timo Mustajärvi.



A selection of Timo Mustajärvi's rings.

“But here in Fiskars you also get a salary and more spare time, which you can buy if you risk employing someone else. And we are close to nature.”

But work is never-ending for an entrepreneur, with customers still turning up around 10 pm complaining that the shop is closed. Mustajärvi says he enjoys his customers and his artist colleagues. He has been motivated to develop his business and his product range.

“Here you develop a belief in your own products. You have the freedom to work outside the traditional norms. This is definitely not a bad place to be for an entrepreneur. Fiskars gives you self-confidence, but quality must remain high because everyone here produces high-quality products. World-class designer products have been created here. Today’s craftspeople want to carry on in that tradition.”

Fiskars has been a strong brand with manufacturing in Finland, but gets criticism too. The world is open, this is what happens to a global company.

Timo Mustajärvi is a fan and user of Fiskars gardening products. But he says he has had to return several that have not been good enough. Customers are sometimes too polite to point out inadequate materials and poor ergonomics, says Mustajärvi.

“But if a company doesn’t know about faulty products, it is useful if customers complain. I for one would appreciate that,” says Timo Mustajärvi.



Vulnerable young people – how best to find them jobs and a place in society?

What is needed to help vulnerable young people be included in work, education and society? A new report sums up the situation in the Nordics. Here is a spoiler: There is no "quick fix".

NEWS

22.09.2022

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: MARTIN ZACHRISSON / NORDEN.ORG

Vulnerable young people are those aged between 13 and 29 who face many different types of problems. They might have learning difficulties, psychological challenges or physical handicaps. They might be youths in foster care or under the care of the child welfare service, young people with anti-social behaviour, or young people who struggle to find belonging in their local community.

Because the groups are so different, there is no one-size-fits-all when trying to find ways of helping them. But are there still experiences that can be shared between the Nordic countries?

That was the task given by the Nordic Council of Ministers to researchers at KAI, the Centre for Work Inclusion at the OsloMet university.

They went through 84 Nordic studies plus 17 other meta-analyses to see whether there were any commonalities.

"Vulnerable young people are not helped by general measures. It is important to develop good relations with the young. To be seen as an ordinary human being and not just some outsider is very important, as we see in many of these studies," said Anne Leseth as their report was presented during a digital Nordic seminar on 15 September.

Inclusion can happen on an individual level, in relation to other people and on a structural level – i.e. how people are included when it comes to institutions like schools, jobs and authorities.

“Politicians and researchers must continuously discuss who should be included into what, how this should happen and why. This also goes beyond young people needing to get themselves included – there has to be some mutual interest in the process.”

With the structural level in mind, the most important thing is to secure good coordination between different welfare services, work, health and education. The different services should also listen to what the young people want. If not, all too often things end up like they did at a job centre in Finland:

Young jobseeker with Eastern European background: “I am a musician and would like to work in the culture sector.”

Employment officer: “How about construction? Or the service industry?”

According to Anne Leseth there are many stereotypical theories about why young people are marginalised and what kind of work suits them.

“It is important to have skilled adults who understand that this takes time. It is something that must be ongoing non-stop – you have not reached the goal as soon as a 25-year-old has got a job. There must be follow-up.”

Andreea I Alecu pointed out that not many of the 63 studies looked at cooperation between the structures and what worked well on an individual level.

“Few studies look at what effect the measures have, only 12 of them do. The studies say very little about how the measures work across different groups of young people and in what time perspective. These are important questions that ought to be studied further.”

The studies do, however, show what the researchers call two robust findings:

1. Wage subsidies, employment measures and measures like IPS (Individual Placement and Support) and SE (Supported Employment) seem to have a positive effect on inclusion in work and education.
2. In-work training and apprenticeships do not seem to have much effect. This is based mainly on Norwegian studies and not on longer-term effects.

Kjetil Frøyland gave a more detailed description of what IPS and SE really is when it comes to work inclusion. Both methods focus on workplace training with individually adapted help, rather than a gradual approach to work through courses and participation in various groups.

There are four important principles for IPS:

1. The aim is to secure employment in the ordinary labour market
2. Integration should happen in the workplace with help from a dedicated team
3. The individuals' preferences and choices should count for a lot
4. Measures should have no time limit

More qualitative-oriented studies, however, show that internships can be of good help for vulnerable young people and contribute to their inclusion.

Kjetil Frøyland also pointed out that things take time, both establishing contact with the young people and for employment officers who work with these groups to find employers in the local area who can learn to know them. It might “of course be a challenge” not to put a time limit on how long the support measures should be in place, as he put it.

“It is also important to continuously adjust the working tasks in the workplace for the young people.”

Employers might be more or less motivated to include marginalised youths, but there are also big variations between trades.

“Some, like the retail sector, have working tasks where no education is needed, while in other sectors you need an education or an apprenticeship. Workplaces differ and many of the studies point out that they might need support in order to get good at inclusion.”

Kjetil Frøyland also sees the need for more research, first and foremost into what “inclusion skills” is. What skills do you actually need to get to know young people and their needs, and to bring them into a workplace and train them there?

Despite the fact that the studies have used different methods, the Nordic report still shows that there is a common view that can be summed up like this, according to Kjetil Frøyland:

- There is no single measure that can solve the problems.
- It is important to build relations with the young people and offer them tailored help, preferably from people with special skills. It is also important to offer different meeting places where young people can meet other young people and helpers from different institutions.
- Help must be coordinated.
- It takes time.



Iceland's record-breaking parental leave "not perfect"

Iceland's parliament passed a new law on parents' leave in 2021 giving each parent at least six months off – the longest paternity leave in the Nordics. Yet only six weeks can now be split between them, a big change from earlier when parents could split far more time between them. Usually the mother took the entire leave that could be split.

THEME

22.09.2022

TEXT: HALLGRÍMUR INDRIÐASON

30 years ago, Iceland had no statutory paternity leave at all and shorter maternity leave than any of the other Nordic countries.



Friða Rós Valdimarsdóttir, the former leader of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association Kvenréttindafélag Íslands, has been working as a freelance project manager on equality issues for a long time. In 2005 she wrote a report for the Icelandic Directorate of Equality on the development of maternity and paternity leave in the Nordic countries, giving her a good overview of developments.

According to the report, Iceland's experience with parental leave stands out. Laws on paid maternity leave were only passed in 1946, decades later than in other Nordic countries. Paid paternity leave was not available until 1998. It only covered two weeks, and only applied for fathers living with the mother.

"Iceland stands out by being slow to provide public care for children in general. That doesn't only apply to maternity leave but to other issues such as warm school meals, which were introduced much later in Iceland.

"The percentage of women working full time has also been high for decades, and there are no clear statistics detailing where the children were at the time, but often they were taken care of by older siblings or their grandmothers."

Fathers took paternity leave instantly

Valdimarsdóttir said this changed when daycare improved after a hard fight from women's rights groups. Trade unions have also put pressure on the government to improve parents' leave. Then came a separate paternity leave, which in 2000 changed from two weeks to three months and has since been lengthened step by step.

"Over 80 % of fathers already started to take leave then. It was incredible how fast this happened. This shows that if there is a will and firm steps are taken, big social changes are possible. Icelandic society changed very fast in that respect.

"It became much more normal for men to be out with a pram and they became more visible as one of their child's caretakers. And research shows that they are experiencing the role as a father much strongly and in a more positive way."

Valdimarsdóttir says that before the new law was introduced, fathers had already started to take more part in childcare. It had become socially expected.

"It was like the year 2000 was the right time to take these steps. And statistics show that it has an impact on the gender pay gap. That is very much based on childcare. The gap starts when the children arrive, and extending paternity leave is simply a way to change it. The pay gap is now closing, and it is very likely to be at least partly because child care is more equally divided between both parents."

Backlash after the crisis

But there was a big backlash in the wake of the financial crisis in 2008. The state would always pay 80 % of people's salaries, currently capped at 600 000 ISK (€4 288). One of the government's budget cut measures was to significantly lower that cap.

"This meant that many fathers felt they couldn't afford to take paternity leave and the percentage of those who took it fell drastically, especially among the ones on higher salaries. It was a shame that the limit was so low that it had this effect. This was especially bad because this applied to leaders who should be role models – they are important in order to normalise paternity leave."

But when the cap was raised again, things gradually changed. Parental leave was extended in 2021 from nine months (where the mother took three months, the father took three months, and the rest was split as the parents wished) to twelve months with only six weeks transferable between parents.

Some MPs criticised this reduced flexibility between the parents. But now, Iceland has the longest paternity leave among the Nordic countries. Valdimarsdóttir says this has come as a result of putting pressure on the authorities.

"That comes not only from the women's rights activist groups but also from the trade unions. Previous examples show that when there is no special paternity leave, people go back to the old habit of the mother staying at home. So, it is very important to have earmarked paternity leave. In some areas it is important that the authorities take action to promote gender equality. This is one of those examples."

Valdimarsdóttir believes that the duration of parents' leave is good as it is now.

"The bigger problem now is to bridge the gap between parents' leave and kindergarten, public childcare, so parents can go back to their work or education. This has become a big problem that adds to the pressure of already strained parents."

Always wanted six months' leave

Birgir Þór Harðarson, a journalist, took a six months paternity leave after his son was born in June last year.

"I always wanted to take the full six months. My wife decided to spread her six months across seven months, which meant we got less money for each month. So she took the first seven months after our son was born and then afterwards I took the whole six months."

And he is still at home with his son even though the paternity leave is over because he has not found a space for him in kindergarten. He now works from home part-time while taking care of his son.

Harðarson says he thinks he would have done it the same way in the old system when part of the leave could be split between the parents as they wished.

"We always wanted to split this time equally between us."

Income shrunk

However, during both the maternity and paternity leave the family's income shrunk drastically.

"We found that parental pay lasted a lot shorter every month than our salaries did. The pay is capped and both of us reached that limit, so we got less than 80 % of our salaries. This meant we had to use our savings to see us through this period. So savings became very important, otherwise we would have been forced to handle the situation differently."

Harðarson says the fact that they had both been working for over 10 years helped. It meant they had more income than those who have children at a younger age, and they had a chance to build up some savings.

"If the child had come when I was a bit younger I would not have been able to afford to take such long paternity leave. I was not able to build up any savings until I managed to buy my own place. And that was maybe the most sensible decision we took – that is, not to have children until we had our own apartment. If we hadn't done that, then the two of us could not have taken full leave."

Harðarson is, however, certain that both he and his son have benefitted from such long paternity leave.

"I've got to know my son better and in a whole other way than if I had taken shorter leave. During the first year you're simply helping them get on their feet, but these last few months I've watched him learn new words, something that I would otherwise have missed.

"So this is very important, for me and not least for him. My mother started to work three months after I was born 33 years ago. I can't for the life of me understand how she managed that," Harðarson says.

Finland extends parental leave

Three Nordic countries have recently made changes to parental leave. Iceland increased the leave for both parents to six months in 2021, while Denmark and Finland made changes this summer.

NEWS

22.09.2022

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

But just how far ahead of other European countries are the Nordics?

In a slightly ironic twist, Danish men now get considerably longer paternal leave in parts thanks to an EU directive (see story from Denmark here). Iceland has long had the most generous paternal leave but it is not perfect, says gender equality campaigners (see story from Iceland here).

In Finland, children born on or after 4 September 2022 will now get the chance to see more of their parents. The country's new parental leave reform increases the number of days that parents can spend at home with their children. Now, each parent gets a quota of 160 paid days off. This means the total length of parental leave goes from just over 12 months to more than 14 months.

For the first time, the reform gives equal access to parental leave for both parents.

The leave can be taken across several periods until the child turns two.

Some of the leave can be given to the other parent, another carer, your own partner or the other parent's partner.

Trying to range European countries according to the best parental leave system is not that easy, however, because there are so many different elements.

There is usually a short period reserved for the mother around the time of birth. This can be taken either before or after the birth.

Even if parental leave is available, the amount of support varies. Is it 80 to 90 % of people's salary, or considerably less? Is the amount based on the mother's or the father's salary?

Are there different quotas for each of the parents? How flexible is the leave – how old can the child be, and can both parents be at home at the same time?

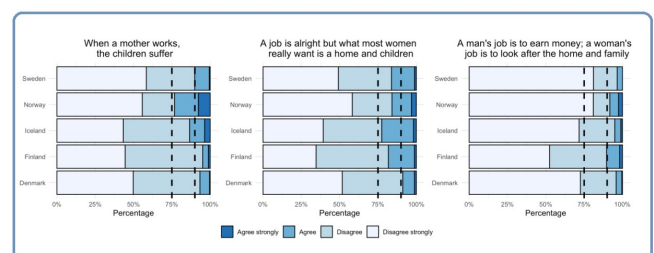
The Nordics are ahead of the rest of Europe on one point, at least: the definition of who counts as parents.

According to the new Finnish parental leave legislation, all parents who care for a child have the same right to support regardless of the parent's gender or whether the person is the biological parent, adoptive parent, residential parent or friend.

What will the new paternal leave mean for gender roles?

"The pursuit of gender equality constitutes one of the main characteristics of the Nordic countries, both in the labour market and in the private sphere of family and care responsibilities. Parental leave policies that include non-transferable quotas for both mothers and fathers are central factors for this," says Johanna Lammi-Taskula, head of research at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare THL.

In a discussion paper published this year, she looked at answers from under-30s in the fifth European Values Study 2017-2020, which is a joint European research cooperation.



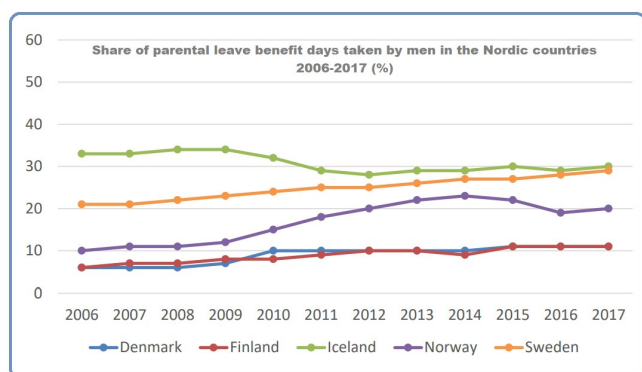
She has looked at how the under-30s answer to three – in a Nordic context – fairly provocative statements:

1. When a mother works for pay, the children suffer

2. A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children
3. A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.

She found that more than 75 % of the respondents across the Nordic countries strongly disagree or disagree with all three statements. Among those who agree or strongly agree, the last statement gets the least support. Less than 10 % give that answer across the five countries.

There was a big fall in support for the three statements over time between 1900 and 2010, while opinions have remained stable since then.



The questions do not provide a clear picture of which Nordic country is most supportive of gender equality, but if you look at how much of the total parental leave is taken by fathers, Iceland came top, although the trend fell slightly over time. Swedish fathers' share increased between 2006 and 2017.

The figures are five years old, however, so the latest changes to paternal leave could change the Danish and Finnish figures in particular.



Labour market policies a challenge for Swedish government negotiations

Labour market issues were overshadowed by crime, high energy prices and immigration in the run-up to the Swedish election. As the centre-right block tries to negotiate a government platform supported by the Sweden Democrats, unemployment and public health insurance might be among the political chess pieces.

NEWS

22.09.2022

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: TIM ARO/TT

There was a victorious atmosphere among Swedish centre-right parties on election night 11 September. The Moderates (M), Christian Democrats (KD) and Liberals (L) were jubilant. All three had lost some mandates from the 2018 election, but the results were still pointing to a centre-right victory and for them, a long-sought-after change of government.

Because on their side, they also had the real winners – the Sweden Democrats (SD) – which became Sweden's second-largest party with 20.5 % of the total votes. SD gained 3 % in the parliamentary elections but also did well in regions and municipalities – including in many municipalities within the traditionally Social Democrat part of the North of Sweden.

Challenging government negotiations

The election results were confirmed a few days later with another slight increase for the centre-right parties. Including SD, they took 176 seats while the red-green parties took 173. Magdalena Andersson stood down as Prime Minister and talks between party leaders began with the aim of giving the Moderates' leader Ulf Kristersson the task of forming a government.

Challenging government negotiations are now underway. Some of the pieces at play could be public health insurance levels, unemployment benefits, labour immigration and the issue of regional safety representatives. The centre-right parties say they cooperate with SD because they agree on the main issues, but when it comes to benefit levels and labour market policies opinions differ.

During the election, the Moderates talked about marginalised people – the 700 000 foreign-born who depend on state support. Later, the party had to correct that figure as it contained students, part-time workers, and people on sick leave or parental leave. Sweden might have one of the highest unemployment rates in the EU, but at the same time, the country has a very high employment rate.

According to Adnan Habibija, a researcher at the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, 100 000 people – not 700 000 – are outside of the labour market and long-term unemployed. Many of the 100 000 have been unemployed for years and one in three of them for more than four years, he writes in his blog.

Lower benefits and taxes an incentive to work

The Moderates and Liberals want to introduce a benefit ceiling – unlike SD. It should pay to go to work, and income tax cuts should help achieve this. KD has advocated a resettlement allowance for people on benefits and sick pay. SD welcomes tax cuts as a stimulus to get people into work but does not want to lower benefit levels. Party leader Jimmie Åkesson has even suggested that this issue is so important that he believes it would be difficult to support Ulf Kristersson as Prime Minister if the Moderates and Liberals cut benefit levels.

SD wants to separate the unemployment benefit scheme from the trade unions and remove increased benefits for having more children, in order to incentivise women to return to work. SD also wants to tighten asylum seekers' responsibilities.

Unlike other parties on the right, SD does not want to use public money to support training schemes, internships or job-creation programmes. SD also does not want trade unions to have the power to appoint regional safety representatives, but rather give that task to the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

SD's strong negotiation hand

As the second-largest party, SD is in a strong position to negotiate and sees its chance to get more influence. The party has been open to joining a coalition, but for M, KD and L, cooperating with SD is controversial. The Swedish Democrats were formed in the late 1980s by extreme-right and populist parties. The party now describes itself as social-conservative with a nationalist foundation.

Cutting immigration and getting foreign-born people to return to their home countries are strong and returning messages. The Liberals do not want SD in government and SD does not want to be in government with the Liberals. If SD is to remain outside a coalition, but still support it in parliament, most believe compromises and concessions are going to be needed.

LO's support for the Social Democrats' election campaign

The election has been thoroughly analysed, not least because the results point to a divided country. SD gained ground in many municipalities, including those that have been Social Democrat-run for years.

The Social Democrats still command the most support among LO members at 42.4 %, but the Sweden Democrats increased their support among workers and stand at 27.3 %. When Social Democrat members are no longer in the majority, it will be more difficult for LO to openly support the Social Democrats' election campaign.

LO and the Social Democrats go way back. The party was originally formed by the trade union movement. LO President Susanna Gideonsson is on the Social Democrats executive committee. LO donated 30 million Swedish kronor (€2.7m) to the Social Democrats during this election campaign and gave another 20 million for extra campaigning staff.

"I am proud of the work LO organisations have done, we have spoken to 621 000 members altogether," says Susanna Gideonsson in an article on LO's website on 13 September, two days after the election.

"At the same time, it is difficult to celebrate, because we know there are clear proposals from parties to the right that go against what LO wants, and what ordinary people will benefit from. They want a weaker unemployment benefit scheme and cuts to health benefits, and are a direct threat to trade union influence over working conditions. This risks upsetting the balance in the labour market," says Susanna Gideonsson.

The campaign support has created debate, including in the newspapers *Expressen* and *Dagens Industri*.

"When LO goes against what the wishes of the membership majority and carries on campaigning for the Social Democrats, LO's role as a society-supporting trade union movement

is weakened. It jeopardises the Swedish model, a model which Sweden has asked the EU to respect,” writes Tobias Wikström, Dagens Industri, in a comment.

A more split country emerges

This year’s election also showed that men and women vote differently. Men seem to be turning to the right and women to the left. With only women’s votes, Sweden would have had a red-green coalition government enjoying a 57 % majority. If only men voted, the centre-right majority would be 56 %. And if first-time voters between 18 and 21 had their say, the centre-right would take home 58 % of the votes.

On election night, the Moderates’ leader Ulf Kristersson pointed out the need for unity, albeit before the results were clear.

“What Sweden needs now is unity. There is a lot of frustration in our country. People worry about the economy, violence and global instability. We see political polarisation, but we want to unify, not divide, and find out what unites us,” said Ulf Kristersson.



Swedes abroad: Can they really sway an election?

Every four years a special group of people get attention for a moment of time – the Swedes living abroad. Everyone wants to know how they will vote in the parliamentary elections. It is often claimed that overseas votes “can determine the election” because they are counted so late. But this year there was also a new phenomenon – the immigrant party Nyans.

NEWS

22.09.2022

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Sweden’s embassy in Oslo receives more overseas votes than anywhere else. This year voting took place in the grand Nobel Institute in the same hall where the Nobel Peace Prize is announced every year.

Outside, embassy staff along with personnel and volunteers from the Swedish Margareta Church offered coffee and newly baked *kanelbullar*.



Swedes voting in Oslo were offered coffee and kanelbullar by Maria Philipson, Consular Officer at the Swedish Embassy.

“This year just over 4 000 people voted, compared to around 5 000 in 2018. The lower number might reflect more postal votes, but we don’t have any figures on these,” says Emmie Isaksson, Communication, Culture and Trade Officer at the embassy.

Altogether some 50 000 Swedes abroad vote in parliamentary elections. The turnout is lower than among Swedes in Sweden, but it is hard to know how low because estimates for the number of Swedes living abroad vary a lot.

According to the Swedish Tax Agency, around 250 000 Swedish citizens were living abroad in 2009.

“But there are several problems with this statistic, including the fact that not everyone who emigrates tells Swedish authorities about it,” writes Maria Solved in the report *Svenska utlandsröster* (Swedish voters abroad), published in 2016 by the SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg.

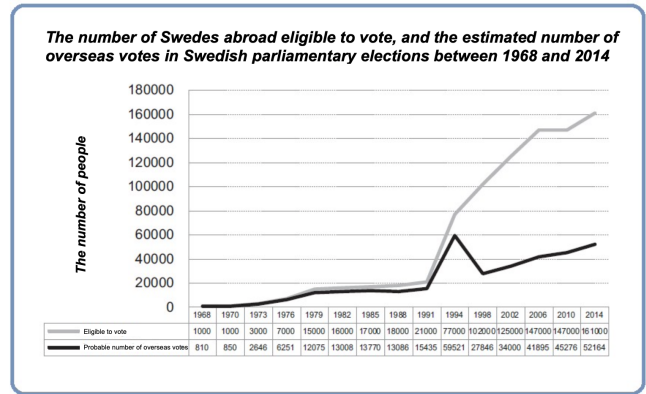
There is also no requirement to report moving house within one county or between countries, and it is unclear how the deaths of Swedes abroad are reported. According to Eurostat 155 000 people born in Sweden live in the EU/EEA area, and within OECD countries there are 246 000. The organisation Swedes Worldwide, however, estimates some 660 000 Swedish citizens are living abroad.

The official voter turnout for Swedes living abroad was 32.4 % for the previous election in 2018.

The perception has long been that Swedes abroad are more conservative than voters living in Sweden.

“The foreign votes are deciding the election!” snorted the then Prime Minister Olof Palme after the 1979 elections, the closest in Swedish history when the two blocks were separated by just 8 404 votes. Votes from abroad would be crucial that year.

“Ironically, this was the first election after the introduction of simplified rules for postal votes from abroad – rules that Olof Palme had been proposing,” writes Henric Oscarsson in his chapter in the Swedish voters abroad report.



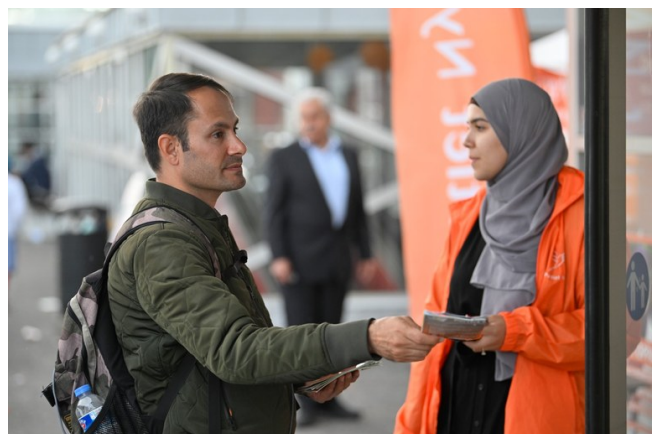
The number of eligible voters living abroad has increased dramatically from 1 000 in 1970 to more than 160 000 today, according to statistics in the Swedish voters abroad report. The number of people actually voting has not increased as much.

The SOM Institute sent a survey out to 10 000 Swedes abroad, and 27 % answered. It showed the centre-right Moderates were overrepresented in the 2018 elections with 13 percentage points, while the Social Democrats were underrepresented with 16 percentage points.

Since 1979, the Moderates have been targeting the growing group of Swedish voters abroad – a tradition the party has upheld in many elections.

This year they sent a special message where party leader Ulf Kristersson had prerecorded around 1 000 names, which were then edited into a YouTube message sent to 160 000 Swedes abroad. The flag on Kristersson’s coffee cup changes according to which country the recipient lives in.

While Ulf Kristersson sent out his greetings, Mikail Yüksel wandered around in the city of Kulu in Turkey, hanging up election posters for his party Nyans (the Swedish word for nuance) which he founded in 2019. The party says it wants to fight for the rights of minorities, but the main focus is on Muslims.



Mikail Yüksel electioneering – here in Sweden. Photo Johan Nilsson/TT

The choice of venue for fighting the election might seem strange, but most of the more than 50 000 Swedes who were born in Turkey are from Kulu, which is in the centre of the country, 110 kilometres from Ankara.

“In 1964, four people from Kulu in the Konya region left to work in Sweden. It was the beginning of a love story that is still going strong. Those who moved to Sweden liked the place a lot, and emigration has continued. According to Lulu’s mayor, 50 000 people from Kulu have gone to live in Sweden. 40 000 of them have Swedish citizenship. Many of them live in Stockholm. Nine out of ten Turks living in Sweden are from Kulu, according to the Hürriyet newspaper.

Many of those who emigrated from Turkey to Sweden have moved back in their old age, so the Swedish general consulate set up a voting station also here.

In Sweden, the Nyans party has been viewed with great suspicion by the established parties. Their demand for a ban on the burning of the Koran has been seen as trying to limit the freedom of speech.

In an interview with the Expressen newspaper, Minister for Justice Morgan Johansson (S) warned against the party describing it as “a threat to the open society”.

Turkish media, however, are proud of the former Kulu resident who emigrated to Gothenburg in 2001, where he worked as a cleaner, taxi driver and welder before becoming a politician for the Centre Party in 2018 and then founding his own party the year after.

“Voter turnout among Turks is usually around 15 %, but if the turnout increases to 90 % the future for all Turks in Sweden – and especially those from Kulu – could change,” says Mikail Yüksel in an interview.

Did not reach the goal

When all the votes in this year’s election were counted, the Nyans party had not gained enough support in order to get a mandate, which requires 12 % in one constituency.

Votes for Nyans were not isolated by the election authorities but came under the group “other parties”, which together took home 1.5 % of votes.

As Swedish Television SVT analysed the Swedish Election Authority’s figures around 11 pm on election night, “other parties” had got more than 10 % of votes in 54 constituencies (out of 6578). In several districts with high immigrant populations, like Rosengård in Malmö, Rinkeby in Stockholm and in Västra Hisingen in Gothenburg, more than 20 % voted for “other parties”.

In future, information about who the Swedes abroad are will probably be more nuanced, and Swedish politics will be discussed even more around the café tables at Olof Palme’s square in Kulu, Turkey.