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Paula Lehtomäki wants a new Nordic passport union and a clearer Nordic Council of Ministers

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Unique study compares how Denmark, Norway and Sweden integrate refugees

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**News**

New Finnish work environment policy

May 27, 2019

## Theme: The many faces of inclusion



Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 4/2019



Financed by  
Nordic Council of  
Ministers

## **NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL**

OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University

## **PUBLISHER**

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

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An email edition of the newsletter can  
be ordered free of charge from  
[www.nordiclabourjournal.org](http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org)

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



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# A more precise view on inclusion

It is hard to generalise about labour market inclusion. Everyone who fails to join or who drops out have their own story. But we are getting more detailed comparisons between the different Nordic countries.

EDITORIAL

26.05.2019

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, ACTING EDITOR

In order to illustrate just how big the differences can be, we have interviewed two people in Norway who both have handicaps and who both have big ambitions. One is Kristine Ronæss Årdal, who is wheelchair-bound with cerebral palsy and who wants to be the first person with a severe form of CP who learns how to walk. Torstein Lerhol leads a team of 700 people, despite his mobility challenges which means he can only move one finger. Now he wants to be elected mayor for a Norwegian municipality in local elections in September.

Their introductions to the labour market were radically different. One was headhunted, the other found a job after 80 failed applications made her advertise her skills on Facebook.

Refugees, immigrants, youths, older people or people with physical handicaps. They all have their own problems in an increasingly demanding labour market. There is rarely one single solution to the problem of people dropping out. You need to combine education, legislation and subsidies in the best possible way. In order to find out what works, it is often best to look to countries that are similar to your own. It is then possible to study the effect of different measures more isolated from other factors.

In recent years, researchers have been given a wider access to the unique register-based information which exists in the Nordic countries. They do not need to physically travel to another country to access the registers. To keep all the information relevant, it must be collected in similar ways everywhere.

Both the report commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers of Labour – about how the Nordics integrate refugees – and the research project led by Rune Halvorsen and Bjørn Hvinden on NEET youths (Not in Employment, Training or Education), are examples of the detailed comparisons which can now be made.

The aim is always to get more people into good jobs, but also to make it as easy as possible for those who want to work in another country. Paula Lehtomäki became the new Secretary General for the Nordic Council of Ministers two months ago, moving from Helsinki to Copenhagen. Like everyone else, she has had to wait for one month for her Danish e-ID. Without it, you cannot open a bank account.

Creating an e-ID that works in all of the Nordic countries and which could be the key to many different digital services, is a priority for her. Perhaps this is so big that one might talk about a new Nordic passport union? Meet the new Secretary General in our portrait!



## Paula Lehtomäki wants a new Nordic passport union and a clearer Nordic Council of Ministers

Nordic citizens should be able to use digital ID and use digital services in neighbouring countries, says the new Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers. She wants to continue delivering results that really benefit the region's citizens.

PORTRAIT

26.05.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Paula Lehtomäki was born in Kuhmo in Eastern Finland, close to the then Soviet Union. Her first introduction to the Nordics was when the choir she sang in as a 13 year-old was invited to the twin town of Robertsfors in Sweden.

“We spent time with local youths, and I can remember finding the language difficult. Kuhmo is a Finnish-only municipality, and I had only heard Swedish at school.”

In addition to Finnish and Swedish, both English and Russian was part of the curriculum. Paula had already visited the Soviet Union, but at 16 she also went on a school trip to Stockholm.

“In the Finnish parliament I was a member of the Nordic council, so the Nordic cooperation has had quite an impact on my life.

### **Not everything runs smoothly**

She has now moved to Copenhagen, and has experienced that not everything runs as smoothly as a Secretary General might wish.

“It took me a month to get a Danish e-ID. Without it, you cannot open a bank account.”



Before taking over as Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Paula Lehtomäki was minister of both trade, development and environment in the Finnish government.

She had started reading only Swedish books even before deciding to accept her new job and move to Copenhagen. This to freshen up her Swedish, which sometimes sounds very Swedish and sometimes is tinged with a different tonality. Once in a while she says something that would not be recognised as a correct work in Scrabble. But her enthusiasm is second to none.

“I am incredibly motivated to begin this job!”

#### **Explaining her approach every day**

In an earlier interview with Finnish Hufvudstadsbladet, she said it is still too early for her to declare what approach she will take going forward. But now, exactly two months after taking over from former Secretary General Dagfinn Høybråten, she feels more secure in her new role.

“I will talk about how I want to do things every day now, I suppose. But that will be mostly for internal use. As Secretary General it is both my right and my duty to come up with proposals. But you have to tread carefully. I would like the member countries to make decisions and for me to be at their service.

“I continuously make contributions as the member countries make decisions. It really is our duty to say what we think. But when ministers make a decision, we will of course follow this loyally.”

#### **Unclear political situation**

From her office, Paula can see Christiansborg, home of both the Danish parliament and some government ministries – including the Prime Minister’s office. Outside, the Danish general election campaign is in full swing.



Finland is still in the throes of government negotiations, so it is difficult to get any politicians in those two member countries to think much about the Nordic region.

One important issue on the Nordic Council of Ministers and Paula Lehtomäki’s agenda is to work with governments to explore the introduction of national electronic identification in other Nordic countries, as well as in the Baltics. This has been an issue for some time now.

Paula Lehtomäki calls it “a new Nordic passport union”, which naturally brings us to the old passport union, which no longer means an absence of border controls between the Nordic countries. How does the Council of Ministers handle that issue?

“This is already being looked at in the border obstacle council, which is following the issue closely – including how the Öresund crossing times are dealt with. Times spend for border controls there have been reduced, but it is up to the individual countries to make decisions here.”

The Council of Ministers is busy formulating a new vision for the Nordic cooperation.

“This issue will be debated when the prime ministers meet in August. It is still their ambition to make the Nordics the world’s most integrated region.”

#### **Nordic paradox**

Opinion polls show there is very strong support for the Nordic cooperation. Yet there is also a feeling that it is bureaucratic and that not much is actually happening. Paula Lehtomäki herself quotes from an old article which called the cooperation “the world’s most expensive coffee club”. Her predecessor used to point out how cheap the cooperation really is – 30 Swedish kronor per citizen (€ 2.8), or the same as a loaf of bread.

“But I do agree there is a paradox here.”

She herself has three aims for the future of the Nordic cooperation:



- There is broad support for what we have achieved so far, but we must continue to deliver on issues that are important to individual people.
- We must become more transparent both externally and internally. I have spent two months trying to get an overview of how the cooperation works, but it is not easy.
- We should not forget that the cooperation is valuable in and of itself. We are a Nordic family, and the cooperation leads to a high level of trust between our countries.

### Trust must be treasured

“Trust is something we must treasure. It is like a marriage. You cannot after 20 years simply say that we’ll carry on in the same manner for another 20.”

Paula Lehtomäki has not yet had time to personalise her office. Presents left behind by Dagfinn Høybråten are sat on a bookshelf, including two carvings. One with panda bears from China, one with Russian buildings with onion domes. These are the kinds of symbolic presents that rarely fit in anywhere.



But Paula has hung up one picture herself: a framed poster from Suomen Työn Liitto (The Association for Finnish Work) with the message

“It is always possible to do a bit more.” The slogan is written across two cogwheels. A closer look reveals an arrow with the text “upwards with sisu”.

The poster channels an earlier industrial revolution. We are now already in the middle of the fourth industrial revolution. The issues surrounding the future of work will be important to Paula Lehtomäki. Her second public engagement was to take part at the Reykjavik Future of Work conference in April, alongside ILO’s Director-General Guy Ryder.

### Life-long learning

“One of the most important things to remember is that the future of work means life-long learning. There is still no

proper solution for how this can be organised. Should businesses or universities be responsible for it, or will it arrive in the shape of a platform solution yet to emerge, where the end-user is directly linked to the provider – like with Airbnb,” says Paula Lehtomäki.

“We must be open for the idea that things can be organised in a different way. But the fourth industrial revolution has many other attributes too, like the possibility to scale up a service at no extra cost. Look at the gaming industry! When a game has been developed, it costs nothing to copy it and earn enormous amounts of money.”



## A tough tone between EU and national courts

Right now, Nordic labour ministries are busy working with two EU directives. The directive on the posting of workers is being expanded, while a new directive on transparent and predictable working conditions is to be implemented.

THEME

26.05.2019

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The directives were being debated when the EU&Arbetsrätt newsletter together with the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour hosted a conference in Stockholm in mid-May. Also on the agenda: examples of conflicts between national and EU courts which have arisen when trying to interpret EU directives in relation to national laws and agreements.

The conference also drew interested representatives from the social partners, government ministries and researchers. There was so much interest, in fact, that not everyone got a space.

### **The core set is growing**

The EU decided to amend the directive on the posting of workers on 21st June 2018. Once the new directive was adopted, member states were given two years in which to implement the amendments and change national legislation to comply within two years –by the summer of 2020 at the latest.

The amended directive expands the so-called “core set” of labour law provisions. These comprise a range of areas where a company employing posted workers must follow the host country’s labour legislation.

The new, amended directive says posted workers will now have the same right to allowances or reimbursement of expenses related to meals, travel and board as workers in the host country – if they perform work away from their ordinary place of work in the host country.

Costs related to the actual posting, e.g. travel, board etc., is not affected by this. The amendment could be compared with the right to claim food expenses for those who work away from their every-day workplace.

The new posting directive also says this right is limited to the first twelve months of a posted worker's job. If the posting is extended beyond that time, the posted worker will enjoy the same work and employment conditions as host country workers. The exception are the rules covering workplace pensions and terms of employment. The 12 month deadline can be extended with a further six months, if the employer can provide a good enough reason.

### **Ongoing consultations**

The amended directive will be fully implemented in the summer of 2020, and member states are busy preparing the necessary legal changes. Sweden will be presenting a white paper towards the end of May, which will then be put out to consultation before being made into a bill which will finally be put to a parliamentary vote.

“The greatest challenge has been to try to implement the EU directive's rules so that they work within the framework of the Swedish model, and with the manner in which we have implemented the posting of workers directive in Sweden,” said Hanna Björknäs, who is working on the white paper.

The process is also being assisted by a reference group made up by the social partners, as well as experts from government agencies and ministries. One of the issues being looked at is individual workers' rights if the posting lasts for more than one year.

“This concerns individual benefits like the right to take study leave. The posted worker will normally remain linked to his or her home country's social benefit system, however. The new directives do not provide posted workers with employment protection according to Swedish law, nor a working pension,” said Hanna Björknäs.

Ingrid Finsland from the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs said Norway too is in a preparatory phase, putting together its own white paper containing the ministry's assessments and proposals. This will then be sent out to consultation with the aim of presenting a bill to the Norwegian parliament in the summer of 2020.

Norway talks about “exported” workers rather than “posted” workers, but the issues surrounding the amendment of the EU directive are generally important, underlined Ingrid Finsland. The Norwegian view is that conditions set out in Nor-

wegian legislation should also cover the “exported” workers, and that the universally applicable collective agreements should cover them too.

“The amended directive is of great importance for Norway, a country with large labour immigration. One of the challenges is how the new rules for long-term posting should be implemented through national legislation. The new rule on compensation of expenses is important, partly because of the STX case,” said Ingrid Finsland, alluding to a long-running conflict over whether the posting of workers directive allows for expenses when workers are covered by a universally applicable collective agreement.

In Denmark, there is a broad consensus that the country's collective agreement model should form the basis for how to treat posted workers. The directive on the posting of workers was met with scepticism when it was introduced in 1996. The principle to adhere to seems to be “equal pay for equal work”, whether or not the worker is posted.

### **EU law or national collective agreement**

The EU directive on transparent and predictable working conditions is also new, after being passed by the EU Parliament last summer. Some work is still being done on its exact wording, but as soon as it arrived as a proposal from the Commission, the Nordic social partners voiced their displeasure.

The social partners in Sweden called the proposal “a deadly blow to the tradition of regulating employment and working conditions through collective agreements, and to the social partners' autonomy in an area where they now operate freely.”

The conference highlighted the difficulties which can arise when countries try to combine national legislation with EU directives. Tensions regularly arise between the EU and EFTA courts on one side and the national courts on the other, not least when it comes to labour law. The EU's intentions and directives do not always fit with national praxis, especially not when it comes to labour law.

On one hand, freedom of movement should be promoted. On the other, workers who spend a period of time working in a different country should enjoy reasonable protection while they perform their job. It can be difficult to determine which rules are to be followed and who gets to interpret this, exemplified by many years of legal wrangling in both Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

### **A tough tone**

The conference highlighted some examples that illustrated how complicated things can be. There are many different interpretations for what should be followed when – EU or national law. The Nordic countries are used to the Nordic model's strong tradition for regulating the labour market through collective agreements. So when the EU wants to create legis-



lation to solve issues that are usually settled around the negotiating table, it is met with a degree of scepticism in the Nordics.

Who owns the issue, how should it be interpreted and who gets the last word? Examples from Sweden, Denmark and Norway were used to illustrate how difficult it can be for national courts and the EU and EFTA courts to agree. There have been long-running disputes and appeals, and cases have been pushed all the way to very top on both national and EU levels.

“The Supreme Court of Norway rarely refers cases to the EFTA Court, as the Norwegian interpretation is that one may, but is not obliged to, relate to it. The EFTA Court interprets this differently, however,” said Professor Christian Franklin from the University of Bergen. He wants to see more dialogue between the national courts and their counterparts in the EU/EFTA.

The examples of how conflicts had begun and developed were complicated, but this was no doubt an issue that engaged the audience; representatives from the social partners, researchers and representatives from various Nordic government ministries that deal with EU labour market directives.

Associate Professor Natalie Videbæk Munkholm from the Aarhus University explained the so-called “AJOS case” – a legal process which has been running since 2009 until now. The Supreme Court of Denmark and the European Court of Justice have been at loggerheads over how the case should be interpreted, and over who has the right to decide. The judicial handling of the case has also come in for much criticism, and the courts have been accused of treating each other badly.

“One of the things which has come in for a lot of criticism is that both courts have escalated the conflict and not worked towards a suitable dialogue, based on trust and cooperation. This creates a ripple effect both politically and legally,” she said.

“There are no signs the tensions between the national and EU courts are set to dissipate. We only agree to disagree,” said one of the audience members.

# How to get Danes to retire later – like Norwegians and Swedes do

Norwegians and Swedes retire later than their Danish neighbours, partly because their pensions keep growing with each extra year they spend in the labour market. This is one of the 11 good reasons a new report highlights for Denmark to learn from what Sweden and Norway do.

THEME

26.05.2019

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Denmark can learn several things from Norway and Sweden when it comes to getting older people to retire later in life, according to a new report from the Danish Ministry of Employment. It underlines that the Norwegian and Swedish pension systems provide a clear economic incentive for working longer.

People in Norway and Sweden contribute to a public pension for as long as they are working – which means the more years they work, the larger the pension. In Denmark, however, the public pension is a set amount, and its size depends on personal circumstances. The report says this difference in pension systems can explain a lot about why Swedes and Norwegians retire later than the Danes.

## **Danes retire the earliest**

57 % of Danish 60 to 64 year-olds are in work. The figure for Norway is considerably higher at 64 %, and in Sweden a full 68 % of 60 to 64 year-olds are in work. The Danes also lag behind when it comes to working past 65: only 7 % do, while 11 % of Norwegians and 10 % of Swedes work past that age.

There has been a positive development in the number of older Danish people in work. In 2002, 10 % of Danish 67 year-olds were working, rising to 19 % 15 years later. But Denmark is still far behind Norway and Sweden when it comes to the total number of seniors in work.

A majority in the Danish parliament has decided to do something about this. A think tank has been established to come up with ideas for how Danes can achieve a longer and good senior working life. The parliament also commissioned a report to find out how Denmark can copy the successes Norway and Sweden have had with keeping older people in work for longer.

## **Different pension systems**

The report, carried out by the Deloitte, has now been published. It concludes that Denmark cannot achieve the same results as Sweden and Norway just by automatically transferring their experiences. The pension systems and labour markets are just too different. But 11 results from Sweden and Norway are so good that Denmark should be inspired by them.

Some of the 11 points are targeted at seniors, others focus on creating a good working environment for all, thus preventing early retirement. Denmark can also learn from Swedish and Norwegian experiences of how to create a pension system which makes it economically attractive to postpone your retirement.

Both the Swedish and the Norwegian pension systems are set up so that pension payments become bigger for each extra year spent in the labour market. This has a documented effect. The report quotes studies which show that seniors are more likely to postpone retirement if the size of the public pension payment is linked to the individual's total payments to the pension system throughout their entire working life. It is also easier to stay on in the labour market in Norway and Sweden without risking a cut to pension payments. In Denmark, earnings above a certain limit will be subtracted from the pension.

## **A personal decision**

Individual workers in all three countries are allowed to decide for themselves when they want to retire from the labour market. Deloitte's report looked at the most important factors behind people's decision to carry on working or to retire. How important is their health and work satisfaction levels? How long does a worker expect to live and remain healthy? What is the attitude to senior workers in a workplace, and what education and skills development is offered to them?

The report exposes marked similarities and differences when senior workers in the three countries must make that important decision about when to retire. People over 50 generally express a high degree of job satisfaction in all three countries. Around nine in ten are happy with their working conditions. But there are major national differences in how senior workers assess their own health. On average, Danish seniors are less content with their own health situation compared to seniors in Sweden and Norway, according to data from Eurostat which have been used in the report.

At the same time, Danish seniors are considerably less likely to link their health issues to their work compared to seniors in Norway and Sweden. 7 % of Danish senior workers say their health problems are related to their work, while Norway has more than double that figure (15 %) and in Sweden nearly three times as many say the same (20 %).

The view of senior workers is generally a positive one in Denmark. Yet skills development for seniors is less common in Danish workplaces than in Swedish and Norwegian ones. In Denmark 24 % of workers over 65 take part in work-related skills development. In Norway the number is 27 % while in Sweden it is 28 %.

### **An advantage to work for longer**

The pension system plays an important part when the individual worker decides to say goodbye to the labour market, the report concludes. Unlike Denmark, both Sweden and Norway have had pension reforms which created a system where it pays to retire later. Sweden introduced an income-related pension back in 1998, and Norway's major 2011 pension reform also made it more attractive for senior workers to stay in the labour market.

All three countries have public pensions, labour market pensions and voluntary private pension funds. In addition to that, Denmark has an early retirement scheme – but also incentives not to make use of it, or to postpone making use of it. There are also incentives for carrying on working while simultaneously benefiting from the early retirement scheme.

Danes can also postpone public pension payments up to ten years, and that way increase their pension. Just before the 2019 parliamentary elections, parties agreed on a new type of senior pension earmarked senior workers who have poor health after many years in the labour market.

All three countries have also introduced various measures to make workplaces more senior friendly and prevent exhaustion. Workplaces across the three countries have also introduced a range of senior policies, including performance reviews for seniors, extra days off, the reallocation of tasks and skills development.

The report has not been able to establish whether Danish seniors would have wanted to carry on working if Denmark followed the examples of Norway and Sweden – because none

of the three countries have sufficient documentation for whether existing measures aimed at holding on to senior workers in fact do have a positive impact on the labour supply.



## “It is our environments which make us handicapped”

Kristine Ronæss Årdal has cerebral palsy, and certain environments make integration difficult. In her experience, positive attitudes combined with physical facilitation is often easier to achieve than many think.

THEME

26.05.2019

TEKST: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN, FOTO: FRODE DREIER/FRILANS-ANDREASSEN.NO

There is really not much that can stop the young woman. She just has trouble with her legs and uses a wheelchair. All her life she has been told that there is no rehabilitation for cerebral palsy (CP). She disagrees.

“OK, but a job had to come along at some point, after 80 job applications. But I only got one interview, and the result was rather unexpected. ‘Oh, you’re in a wheelchair’ said the employer. The interview ended after five minutes,” says Kristine, rolling her eyes. She then talked to her personal assistant. How could she get a job? Kristine wanted to contribute to society.

“We wrote a Facebook post in the form of a job application. We used the words ‘positive, extrovert and wheelchair user’. We encouraged people to like and share. This time too, the result was unexpected,” says Kristine excitedly.

### **Mega response**

“We posted the ad in the afternoon. Then I took the dog out. By the end of the evening we noticed many friends had been sharing the post. A few days later my sister had an incredible message for me. The post had been shared more than 8,000 times. Soon I had many messages. People wanted to give me a job,” she smiles.





"I now felt welcome in many places, and especially with someone who was running a fitness centre. I dressed for the occasion, brought my CV and was super serious. Finally I was going to a normal job interview, I thought. But the managing director just wanted to say hello and talk a bit to get to know me better. I was hired on the spot and started there and then. At that stage I had been training a lot at home, but not in a gym."

### **Approachable**

Kristine was hired as a receptionist, to administer memberships, be a social motivator for customers and make sure they had access to everything they needed.

"I carried out member surveys, and updated the fitness centre's social media. It was a good workplace because wheelchair access was good. A lift and big training rooms allowed me to move around freely."

Kristine was given proper working tasks. She felt valued during her two years at the fitness centre. Soon she was combining work and targeted training, which might turn into something more.

"I got feedback like 'it is motivating having you here. When you can exercise a bit more, so can we.' My bosses liked the fact that I was so visible. My colleagues were good at finding tasks which suited me. They saw me as extrovert, happy and positive."

### **Facilitation helps with inclusion**

26 year-old Kristine is adamant that facilitation is the key to inclusion.

"If the world had been made accessible, I would not have had a handicap. If there were ramps everywhere, if I could crawl in the streets. The attitude at the fitness centre was that 'we will make this work, this will be good'. They facilitated things for me with their positive attitude in addition to the lift and other physical advantages the building had to offer."

Then, the fitness centre was sold and got a new owner.

"The new leader wanted to keep me on, but management higher up in the system did not," she says. She did not lose

faith, however, because Kristine now has bigger things going on.

### **Other countries**

The training enthusiast compares accessibility in England, Scotland and Ireland. Sweden and Denmark are pretty similar to Norway, she says.

"But perhaps a bit poorer than in Germany. There are no curbs there. There is smooth paving and asphalt everywhere. I like visiting old buildings. But the royal Stiftsgården residence in Trondheim has 10 steps before you reach the lift. In Scotland everything was better, with chair lifts everywhere. In Oslo you have small water drains running down every street. These can be tricky to get across. Trondheim is better than Oslo," says Kristine, and concludes that things can easily be improved.

### **Going for the "impossible"**

"Right now I am training hard to try to learn how to walk, despite the fact I have yet to see any research that shows that [wheelchair-bound] people with CP can learn to walk. In that sense, I am a guinea pig."

Kristine is very determined. She has met someone with CP at the fitness centre who apparently has learned how to walk.

"The doctors don't quite believe him. But we train together, and I bring my doctor along to document my progress. I have become 14 centimetres taller, because my body has stretched as a result of the training. I am curious about how many years it takes before I too can walk. And how quickly I can get an ordinary job."

### **"Still a ray of sunshine"**

Unni Carlsen Trøen was the managing director at the fitness club who offered Kristine a job on the same day she came in for her interview.



"You have to look beyond the handicap and see the person. We called Kristine our ray of sunshine. It still makes us happy to see her. Facilitation is everything of course, says Trøen, meaning both the physical and attitudinal kind.

“IT IS OUR ENVIRONMENTS WHICH MAKE US HANDICAPPED”

“Kristine had an ordinary everyday job here. Facilitation was good, and staff had a normal attitude to people with handicaps. They are like me. There are lots of things I can’t manage too. Everyone has their limitations, but integration is about looking for opportunities.”

Kristine still has a part time job with Trøen. She is completely integrated there. It is a sales job, and she has good colleagues.

“We appreciate her input at work, during courses and during work trips. As part of our community.”

# Inclusion on a labour market with ever increasing demands

Inclusion is something which all the Nordic countries treasure. Yet while they agree on the goal, they often use different measures and have different ideas for how the labour market should work. How, for instance, does an education system using a lot of workplace training impact on those who do not finish their education? Does strong employment protection help youths?

THEME

26.05.2019

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Rune Halvorsen and Bjørn Hvinden at OsloMet are trying to make sense of all this, with the help of a European perspective and new research. They are focusing on the NEET group – young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.

There are fewer NEET in the Nordics than in the other 25 EU countries, so someone is doing something right. Statistics show the average number of NEET among 20-24 year-olds was 9.4 % between 2007 and 2016, while in the rest of the EU the figure was 17.4 %. The difference was even greater among those aged 25-29. 10.1 % in the Nordics and 19.3 in the rest of the EU.

25 Nordic and European researchers have contributed to the anthology *Youth, Diversity and Employment*, published by Elgar. They have also looked at whether there are higher numbers of youth dropouts among women, immigrants or people with physical handicaps within these age groups.

## So what separates the countries?

One thing which separates the Nordic countries – and to an extent separates the Nordics from the rest of Europe – is that the number of youths expected to get a higher education is so high. Looking back at what has happened since 1995, the proportion of people with a university-level education has risen by 65 % in Norway, 67 % in Sweden, 88 % in Denmark and 140 % in Finland.

An ever-smaller part of the labour market is now available for youths without a university-level education, and more of these jobs will disappear in the future. A Norwegian forecast estimates that people without a completed upper secondary education will only be able to access 15 % of jobs by 2030.

Despite the fact that education becomes increasingly important, the Nordic education systems fail to get more than

60-80 % of each age cohort to completion of upper secondary education.

## Danish students get the most training

Vocational schools combined with workplace training represent an alternative to academic studies. Danish vocational students are the ones who get the most workplace training in the Nordics. It is, however, difficult to say whether this really is an efficient way of reducing the number of youths who fail to finish their education. Existing research has mainly focused on those who finish their education and their chances of finding jobs, and not on those who leave early.

If you look at the four largest Nordic countries in terms of how much weight is being put on workplace training, Denmark comes first, followed by Norway and Finland. Sweden comes bottom.

Some researchers working on youth employment have a theory that employers look less at what the youths have learned, and more at the signal that they have finished their education sends. Other researchers claim that educational systems that generate specific skills and in which there are close links with employers are the ones that send the clearest signals.

## What about legislation?

Labour market legislation is also an important factor. Is it easy to fire youths, or are they protected as soon as they have been hired?

“An education system that performs well in terms of labour market outcomes for graduates, but not so well for dropouts, might nonetheless produce a net output that is inferior to that of a system that does much better with regard to dropouts,” points out Olof Bäckman and others.

Denmark, with its flexicurity model, comes out top when it comes to how easy it is to fire youths. The EU has its own index for how strong a country's protection against redundancy is. The lower the figure, the weaker the protection. The list reads: Denmark (1.4), Finland (2.0), Sweden (2.2) and Norway (2.6).

The researchers have looked at how native youths who drop out of a vocational education fare compared to youths who finish an academic education. The theory was that it would be worse to fail a vocational education, which is strongly linked to a workplace, since this sends out such a strong signal. If it is difficult to fire employees on top of that, employers will be more careful.

### **Norway in worst situation**

In Denmark, the signal being sent out is weighed against the reduced risk of hiring youths. Vocational students who drop out in Norway should therefore be in the worst situation, where training also takes place in a workplace to a certain extent, while employees enjoy stronger employment protection.

Yet the researchers could not find any such signalling effect in Norway. The number of youths who fail to finish their education has been remarkably stable between 1997 and 2006.

“Although signalling and labour market regulation may play some role in the process by which early school leavers in Scandinavia are included or excluded, it might just as easily be a story about the functioning of labour markets in general and about how well different labour markets manage to include young, unskilled and inexperienced workers.”

### **A gap between theory and practice**

In other words, there is sometimes a gap between theory and practice. When the researchers looked at how immigrant youths managed compared to native youths, the surprise did not lie in the fact that more youths with immigrant backgrounds end up in the NEET category.

That can partly be explained with the fact that they have poorer language skills, lower levels of education and a different social background. But in many instances there is also an unexplained difference which might be linked to prejudices among employers, for instance.

The researchers looked at the period from 1997 to 2010 and divided youths aged 18-29 into five groups. Youths born in the country, with parents born there too, were at one end of the spectrum. Youths born in non-Western countries were at the other.

The results divided into three year groups and into gender groups. In Denmark in 2010, 50.8 % of young women aged 24-28 who were born in a non-Western country were in the NEET group – by far the highest figure. This group did badly in the other Nordic countries too. But there were big differ-

ences between the countries. In Sweden, the number for this group was only 21.2 %.

### **Biggest surprise**

The biggest surprise was that the difference between those who were born in a different Western country and those born in a non-Western country was as small as it was. In Denmark, during several of the years spanning 1997 to 2010, youths born in a Western country made up a bigger group of NEET than those born in a non-Western country.

In Sweden, the surprise consisted in the fact that the worst off group for the entire period was for native born with parents born in a Western country.

Overall, Sweden had the lowest proportion of NEET and the smallest differences between the five groups. This could be because those born abroad had been living for longer in Sweden because immigration to that country started earlier. Finland, for instance, saw only net emigration until the early 1980s.





## Torstein Lerhol is responsible for 700 staff. Now he wants to become mayor.

Torstein Lerhol can only move one finger, but feels he can contribute to society just like anybody else thanks to the support he gets from his home municipality of Vang in Oppland, Norway. He wants to give something back. That is why he will run for mayor this autumn.

THEME

26.05.2019

TEXT: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN, PHOTO: LARS ERIK SKREFTSRUD/NRK

Torstein Lerhol works as a section head for a large company. But he is also top of the list of the Centre Party in Vang municipality.

“Political decisions should be made at the lowest possible level, closest to the people who will be affected by the decisions. That is why I am a fierce opponent of the merging of municipalities, for instance. Because proximity to political governance leads to better services. When we as politicians have to relate to the people we make decisions for, we make better choices,” says the mayoral candidate.

He has been a member of the local and county councils since 2015. He does nearly everything except from swinging the

traditional mayor’s gavel.

***Do people mainly associate you as a politician with issues that concern people with handicaps?***

“I try to limit myself as little as possible, and do feel I am being taken seriously. I engage in anything which is on the political agenda. I am probably quite an ordinary politician who has an opinion about most things – from upper secondary education to how many beds there are in the old people’s home. So no, I do not feel stigmatised,” he says and laughs a little.



Lerhol's election prospect are not bad. The Centre Party had the mayor in Vang for 35 years before Labour took over in 2011. Lerhol says he has been interested in politics for a long time, and that he is particularly interested in the Norwegian Armed Forces.

"Yes, defence politics is and always has been one of my passions. Both of my brothers have served in the Telemark battalion," he says. The Telemark battalion is made up of 470 professional soldiers, and have been involved in a range of foreign missions, according to the Norwegian Armed Forces.

"I joined the Centre Party in 2005 because of the EU. I am a fierce EU opponent. Decisions must be made as close to people as possible," he repeats, and makes it clear that he thinks the EU is in breach of this principle.

### Section head

"I have a master in teaching with history and social sciences. I started out teaching social sciences to immigrants in Trondheim in the adult education sector. Then I was head-hunted by Aleris," he says contentedly. The company has since changed its name to Stendi.

Lerhol works full-time in Asker for the private care company, as a section head with responsibility for 700 people. Legislation was introduced in the year 2000 obliging all Norwegian municipalities to offer user-controlled personal assistance – known as BPA. Lerhol makes sure all BPA users get what they need. He is passionate about making sure anyone who needs and is entitled to help are told about the offer of user-controlled personal assistance.

"The three things I need to be in work is my wheelchair, my own car and my assistants. These are the aids I am dependent on."

### Not incapacitated

***The Nordic Labour Journal is read by many outside of Norway. Do you think some people believe there is a special Norwegian attitude to people with handicaps?***

"Yes and no. On the one hand I feel we have all the aids and services needed to get people with physical handicaps into

the labour market. But the Norwegian state has had so much money for so many years and many people have remained passive. They get incapacity benefits and many feel this is better and less stressful than finding a job," he says.



Photo: Stendi

"There is hardly any obligation for people with physical handicaps to get jobs. But it should be possible to be a bit more creative and to see the inherent resources among people with physical handicaps. Many of them have been seen as a challenge that does not need facing. But we are now starting to see that people with physical handicaps represent a resource which can benefit society."

### Assistance for integration

When he was one year old, Lerhol was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA). The illness means he has to lie down in a wheelchair, and he needs help with most daily tasks. This means he brings plenty of personal experience to his job at Stendi. According to the company, adults who are entitled to BPA usually have full control over what it is they need. That is why the company focuses on tailor-made solutions in order to achieve the best possible integration and participation.

# New Finnish work environment policy

Psychosocial strain of work will increase as the transformation of work accelerates. We must therefore take a more comprehensive approach to risk assessments. That is the main message from the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health's new policy for the work environment until 2030.

NEWS

06.05.2019

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The new policy, edited by Ministerial Counsellor for Health/Medical Affairs Riitta Sauni, has been developed in cooperation with labour market organisations and other partners.

“The new policy covers the most important issues which also featured in the old policy. But now the emphasis is on the changes to the labour market and future challenges,” says Riitta Sauni.

“One of the aims that are included in the policy is for work to be safe and healthy in all workplaces, regardless of the type of work being carried out. Risk assessments should take into account physical, chemical, biological, psychological and social risks in a comprehensive manner,” she says.

The content of work, workplaces and occupations change, however, which calls for a continuous updating of the policy.

## Fewer routine jobs

Routine jobs become rarer, while both high and low skilled jobs will probably increase in number in the future, the policy points out.

The physical strain caused by work is likely to decline or at least change. At the same time, work becomes increasingly mentally stressful and the demands of brainwork gain emphasis. Artificial intelligence will also supplement work requiring a high level of competence.

Megatrends, such as digitalisation, globalisation, demographics, urbanisation and climate change are driving the change. This in turn changes the way people work, the contents of work and not least the relationship between employers and employees.

“Any risks associated with new technology and different ways of working should be identified, prevented and minimised. At the same time it is important to make use of the opportu-

nities new technology and different ways of organising work can bring,” says Riitta Sauni.

## More deaths in Sweden, record low numbers for Finland

Sweden has seen a worsening in the number of workplace deaths.

“This year alone 12 people have died at work. This is unacceptable,” wrote six Swedish government ministers in an opinion piece in March this year.

Sweden's work environment strategy for 2016-2020 states the aim should be zero fatal accidents. In Finland, Nolla tapaturmaa (Zero Accidents) has been a successful measure since 2003. The new Finnish policy says that in this context, zero is not a numeric goal but rather indicates a vision to aim for. 14 people died at work in Finland in 2017.

“This is a record low figure, but it is still not possible to draw conclusions about a reduction of workplace accidents after just one year,” points out Riitta Sauni.

Promoting functional capacity, workability, and employability is also high on the agenda.

From both a human and economic perspective, it is important to take care of the workability and functional capacity of people of working age, career lengths, and the opportunities of those with partial workability to be involved in working life.



## Unique study compares how Denmark, Norway and Sweden integrate refugees

Who is best out of Denmark, Norway and Sweden at integrating refugees into their labour market? The answer depends at what stage after the refugees' arrival you measure the success. Refugees to Denmark find jobs faster, but in the longer run more refugees get jobs in Sweden than in Denmark. Norway is the clear winner when it comes to integrating female refugees.

NEWS

29.04.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The four researchers behind a report on how Nordic countries integrate their refugees have performed a task which is both difficult and pretty unique; comparing how successful three countries have been when it comes to labour market refugee integration, and how this is linked to active policies.

“When I wrote my thesis on refugees, I noticed very few studies compare refugee policies across different countries,” says Vilde Hennes at the Department of Political Science in Norway.

The reason is the potentially wide range of variables. Vilde Hennes, Jacob Arendt from the Rockwool Foundation's re-

search unit, Pernilla Anderson Joona from Stockholm University and Kristian Tronstad from OsloMet have concentrated on three of the main differences.

### Three hypotheses

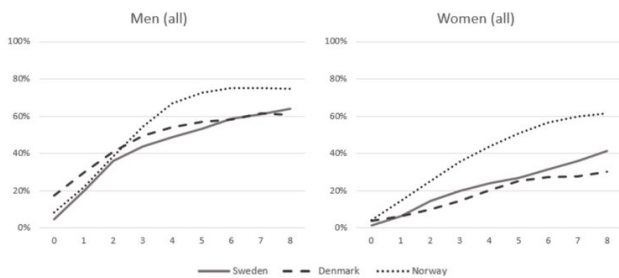
Are the different results due to:

- Differences in age, education or gender among refugee groups arriving in the different countries
- Authorities' integration measures?
- Refugee settlement regulation?

But first a word on the differences between the countries:



As the graph below shows, how well the countries manage to integrate their refugees differs. All three countries have less success integrating female refugees than male refugees. But Norway is a clear leader when it comes to integrating female refugees, both in the shorter and longer terms. The country is also better at integrating male refugees, but the differences between the countries are smaller in this category. Sweden surpassed Denmark towards the end of the eight year long period between 2008 and 2016.



*The graph shows Norway has the highest number of refugees who find work, except for the first two years for men, where Denmark is ahead. Sweden is lower down but does not remain low – its figures keep rising for longer than in the other countries.*

There are different groups of refugees arriving in the three countries. How does this impact the results?

“Sweden has more refugees above the age of 35. Norway has fewer married refugees compared to the other two countries. Norway also has the highest number of quota refugees and a larger proportion of refugees from Eritrea. The refugees’ origins change over time, however,” sums up Jacob Arendt.

Yet despite these differences, it is hard to identify each country’s level of success when it comes to their integration policies.

“The differences in the refugee groups explain the nearly seven percentage points in the employment gap between female refugees in Norway and Sweden. In other paired comparisons, the differences were no more than one to two percentage points,” says Jacob Arendt.

So how do the differences in measures play out? 92 to 96 % of the refugees are enrolled in language training, hence there are few differences there. There are, however, major differences in how many refugees are participating in internships – 73 % in Denmark and 23 % in Norway.

“It is difficult to calculate the figure for Sweden. 87 % take part in labour market programmes. Internships form part of that training, but it varies in size,” says Pernilla Anderson Joona.

Sweden spends the most on subsidised employment. This also increases people’s chances of finding regular work. But despite Sweden’s spending in this area, the other countries achieve better results.

### Different rules for citizenship

The largest differences between Denmark, Norway and Sweden is found in refugee settlement regulations.

“To put it simply: in Denmark the state decides where refugees live for the first three years, in Norway municipalities get to decide and in Sweden the refugees themselves decide where they want to live,” says Kristian Tronstad.

As a result, more refugees in Sweden settle in cities – 72 %. The figure for Denmark and Norway is 50 %, but after the three years have passed, many of the refugees there move.

The level of local unemployment has little influence on people’s decision to move to urban areas.

Have the researchers managed to explain what is behind the differences in integration between the three countries? Yes, to a certain extent, but there are still differences that cannot be explained. One factor might be how much money is being spent on refugees.

“We have not looked at the impact this might have on integration,” says Kristian Tronstad.

### What can the countries learn from each other?

In their conclusion, the researchers discuss what lessons the countries can learn from each other.

“There is not one single measure which would improve employment across all of the countries, because the refugee groups and policies differ so much. There are many different measures aimed at different parts of the refugee population,” write the four researchers.

A closer look at the statistics will for instance reveal that Denmark has had most success with men between 20 and 25, Norway is best with those aged 26 to 45 while Sweden has the most success with people between 46 and 55.