

Theme:
Women in the
labyrinths of
working life
and power

02

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Editorial: The many reasons for gender equality

The Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer, the third in as many years, shows progress for women's representation in Nordic power positions by one percentage point in 2012 in relation to a 50/50 gender distribution.

COMMENTS

08.03.2013

BY BERIT KVAM

"Europe Back on Top with 50/50" is the name of the campaign launched by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in early March. It focuses on equal participation in politics and working life, and expresses a belief that women can make a difference in times of crisis.

We have looked around the world to learn from the 80 women who have held office as presidents or prime ministers, about dilemmas which can arise if there aren't enough women in leading positions. But primarily our theme 'Women in the labyrinths of working life and power' has a Nordic outlook on debates about quotas and other initiatives aimed at increasing female participation.

Swedish leaders call it "Battles of numbers". Their campaign has just been launched. Bosses in Sweden's largest companies want more women in leading industry positions. It pays, the Swedish businesswomen say, but they want it to be voluntary by using networks and campaigns.

Forced gender equality, as the Danes say, is not popular in Denmark or in Sweden, despite the fact that EU's Minister of Equality Viviane Reding has tried to get member countries to support her on this. Denmark lags a bit behind the rest of the Nordic region, except when the three par-

ty leaders meet for government debates. Then they are in a majority - but not because of quotas.

In Norway we are proud to say Gro Harlem Brundtland, as one of the 80 women in the world who have been heads of state or government, first joined government as a result of a quota system. Later she won government power, over and over again.

"We think we are equal," says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson, chief secretary for the Swedish government's gender equality commission, "but it strikes me how big the differences really are between men and women in working life". There are many reasons for maintaining focus on gender equality. The progress shown in our barometer is proof of this.

50/50 is the European Women's Lobby's top priority. Why? If Europe is to come top again? Why not 60/40 in the women's favour?



Kristin Skogen Lund, Norway, became President of the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) on 1 November 2012. The diagram shows women in the Nordic region have reached 61 percentage points. 100 points would be full equality on our barometer

Nordic women have gained a little more power since last year.

Women in the Nordic region are slightly more equal on 8 March this year compared to last year. The Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer shows they have climbed to get 61 of the points we have allocated for government minister posts and other positions in society. That is one point more than last year. 100 points would be full equality.

THEME

08.03.2013

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: SCANPIX

The largest change for 2012 came as Wanja Lundby-Wedin stepped down as President for the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions. Iceland got their first female Minister of Finance and a female bishop.

NLJ's gender equality barometer tries to reflect women's influence in 13 government ministry

posts, major labour market organisations and other symbolically important positions like head of state, commander-in-chief and central bank head.

Looking exclusively at the number of women in governments, the Nordic countries all sit at around 50 percent:

Country	Ministers	Women	Percent
Iceland	9	5	55.6
Sweden	24	13	54.2
Norway	20	10	50.0
Denmark	23	11	47.8
Finland	19	9	47.4
Nordic region	95	48	50.5

Since certain ministers have more power than others, or are symbolically more important, this is a rather unclear measurement of equality. We have chosen to give all ministers one point while the Prime Minister gets five, Finance Minister three and Foreign Minister two points. We have compared the 13 ministers who participate in the Nordic Council of Ministers or who normally are part of a government. The President of the Confederation of Trade Unions gets four points, while the leaders for the professional and academic trade unions get two points each. On the employer side we have given two points for board directors and two points for CEOs. See here for a full list.

All surveys have weaknesses. Earlier we have given women points as long as a woman held a government minister post for more than one month in that year. But when Kristin Skogen Lund went from being the board director to President of the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, this would mean she counted twice in 2012.

We have therefore adjusted our barometer to measure who sits in a certain position on International Women's Day, 8 March, each year. This makes our gender equality graph a bit longer than before. The biggest difference is that Finland's first female Prime Minister Anneli Tuulikki Jäättenmäki, who served between 7 April 2003 and 24 June 2003, does not make it.

At the same time things are moving faster than we thought they would. When we presented our first barometer three years ago, we looked at

which positions women had not reached in any Nordic country, and which positions were not held by women in the individual countries.

One such Nordic position unconquered by women was archbishop. Since then, however, Helga Haugland Byfuglien has been elected bishop in the Church of Norway (on 2 October 2011) - the closest thing to an archbishop you get in Norway. Iceland has only one bishop, also now a woman, since the ordination of Agnes M. Sigurðardóttir on 24 June 2012.

Three years ago Denmark had never had a female Prime Minister, Finland had never had a female Finance Minister and Norway had never had a female head of the employers' association. All these posts have since been held by women.

Never a female chief of defence in the Nordic region

The one remaining symbolic function never yet held by a woman in any Nordic country is chief of defence.

However, there are still many positions where the first woman is still to be appointed:

Denmark – never had women leading the Confederation of Trade Unions or the employers' association. There has also never been a female bishop of Copenhagen (there is no archbishop title in Denmark), a head of police or supreme court leader.

Finland – has the worst gender equality of all Nordic countries when it comes to labour market organisations. Neither the Confederation of Trade Unions, the Confederation of Professional Employees nor the employers' association have ever been led by a woman. Finland also has no female archbishop, supreme court leader or head of police.

Iceland experienced a gender equality boom in many ways after the finance crisis, when many men were blamed for the collapse of the country's banks. Although there is a female Prime Minister, many government ministries have never been headed by a woman. Here too there is a lack of gender equality among employers, in the police and in the coast guard (since the country has no standing army). The Left-Green Movement recently changed their party leader – Katrín Jakobsdóttir took over from Steingrí-

mur J. Sigfússon. Just before that, however, Iceland's Social Democratic Alliance changed their party leader. Árni Páll Árnason took over from Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, who continues as Prime Minister. On 27 April Iceland holds parliamentary elections.

There are elections in **Norway** too, on 9 September. This year Norwegians have celebrated 100 years of female voting rights. The aim is a particularly high number of women voters this year. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg's seat is not safe, according to opinion polls. The country's next Prime Minister will therefore not unlikely be a woman - Erna Solberg from the Conservative Party. In May the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions will also elect a new leader after Roar Flåthen.

Sweden has never had a female Prime Minister, the top position of power in the Nordic region still never held by a woman. The head of state has never been a woman either, but at least one is now lined up. Neither the church, the central bank nor the police have had female leaders. The fact that the head of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, Wanja Lundby-Wedin, was followed by Karl-Petter Thorwaldson gave the largest swing on the NLJ's gender equality barometer - because that position counts for four points.



Denmark's three female party leaders: Helle Thorning-Schmidt from the Social Democrats, Anette Wilenssen from the Socialist People's Party on her left and Margrethe Vestager from the Danish Social-Liberal Party on her right

Denmark's gender equality policies: no quotas and a focus on men

Women hold all of the Danish government's top jobs, but Denmark lags behind the rest of the Nordic countries measured in paternity leave and women in leadership positions.

THEME

08.03.2013

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: SCANPIX

There are only women around the table when the party leaders in Denmark's coalition government meet. Women head all of the three government parties - the Social Democrats, the Socialist People's Party and the Social-Liberal Party. The government's supporting party in parliament, the Red-Green Alliance, is also headed by a woman. Yet Denmark lags behind in terms of other gender equality parameters,

and the Danish government has so far chosen not to change this through the use of force.

The government's reluctance to forced gender equality means there is no mention of quotas in the new rules for female representation in company management, which come into force on 1 April 2013. After that date Denmark's 1,100 largest companies and all state institutions

must set aims for how many women they want to have in management and they must develop plans for how to get more women into leadership in general. But they are not duty-bound to increase the number of women.

Each company must have concrete goals for how much it wants to increase the share of women in management by - for instance from five to ten percent by 2015. But there are no sanctions if companies fail to live up to their goals.

Companies will also have to describe what they do to increase the share of women in management and other leadership positions. But they are not being asked to come up with any figures, and they are not obliged to work towards a higher percentage of female representation. The government does expect, however, that because companies are asked to highlight what they are doing to further gender equality, those who do nothing will be exposed and this will motivate more to take action to get more women into leadership positions.

EU quotas sidelined

Danish industry opposes quotas and predicts the new rules will result in greater gender equality though voluntary means. In the coming years it should become clear whether this will be enough to shift Denmark from its bottom place in the EU when it comes to women in management. Only seven percent of Danish management positions in listed companies are currently held by women, and there are far fewer female leaders than male ones on all levels.

The new Danish rules were about to be overtaken by new EU regulation on female quotas before Denmark's rules had had a chance to come into effect. EU's Commissioner for Justice, Viviane Reding, proposed towards the end of 2012 the introduction of quotas as a means to secure at least 40 percent women on private company boards in listed companies by 2020 at the latest. But as it turned out there were many other European anti-quota voices out there along with the Danish government.

The European Parliament supported Reding's proposal, but large parts of the EU Commission and a range of EU countries were opposed and EU lawyers decided that female quotas would be in breach of EU legislation - including the

EU's principle of subsidiarity, which defines which legislation the EU can pass.

Many experts therefore believe Viviane Reding must abandon her drive for EU quotas when she presents a revised proposal, and that the EU instead will prepare a new kind of positive discrimination of women which would stay in place until they fill at least 40 percent of boardroom seats.

Delayed paternal leave expansion

Denmark is also behind other Nordic countries when it comes to paternal leave. A Danish man takes on average nine percent of the total parental leave and that is too little, says the government. It has therefore promised in its government programme to take a sizeable chunk out of women's parental leave and give it to the men.

Today two weeks of the total parental leave are reserved the father, while the mother has the right to 14 weeks' leave after birth. After that each of the parents can choose to take up to 32 weeks parental leave - however only 32 weeks of the total is paid. Mostly women make use of this, and that's why the government wants to earmark up to three months of the paid parental leave for the father.

Changing the law will take time, however. The government has sent the issue for consideration by committee, which critics say is putting it on ice. In early summer of 2013 the commission is expected to present a concrete model for how future paternity leave could look like.

The government is taking a long time over this because making changes to parental leave is controversial. It involves disturbing the way families prioritise and many Danish women do not want to give up any of their maternity leave. It could also send some children into nurseries at an earlier stage, as some men might not make use of their longer, earmarked parental leave.

While the government is taking its time over changes to parental leave, it does have concrete plans for how to fulfil a different and smaller election promise on gender equality: improving statistic for equal pay. So far Denmark's salary statistics have not reflected gender divisions, and as a result it has been difficult to identify

gender salary gaps. In future, larger companies must provide salary statistics based on gender.

Don't forget the boys

Another high priority gender equality issue for the government and the Minister for Gender Equality, Manu Sareen, is the special challenges faced by men and boys. On 1 March 2012 the government presented an action plan for gender equality which highlights how the welfare society in several areas does not meet the needs of some boys and men.

Men have lower education, suffer from more lifestyle illnesses and struggle more during a divorce or if their spouse dies. That's why the government has cooperated closely with municipalities and others to focus on the challenges met by men and boys and to try to find concrete answers.

The government also wants municipalities to better adapt their public services to reflect that the two sexes do not always have the same needs and do not always behave in the same way. Men and women should be treated differently in order to give them equal opportunities, says Manu Sareen in a new strategy for gender equality assessments.

The strategy does not mean one gender get offered services which the other does not. But the Minister for Gender Equality wants to use the new strategy to stimulate the public sector to think more about gender in their services - for instance by targeting activation measures either towards men or women or to do something extra to get boys into education, because they fall out of the education system more often than girls.

"For many years the focus of our gender equality debates have been about key issues like equal pay and more women in leadership positions. This is also important. But for me gender equality is basically about the everyday opportunities faced by women and men, girls and boys," said Manu Sareen as he presented the strategy.



Major Swedish companies seek more women leaders

The cold facts show there is a long way to go before there is total equality between men and women in Swedish working life. So when CEOs from ten of Sweden's largest companies launched the equality drive 'Battle of the numbers', there was a lot of interest.

THEME

08.03.2013

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: PETER JÖNSSON

On 17 January one hundred women from ten major companies came to Kulturhuset in central Stockholm. It was time for their first meeting and workshop as part of the project 'Battle of the numbers'. The meeting was closed to outsiders and the media. A sign on the window explained what was going on: 'Sorry for any inconvenience, we are refurbishing Swedish industry'.

The women, ten from each company, represent Ericsson, H&M, Ikea, Saab, Sandvik, Scania, SEB, SPP, SSAB and Volvo AB. They are leaders

or soon-to-be leaders and have been chosen by their group's management to spend a year being internal management consultants within their companies and to identify best practice which will help more women reach executive and decision-making positions. Their own experiences form the basis of their work. With the support of their group's management, they will scrutinise and systemise their experiences and hopefully these will become a force for change. The companies' heads of HR and information together with the CEOs will also meet during this time. The idea is for them to benchmark

against each other and to find good examples of how companies can work with the issue in their daily work and how to integrate this into the way the company is run. The aim is to find more methods to lift women into executive roles, and in November this year the project will finish with a large event which will showcase the results and good examples.

The background is the well recognised numbers which show what a bad state gender equality is in at higher levels in large companies. There is often focus on the 16 percent female representation in listed companies' board rooms.

"We wanted to shift the focus from how many women are sitting on boards to women's chances of getting into managerial positions. CEOs are often blamed for not having enough women on their boards, but that is a question for the boards. When we contacted CEOs to start work with leaders we met them on a level where they have influence," says Sofia Falk, founder of the Wiminvest company and one of the three women who got all of the ten

tiveness and it is about being able to recruit and keep hold of top talents.

"We know that the fight talents will be tough in just a few years from now. And research shows that equal opportunity companies have higher turnovers and that young, talented people will not choose companies which don't have the right set of values. Many of today's organisations were created a hundred years ago, but they need to start reflecting today's society," says Sofia Falk.

Took up a loan

Sofia Falk's own story plays a role in all this. The way her company Wiminvest gets more women into higher positions is being used as an example in the workshops, which play a main part in the 'Battle of the numbers' project. It is a method which partly springs out of her own experience.

In the middle of her political science studies in Uppsala while in her early twenties she changed course and signed up for national service in order to become a military intelligence officer. She was already extremely fit and often did very well as the only woman among many men. Her good results were often explained by the men as 'luck'. Little by little she began working with crisis and risk management for companies, often on a high level. More than once when she turned up to start work she was asked "where is the consultant who is coming to help us?"

"I started talking to other women and understood that this was everyday life for most women in higher positions. I got angry. I was young, clever and exhausted. I felt we women were not given the chance to have a career on our own terms, and that kills both your passion and creativity," says Sofia Falk.

The women act as management consultants

She changed jobs and became a PR consultant, and saw that attitudes were the same there - if not worse. She finally decided enough was enough. She wanted to start a company to help talented women get a company career on their own terms and to help them reach their full potential. She quit her job, borrowed 200,000 kronor (€24,000), made 100 phone calls, visited 53 companies and after two months she had 12 customers in major Swedish companies.



CEOs interested in supporting the project. The motive for the ten CEO's who have joined the project can be found in a comment piece in the newspaper Dagens Industri on 21 November 2012: 'This is how Swedish women will reach the top'. In it, the ten CEOs explained why they were supporting the 'Battle of the numbers' campaign. It is about profitability and competi-

Together with clients and some of Sweden's best known consultants on leadership, change, communication, business development and personal development she created the work procedure she has been using ever since in her company Wiminvest. With the help of focus groups she found out what women in leadership positions needed in order to create a career on their own terms.

What did they think was expected from themselves, their bosses and the organisation's leadership in order for them to reach their full potential and to get them to want to reach leadership positions in the company? It was and remains the women's own experiences in a company which are used to find out what the career choices are, what pays and how, which obstacles there are and so on. The women become strategic advisors in their own organisations for how these should be organised, run and led in order to reflect today's society.

"The women use themselves as a knowledge base. How did they get to where they are and can they go further?" explains Sofia Falk.

During their four workshops the women create suggestions for changes which could be about initiative, activities, routines and processes. The suggestions should accelerate the drive towards the goal of getting more women into leadership positions and they should be implementable within six to twelve months. Together with the participating companies' group leaderships they will then continue to work with the suggestions. It is crucial that the leadership actively supports the project and is prepared to act on the suggestions put forward by the women. Just sitting in the leadership group and simply saying thank you for a 'cute' presentation is not OK. The leadership's active support is a precondition for Wiminvest's work and also for the ongoing 'Battle of the numbers' project.

Opinion building

Since the birth of the company in 2007 she has got more and more commissions. She has also been working with opinion building and has been an advisor to the government. Last year she was asked to host a pre-seminar for the Northern Future Forum with 150 Swedish female bosses, the Minister for Gender Equality and the Minister for Enterprise. The aim was to create a knowledge base which could be shared

with state leaders in the Nordic region, the Baltics and the UK. The seminar also welcomed Cissi Elwin Frenckel, the publisher of the monthly magazine Chef, and Eva Swartz Grimaldi from Bianchi café and cycles. Three women with different experiences and positions but with large networks and a burning desire to create a business environment open to women all the way to the top - they all found each other through their shared desire and decided to take the lead. They saw that there were already many things being done within companies which never saw the light of day.

"It's a ragged debate but more is being done to promote equality within companies than what comes out. We wanted to highlight the good examples," says Sofia Falk.

They contacted a range of companies and got positive responses from those listed above. The initiative has created a lot of interest, including from the Swedish Minister for Gender Equality, Maria Arnholm, who in several interviews has pointed to 'Battle of the numbers' as a good example of how to work towards improved gender equality.

Through her work Sofia Falk has noticed a reluctance to pursue legislation and quotas. She has also worked with Norwegian companies and doubts the Norwegian quota system for company boards is having the right effect.

"The aim becomes to reach a certain number and when that aim is reached you risk that people start ignoring the issue. You also lose internal role models when women on an operational level become board members. Equality is about how you organise and run things, and it is about attitudes and assessments," says Sofia Falk.



Park Geun-hye is South Korea's 11th President and the first woman to hold the post. She was sworn into office on 25 February in the capital Seoul in front of 40,000 people. Photo: Office of the President

What can we learn from 80 female prime ministers and presidents?

A lone female leader's dilemma is whether she manages to change the system before it changes her. You need a critical mass of 30 to 35 percent female parliamentary representation before you get lasting cultural, political and practical change, writes Torild Skard in her book on female presidents and prime ministers between 1960 and 2000.

THEME

08.03.2013

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Torild Skard has been an MP and Director for Questions relating to the Status of Women at UNESCO. She has coordinated UNICEF's work for children in 23 African countries and has attended several major UN women's conferences.

Last year her book 'Maktens kvinner' ['Women of power'] was published, where she writes

about the 73 women who have been elected prime minister or president between 1960, when Sirimavo Bandaranaike broke the gender barrier in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), until 2000. She details how they reached the top and asks whether these women of power can teach us something.

Since then a further seven female leaders have been elected, so the total number is now 80. The latest addition is South Korea's President Park Geun-hye who was sworn into office on 25 February this year. 17 women hold one of the two positions of power today, among them Iceland's Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir and Helle Thorning-Schmidt in Denmark. The world's two most powerful women are Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was elected in 2005, and Brazil's President Dilma Rouseff, elected in 2011.

Torild Skard's search for common ground shows the first women came to power often as a result of family connections. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Isabel Peron were both widows of politicians, while Indira Gandhi was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. Élisabeth Domitien became Prime Minister without any family links, but in the Central African Republic - a country run by the megalomaniac Jean-Bédel Bokassa. Out of the first five female pioneers, only Golda Meir in Israel was elected on her own merits.

There are major differences between these and the women who have become leaders in the 90s and later:

"Apart from a portion of luck, the women generally reached the top because of their own skills. It is striking how much competence and assertiveness many of them have," writes Torild Skard.

Three roads to power

According to researchers like Francine D'Amico there are three ways in which women have reached the pinnacle of power. Torild Skard uses a similar but slightly different definition:

1. Replacements - women who take over a family member's position of power.
2. The insiders - who climb to power in a political party.
3. The outsiders - who get a position of power because of their work in voluntary organisations, on a grassroots level or because of their profession.

These three roads to power might appear simple, but they are long:

"It has almost become standard language to say women reach a 'glass ceiling' blocking the road to leadership," writes Torild Skard, who criticises the expression because the metaphor implies it is possible to break through that ceiling once and for all.

Labyrinth - not glass ceiling

She thinks labyrinth is a better metaphor:

"Women always face barriers they need to scale in order to move on. They have to take detours, go back and travel down complicated and partly hidden paths."

This also applies to men, but their labyrinths are often simpler. For a woman so many things have to come together: society must be prepared and the political system must be accessible. Women also need suitable skills and support from their environment. Several outstanding female leaders, like Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel, have had male mentors - like Edward Heath and Helmut Kohl - while Brazil's President Dilma Rouseff was backed up by her predecessor Lula da Silva. Yet the relationship to the male mentor must not be too close, or rumours of a sexual relationship might emerge.

Many women rose to power as a result of coincidences - but political decisions on quotas and gender equality have also made things easier. Gro Harlem Brundtland became a government minister in Norway when a female minister for social affairs died. When one of the male government ministers saw her in a televised debate on abortion, a question close to the young doctor's heart, he put Brundtland's name forward. She did not become minister for social affairs but the Environment Minister. A few years later she was elected deputy party leader. When Prime Minister Odvar Nordli stepped down because of ill health and party leader Reiulf Steen lacked the necessary support, she became the natural candidate for the premiership. By herself she decided to take the fight to also become the party leader at the next party congress.

Different gender and political roles

For male leaders there are no major differences between the role as a man and the role as a politician. In both cases the man is expected to

be ambitious, determined, conflict oriented and tough.

“Based on gender divisions within the workplace, however, women are expected to be cooperative, caring, ready to compromise and peaceful. In politics women are expected to be both ‘women’ and ‘political leaders’, not always an easy combination,” writes Torild Skard. She says the following conditions need to be in place in order to increase the number of women in positions of power:

- The political culture needs to change to make sure the recruitment to political parties, internal processes, elections and decision processes aren't to the disadvantage of women.
- Parliament and government must become more representative. Many election systems allow only one candidate per constituency to win, which makes it harder for women compared to multi-candidate election systems.
- In many countries feudal power structures, class and caste divides and ethnic gaps need to be overcome before female democratisation can take place.
- The state must be assertive. Only the state can protect gender equality, protect human rights and further social equality.

Workplace equality depends on early life choices

Sweden has one of the world's most equal societies. Yet there are still major differences between men and women. A man's lifetime earnings is on average two million Swedish kronor more than a woman's.

THEME

08.03.2013

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

Just over a year ago, in November 2011, the government appointed the Delegation for Gender Equality in Working Life, JA-delegationen. Its mandate is to compile and spread knowledge about the different conditions of women and men in working life, to create a debate on the issues and, before its task finishes in October 2014, the delegation should propose ways to improve gender equality.

The JA-delegationen has 11 government appointed commissioners led by Mikael Sjöberg, Director General at the Swedish Work Environment Authority. The other delegates are high-level representatives from the social partners and representatives from the world of research and several major companies. The secretariat is tasked with providing the delegates with facts and material for the measures which the delegation should propose by the end of 2014.

Obscure knowledge

"This is a fantastic assignment. We go deep, analyse and look for connections. What has really hit me is how much knowledge is out there even if it is obscure. We know what it looks like - the question is whether the will to change exists," says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson, the delegation's chief secretary.

So far much of the delegation's work has been focused on the first part of the assignment - to compile knowledge and make it accessible. The

four members of the secretariat have travelled around Sweden, meeting people in many different roles, sought help from researchers and collated information. But they have also organised a large and well attended conference. The next step is to commission a collection of texts which will highlight women's conditions in working life.

"What has struck me are the large differences which actually exist between men and women in working life. We think we have gender equality - and we have come far compared to how things were a hundred years ago - but that does not mean that your average woman enjoys the same quality of life as your average man," says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson, the delegation's chief secretary.

Women more exposed

When Maria Hemström Hemmingsson looked for candidates for the delegation's secretariat she consciously chose people with different backgrounds. Three are researchers from different disciplines - national economy, sociology and economic history. Each of the areas they are studying can therefore be looked at from different perspectives, which is somewhat unusual for equality research.

"Women have a weaker position in working life on average. They are in part-time work, get paid less and - in the long run - have lower pensions,

despite the fact that women do better at all levels of education,” says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson.

During their work it became even clearer just how complex this picture is. The lack of equality does not have one single cause. The structures that keep women back are made up of many interconnecting elements. Women and men are equal in a legal sense, but other structures work against equality. One important issue is how their work is valued and paid. Maria Hemström Hemmingsson draws a diagram which clearly shows the statistics for how female dominated occupations pay less. It is simply better to become a construction or transport worker than to study for a job within the health sector or in schools. It is women who carry the welfare on their shoulders, says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson and her colleague Emilia Liljefrost.

The consequences of our life choices

Our life choices play a major role, in other words, not least when we choose our future occupations. At the same time this illustrates how complex the equality issue is. Choosing an occupation is about an individual's free will, yet the consequences can be a difference in life-long earnings of two million Swedish Kronor (€241,000) in the male's favour. Another critical period for gender equality is the birth of a first child. The woman often takes on the main responsibility, which has an impact on her future career prospects, her salary and her pension. This, as well as the parental allowance, is something which will be studied further.

“The question of equality touches on the self, and if you start looking for measures you risk stepping on the individual's free choice. We easily forget that people tend to think on the basis of gender about all kinds of things,” says Emilia Liljefrost.

They conclude that the freedom to choose does not come for free and that it is women who pay the price. The dilemma is that for changes to take place there needs to be adjustments which will have an impact both on people personally and on the balance of power in society.

“It is important to recognise the structure in your own life. To demand debate at home, with your employer, with the state and to also have

that debate with yourself,” says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson.

When it start to grind

Meanwhile, society faces major challenges when it comes to the future labour force.

“The gender-divided labour market is already having consequences in certain parts of the country. In Norrbotten, for instance, they are already struggling to recruit enough healthcare personnel. Municipalities and county councils are competing with the booming mining industry which happily hires trusted people with healthcare backgrounds,” says Emilia Liljefrost.

Over the next seven years Sweden's municipalities and county councils need to recruit 420,000 people. Already it is so hard to get enough nursery teachers to the Stockholm region that the local monthly pay is 6,000 Kronor (€722) higher than in the rest of the country. Perhaps salaries in female dominated occupations need to rise in order to recruit enough workers? But who would pay for that? Do men have to not work in order for working life to become more equal? What sacrifice must be made to create a more equal working life?

“It is when you get to this point that the debate starts to grind,” says Emilia Liljefrost.

Both Maria Hemström Hemmingsson and Emilia Liljefrost want to keep to the facts. The delegation's mandate is to come up with suggestions for the future. At the same time you cannot but notice their commitment - they are working with a topic which touches them personally.

“Equality in working life is a question which we need to take very seriously. Taking care of the competence which women represent is a question of justice, but it is also a question of social economy,” says Maria Hemström Hemmingsson.



The Minister of Education and Culture Katrín Jakobsdóttir has just been elected party leader for Iceland's Left-Green Movement (VG)

Katrín Jakobsdóttir - party leader during times of change

She is young, skilled and popular and has just been elected party leader for Iceland's Left-Green Movement (VG). She will lead her party into parliamentary elections at the end of April, under what for Iceland are unusual circumstances were the former party leader is one of the party's strongest candidates in the election.

PORTRAIT

08.03.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR

She walks quickly down the corridor, knowing she is late for the meeting with the journalist. The new party leader Katrín Jakobsdóttir's programme is full. Her job is to be the party's voter magnet. Opinion polls indicate VG stands to lose in the election, but perhaps the young party leader can turn the trend.

The Nordic Labour Journal meets Katrín Jakobsdóttir in her office in central Reykjavik. Is there a generation shift in Icelandic politics?

"There have been great changes to Icelandic politics since 2008. The question is only how lasting these changes will be," she says.

Changes are coming

There have been unsettling times in recent years. Katrín Jakobsdóttir points out that Iceland has gone through major changes. New political parties are emerging but so far they have not had much support during elections. Politicians also sense that changes are coming. They don't tend to stay as long in their seats as in the past, when they remained in position for years and sometimes decades.

VG's former leader, Iceland's Minister of Industries and Innovation Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, is one example of that. He had been VG's party leader for 24 years when he recently decided to give up that position.

"I don't find it problematic that the former party leader runs in the parliamentary elections, but it is of course unusual," says the new party leader Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

Expectant party members

She believes Iceland's political culture is changing. People expect things to change. Katrín Jakobsdóttir notices how party members are expectant and want to fight for her party to do well in the elections. The newly elected party leader is realistic, though.

"Choosing a new party leader doesn't always mean good election results," she says calmly.

The debate sometimes centres on which coalition governments might emerge after the elections. VG aims to cooperate with the other parties of the left. But which post would Katrín Jakobsdóttir demand in a new government - the Prime Minister's office or Minister of Finance?

"When it comes to my own ambitions I find it hard to think more than one day ahead. I am happy with being the Minister of Education and Culture. To me it is without doubt the most interesting ministry," she says.

"But of course I would like to try something new. Politicians never know what politics will bring. It doesn't pay to think too much of the future, it can hamper you in your job."

The government faces big and difficult economic issues during the election period, including what for Iceland counts as record high unemployment. Katrín Jakobsdóttir is proud of the

government's results when it comes to industry. She points out that unemployment has fallen.

Youth education

Unemployment policies have been focusing on the young. They now have more study places and Iceland's employment service has been following up individuals. Other unemployed people have also used the opportunity to study. They did not have that opportunity before. Unemployment is now below five percent.

"Studying is always useful," says the Minister of Education.

Equality questions have been important to Iceland's government. Katrín Jakobsdóttir says the government has done well both when it comes to legislation and not least in the fight to bridge the gender pay gap. But there is still work to be done.

"We need to decide how we can achieve equal pay for equal work. We must also continue the fight against gender-based violence," she points out.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir quotes British philosopher John Stuart Mill and says that the most established injustice is the discrimination between men and women.

"Discrimination pops up again and again, just when you think you have solved the problem," she says, disconcerted with the fact that state companies and public institutions have acted less than exemplary in this matter and have failed to address the pay gap problem.

But Iceland's government must act economically, sadly also when it comes to questions of equality.

"I am realistic. We don't have chests full of gold. We must save," says Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

"We must also think of people with handicaps and older people. They have got it even harder since the crash and we have to do something about it," she continues.

More than fisheries and aluminium

The government has focused on creativity and innovation in its business politics, partly by introducing tax rebates. This is partly to do with the economic importance of creative industries.

“This is about more than fishing or producing things, we must also think about value creation, productivity and the products’ worth,” says Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

She thinks Iceland should not compete with countries which rely on primary production. Iceland should focus on innovation and inventions. Iceland can exploit its natural resources in a better and more sustainable way.

“As a green politician I think it is not a private matter what we do with our fisheries, our water or other natural resources,” she says.

“It is not our private matter how we exploit natural resources, not globally and not privately. We must think about sustainability and sustainable development and we must think about the future,” she continues.

EU critic

The Green-Left Movement VG is against Icelandic EU membership. Katrín Jakobsdóttir points out that Iceland is part of the EEA and that her party supports increased cooperation with Europe.

Personally Katrín Jakobsdóttir wants Iceland to end membership negotiations with the EU. She feels the Icelandic people should be allowed to make a potential decision on membership in a referendum.

“I am critical to the EU. I believe EU policies are too focused on free market principles. EU is too much about global capitalism,” she says.

“Within the Union I see an aggressive fight for the interests of certain groups. People in Iceland are not aware of this because it has been invisible in the Icelandic EU debate,” she claims.

According to Katrín Jakobsdóttir the government’s most pressing task after the elections will be to get the budget under control and to create a stable economy. The government must also ease the currency restrictions which are still in place and make it possible for foreigners to sell their Icelandic kronor.

“This is urgent. As soon as the elections are over the government must create good conditions for industry and the economy as a whole,” says Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

“Iceland needs a stable interest rate and good economic conditions to face the future,” she says.

OECD: Norway's welfare system needs reform to keep people with mental issues in work

Norway's sickness benefit system allowing 100 percent compensation from day one is too generous. Financial incentives for all parties - employees and employers, unions, municipalities, schools and mental health care services - should help them take responsibility. That is the OECD's message to Norway.

NEWS

08.03.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

Norway enjoys high employment rates and low unemployment, but sickness absence and the number of people on disability benefits is way above the OECD average. Just 55 percent of people with mental health problems are working and at least one in two unemployed people have a mental disorder. Norway's spending on sickness and disability benefits is also the highest in the OECD, making up nearly six percent of the country's GDP. But the OECD report points to more than just the costs. High sickness benefits can lead to people with mental health issues being shut out of the labour market.



"Norway has exceptionally high numbers of sickness absence and people on disability bene-

fits. Far too many are excluded from the labour market," admitted Cecilie Bjelland, State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, when she received the OECD report 'Mental Health and Work: Norway' on 5 March.

"We need to do something to make working life more accessible for people with mental health problems," she said before thanking for good feedback and pointing to a range of measures already underway or being planned in order to get people with mental health issues into jobs. But she dismissed any reductions to sickness benefits and said Norway believes in dialogue.

Generous benefits "a trap"

The OECD argues generous sickness benefits can become a trap and stimulate absence from work, because people with mental health issues often experience conflicts in the workplace, feel fear and want to stay away. Reducing benefits to 80 percent of people's total pay would stimulate their desire to remain in work, the OECD writes.

"We disagree with this argument. We want to build on the agreement for an inclusive working life. It sets out ways to reduce sickness absence without changes to benefits. Sickness absence

figures are heading in the right direction. The cooperation and follow-ups are producing results," said the newly appointed State Secretary Cecilie Bjelland.

The fact that there is no political will in Norway to introduce economic incentives to the country's sickness benefit rules came as no surprise to neither the OECD nor the social partners and others who were there during the presentation of the report. Still, the report's author, Niklas Baer, and John Martin, Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, said in the long run they remained optimistic:



"We don't expect Norway to change its system immediately. The idea of economic incentives will take time to mature," Niklas Baer told the Nordic Labour Journal, and said the way the report had been received was promising: people in Norway are very open and take the findings seriously and follow up recommendations from a very concrete perspective.

Important to increase awareness

"That's good. What's important now is to increase the awareness of these problems," said Niklas Baer who spent 123 pages to focus on the challenges Norway faces when it comes to fighting secondary school dropout rates and working life alienation because of mental health issues.

It is important to stop the fragmentation of the support system, to promote inclusiveness through accountability and cooperation between different service providers and not least to safeguard the transition from school to working life. Mental health problems often start around age 14. Mental health support must therefore be available at an early stage in order to catch pupils at risk, and to follow up individuals over time.

Niklas Baer also underlines that a lot is being done in Norway in general to create equality and to fight inequality, but this does not cover mental health. People with mental health problems have not profited from the favourable labour market situation in the period before the crisis hit, when unemployment fell and employment was rising. He also thinks there is reason to ask whether Norway's high labour immigration is keeping people with mental health problems out of the labour market.

"Considering how well Norway is doing and the country's high level of health care and education, the differences when it comes to mental health issues seem very high."

Generous sickness benefit system

The reason, according to the OECD, is not a lack of measures or policy changes, but a generous sickness benefit system with inefficient follow-up provisions. Workers get full compensation for a whole year of sickness absence, and there is little incentive to return to work. Employers pay for the first 16 days and the state pays for the remaining time. It is also a known fact that a long sickness absence often results in reduced contact with the workplace, which can make it harder to return to work.

The OECD claims it is too easy to get disability benefits in Norway. The existing demand to seek treatment before benefit is granted must be better implemented and there should be a regular review of the disability pension, the organisation says.

The State Secretary confirms that there is a large number of people in Norway who receive disability benefits in some shape or form, but she disagrees with the OECD's proposed solution:

"We have tried to review the degree of disability and ability to work several times, with no discernible results. Our new disability benefit with increased incentives for working part time during the benefit period is a better solution I think," said Cecilie Bjelland.

Mental health problems

But the OECD also praised Norway:

Norwegian authorities see the need to act in order to prevent people with mental health is-

sues dropping out of the labour market, and help people with mental health problems find work. To do this Norway has launched a range of reforms and measures to prevent people with mental health issues from being excluded. This includes a national strategy on work and mental health created by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, and the integration of the labour market agency and the benefits agency into the Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV).

This secures a strong structure for early intervention and coordinated support. Yet despite a good framework and supporting services, fundamental changes are still needed in order to improve the situation for those concerned. The OECD therefore suggests the following:

- Avoid sickness absences of workers with mental health problems as much as possible, and instead try to solve the problems in the workplace.
- Expand NAV's Employer Support Centres by introducing early intervention measures.
- Stop the fragmentation of mental health services and rehabilitation and the lack of cooperation between GPs and NAV, by developing integrated support models.
- Minimise upper secondary school dropout numbers by defining clear responsibilities for ongoing individual follow-up for students at risk.

The Nordic role in Europe's crisis

Participants at the conference 'Nordic ways out of the crisis' agreed the Nordic countries can play an important role in southern Europe's current economic crisis. Yet just how the Nordic countries can work together and how much support there is for such work remains uncertain.

NEWS

08.03.2013

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

The Norden Association, the think tank Global Challenge and The Nordic Region in Focus created a lot of interest when they hosted a debate on 'Nordic ways out of the crisis' on 19 February. Only half of the 300 people who had signed up could be accommodated by the venue at the Swedish government offices at Rosenbad in Stockholm.



"There is a strong desire to talk about how the Nordic region can become stronger within the

EU," said Birgitta Ohlsson, Sweden's Minister for European Union Affairs.

She talked about how she had hastily posted a question on Facebook the night before; 'Do you think we talk too little about the Nordic region in the EU?'. Despite the late hour she quickly had some 40 replies. More and more countries are starting to look to the Nordic countries and The Economist recently published an article called 'The next supermodel – why the world should look at the Nordic countries.'

The seminar was part of the release of the book 'Nordic voices on Europe's future', in which 16 writers, academics and politicians have been allowed to write freely within a generous framework about their view of the European crisis. The writers come from all of the Nordic countries, regardless of whether they are EU members or not.

"The writers, with a few exceptions, disregarded two questions which are central to the rest of Europe - can you save your way out of the crisis and Europe's future and integration. The writers seem to have a different understanding of the crisis compared to people in the rest of Europe. But we will all be facing the results of the crisis," said Ylva Johansson, who edited the book.

Interdependency

The economic crisis has led to the emergence of xenophobic parties in Europe and dreams about the nation states of old.

“People have lost faith in the EU in the wake of the crisis and we see changes in people’s values as complex questions are met with simple answers. The Nordic region can play a role in this value crisis when some groups of people are treated badly or when press freedom in certain countries is coming under threat. Nordic EU countries have demanded annual investigations to map how human rights are being upheld,” said Birgitta Ohlsson.

But the solution is not only to go back to how things were. This does not seem to be an alternative for the book’s 16 authors nor for the five people on the seminar panel or the public. On the contrary. The seminar heard people plead for a Europe which needs to become even stronger, not least in order to face global challenges and handle a rapidly increasing rate of change. Birgitta Ohlsson pointed out how much competition has changed in just a few decades. Some 20 years ago nine in out of the ten tallest buildings stood in the western world.

Today it is the other way around. The tall buildings are to be found on other continents. Europe used to be top for reading comprehension, but that is no longer the case. Today the EU countries make up a quarter of the global economy, but by 2050 China will probably own half of the world’s resources. This is the reality the EU and the Nordic region are facing. Things change fast and what was true 20 years ago now belongs in history books.

Different directions within the EU

The EU is also becoming more fragmented. Countries used to be said to be going at different paces, now they are said to be travelling in different directions. The UK wants a looser union while Germany argues for more and stronger cooperation. Which role can the Nordic region play in the development of a future Europe.

“The Nordic region can be a bridge. The EU and the UK need each other,” answered Birgitta Ohlsson.

She also talked about how Nordic countries can act as role models. Equality is one area where

the Nordic countries have come far both in terms of representation and in the access to child care. Openness is another. Göran Rosenberg, the seminar moderator and also one of the book’s authors, asked whether the Nordic countries should get more engaged or remain on the sidelines as a role model, with the risk of becoming a *besserwisser*.

“It is perfectly possible to be a role model without being a *besserwisser*. Equality is one such example. We have every reason to be proud of our level of equality, but we need to tread carefully and be tactical when we talk about it,” said Birgitta Ohlsson.

But neither the book’s authors or the seminar’s panel could answer how the Nordic cooperation should look in relation to the EU. Some of the book’s authors argue for stronger Nordic cooperation and for building a Nordic vanguard or a flexible Nordic federation. Other voices are sceptical or downright angry when it comes to Nordic cooperation, for instance the Icelandic author who thinks the country’s crisis demonstrated that when the going gets tough you’re left to your own devices.

Reduced news coverage of the Nordic region

“One problem is the weakening of a Nordic awareness. We find ourselves in a state of increasingly closed national egotism. That’s why we need to start with knowledge about the Nordic countries and to have a conversation about this,” said Bengt Lindroth, a former Nordic correspondent for Swedish Radio and the author of “*Härlig är Norden*” [“Beautiful Norden”].

The news coverage of the Nordic region has fallen by 30 percent in the last 15 years, while coverage of the Middle East, Asia and the USA has increased. However, Bengt Lindroth thinks there is an increase in every-day Nordic awareness. There is a gap in how the Nordic region is being viewed by ordinary voters - who believe it has become a more interesting issue - and the elite, who to a larger extent find the Nordic region uninteresting.

Europe’s major challenges are the economy, jobs and democracy, said Kristina Persson, Chairwoman at the think tank Global Challenge.

“There is a demand for politics and political leadership, but not enough people take on that responsibility. There is a lack of policies for jobs and growth, and this is where we in the Nordic region should be able to do more. If we cannot develop policies which embrace everybody, democracy is under threat and we'll be facing more xenophobia. The solution is not cuts but economic stimulation,” said Kristina Persson.

Renaissance for Nordic cooperation

One of the panelists was Finland's Sture Fjäder, the Chairman of the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NSF). He detects a renaissance for Nordic cooperation. With a total of 26 million people the Nordic countries make up the world's 10th largest economy. The region has long had a free labour market and also similar values and social structures.

“There is no one Nordic voice, but it is emerging and it is needed. The Nordic region should behave as a block within Europe. We will never be able to compete on salaries but we will compete on knowledge and good working conditions,” he said.

The seminar heard many ideas on Nordic cooperation in a future Europe. But time and again the participants underlined that if the political cooperation is to be strengthened there is a need for a popular mandate. Bengt Lindroth warned against goodwill rhetoric and referred to grand plans agreed during a 2009 meeting for research cooperation between Sweden and Finland. Nothing substantial has happened since.

“Grand words risk becoming their own worst enemy,” said Bengt Lindroth.