

Portrait

Solveig Horne, minister with a blue-blue view of Norwegian integration

Editorial

Who can come, who can stay and who deserves a worthy life?

News

Recommendations ready for new Danish employment policy

News

Fewer deaths at work

Feb 12, 2014

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 1/2014

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 1/2014

Theme: New measures for better integration



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

Work Research Institute
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130
Oslo

PUBLISHER

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

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Björn Lindahl

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.nordiclabourjournal.org

An email edition of the newsletter can
be ordered free of charge from
www.nordiclabourjournal.org

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



Contents

Who can come, who can stay and who deserves a worthy life?	3
A Minister visits the Office of Opportunity and the Place of Opportunity	4
Finland is learning the meaning of immigration	8
"Every Polish worker's dream is a steady job in Norway"	10
Jobs are key to all Nordic countries' integration policies	12
Positive prejudices benefit Icelandic immigrants .	15
Solveig Horne, minister with a blue-blue view of Norwegian integration.....	17
Fewer deaths at work.....	21
Recommendations ready for new Danish employment policy	22
Renewed focus on Danish working environments	24

Who can come, who can stay and who deserves a worthy life?

Sweden is a strong proponent for a generous and open immigration policy. The differences between the Nordic countries become clear. Minister for Integration Erik Ullenhag stands out when he talks to the Nordic Labour Journal and warns against what he sees to be developing in several European countries — anti-immigrant parties on the rise and a general move towards stricter and more immigrant-critical policies. Nevertheless, new measures for better integration is being promoted by many.

EDITORIAL

11.02.2014

BY BERIT KVAM

The eye of the needle is narrow. Even those who get in cannot compete without the language skills or networks. This is where integration policies ought to help: giving people the chance to create a worthy life in a new country. The result must be built on a mutual process. Erik Ullenhag wants to work towards a new Swedish “us”.

Integration and immigration is hotly debated in Norway too. For the country's new blue-blue government comprising the Conservatives and the Progress Party, a stricter asylum and immigration policy is a main aim. Fewer should get in, and those who are not granted permission to stay will be quickly sent out of the country. The government has entered into a special agreement with supporting parties in parliament aimed at securing just this kind of development. Money saved from asylum centres will be used to improve the integration of those who are allowed to stay. Jobs and a place to live are important elements, but language skills remain the key to good integration, says the Minister for Integration Solveig Horne in our Portrait. Few would argue with that. The question is, as she too points out, whether the training is good enough, and who should have access to it.

In our overview over the importance of employment in integration politics in the Nordic countries we quote OECD statistics which show Finland welcomes fewer immigrants than most. Here too immigration remains crucial. Finnish Tarja Filatov, former Minister of Employment and now head of the parliamentary labour and social committee, praises what has been done to improve integration in Finland, but she wants to see the decision process for residency permits sped up. Who can come and who must go? It doesn't really matter in the greater scheme of things. Most immigrants to the Nordic countries come as a result of the free movement of labour

in a crisis-hit Europe. People driven by a dream of a steady job and a safe life, like Poles in Norway. New measures for improved integration are not so much aimed at labour migrants, however. Their movements are governed by the market forces, and this might well be the main challenge.



Bashar Tancro Hussein in the middle explains about the work done by the Place of Opportunity for Erik Ullenhag, left

A Minister visits the Office of Opportunity and the Place of Opportunity

“The important thing is to create a feeling of “us” for everyone who lives in Sweden and who sees their future to be here. If you want to live here you should also have a future here, but then there are issues which must be sorted out; like a job, language and security,” says Sweden’s Minister for Integration Erik Ullenhag.

THEME

11.02.2014

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: ANETTE ANDERSSON

“What would you do if you could decide?” asks Sweden’s Minister for Integration Erik Ullenhag a group of children milling around him at the Sollentuna International School (SiS).



They have their origin from all over the world and don't hide their amusement or curiosity about having a government minister visiting their school. Not all of them know quite what a minister does, but Erik Ullenhag shakes their hands, asks questions and explains. He moves with ease through the throng of chatting and laughing children. He is on a one day visit to Sollentuna, a municipality of 57,000 people just outside of Stockholm. He has come to meet people and learn from the way they work with integration and solve issues concerning outsiders, jobs, language and security.

It is a grey day as colourless as the 1960s blocks of flats called Malmvägen which at times have been as notorious as the Stockholm suburbs of Tensta and Rinkeby, or similar areas in Malmö and Gothenburg. Erik Ullenhag regularly goes out to listen to people who work in areas facing serious problems.

"It gives me an idea of what works and sometimes also some new ideas which you can turn into reality. Sometimes the images are quite similar, for instance the problems surrounding cooperation between municipalities and the Public Employment Service. It also gives me a contact network and allows me to compare different parts of Sweden," says Erik Ullenhag.

Birthplace is down to luck

The tone is struck as the day begins. Erik Ullenhag opens a major conference on orphaned refugee children, in front of 400 participants from across Sweden. An increasing number of children between 13 and 17 come to Sweden. Last year 4,000 sought asylum, most of them boys.

"If you're born in Sweden you've been lucky. So it is our responsibility as fellow human beings to acknowledge this and to help find safety and development for those who have not been so lucky, and who were born with no freedom into poverty," says Erik Ullenhag.

He wants Sweden to be an open country and warns against a Europe turning increasingly xenophobic and closed. As an example he tells the audience about a meeting with a BBC journalist who told him "you welcome refugees and labour migrants. No British politician would ever be able to say

that". He also warns about the risks of having xenophobic political parties in national parliaments, which often leads to more established parties starting to borrow their views in order to satisfy anti-immigrant voters.

The result is already visible in several countries: the xenophobic parties grow while the political centre becomes more closed and sceptical to immigrants. Erik Ullenhag adds that we must decide which continent we want — a closed one or a human one? Welcoming refugees and labour migrants also makes us richer in so many ways — partly because of an improved economy but also because of all the new impulses and knowledge immigrants to Sweden carry with them.

Integration takes time

This does not mean integration is easy, which became very clear last year with the riots in the Stockholm suburb of Husby, when images of burning cars were broadcast to the world.



Malmvägen in Sollentuna is not as well known, but the area has been struggling with the same issues and things got so bad that the centrally placed Turebergs school was closed and demolished after much vandalism. It also takes a long time for people of foreign heritage to get into the labour market, despite new figures showing 185,000 out of the 260,000 new jobs created since 2006 have gone to foreign-born people. Yet at the same time research shows that someone called Muhammed will have a considerably harder time finding a job than someone called Kalle, even when their CVs are identical.

Unemployment figures are also considerably higher for people of foreign heritage and young people often leave education early. Hate crime has fallen since 2008, but a new report shows that people with an African background run a considerably higher risk of being targets for discrimination and hate crime in Sweden compared with other immigrant

groups. They also suffer verbal abuse, they are kept out of certain environments and they face discrimination at work. Many Afro-Swedes also fail to report incidents of discrimination because they lack confidence in the police and other authorities.

So how do you solve these problems? Which measures work when you want to create an “us”? How do you get rid of contempt of authorities and create a belief in the future?

The importance of listening

“You need to meet people where they are and find out what it is they want. But we don’t just take over people’s problems; we ask them ‘what can you do yourself?’,” says Annika Nordgren who works at Möjligheternas kontor (The Office of Opportunity) – a company started by the municipality’s education and labour market department in 2013. It targets unemployed youths from 16 years of age who need support to find ways of supporting themselves.



She and her colleague Abdulkadir Bulhan meet mostly young people, but sometimes others, to talk about their futures. What skills did they have before they came to Sweden? What are they good at? What steps do they need to take in order to be able to compete with others? The team’s main task is to figure out the youths’ knowledge and desires, what suits them, and then to make sure they find the right contacts in order to move forward. They have a number of coaches to help them. One of their advantages, they say, is that they do not act as an authority nor do they spend time on red tape and administration. They have been up and running for less than a year, and have so far met nearly 400 people. 129 have been ‘signed out’. Out of these 39 have found jobs and 14 are in education.

Erik Ullenhag pictures himself in the shoes of a 17 year old Muslim boy – perhaps he has finished studying only three subjects and been discriminated against and left feeling ‘I can’t be bothered’. What would the people at The Office of Opportunity tell him?

“Change your mentality! What do you think you are worth yourself? Overtake those who know nothing and improve your grades. We cooperate with Kunskapsparken [the local adult education authority] and can apply motivating measures to help him study,” says Abdulkadir Bulhan.

Step out of your comfort zone

He grew up in Malmvågen himself and was not particularly motivated to study. Yet he got good grades and he took further secondary education in Stockholm. His father was so proud over his results that he personally carried his son’s grades into the university to make sure he was accepted.

Abdulkadir Bulhan, like several other young people we meet, talks about the importance of breaking out of your comfort zone. They see it as important to look beyond their own area and the role models and conditions which exist there. This could happen through education, travel, working in other areas and in other companies. The demolition of the Turebergs school could in this way mean many of the pupils from Malmvågen have been forced out of this comfort zone.

The Office of Opportunity also found jobs for a group of youths last summer. The group of 30 were chosen by the local social office. Early intervention is alpha and omega, agree Abdulkadir Bulhan and Annika Nordgren.



“Our challenge is to face up to the evil forces and contempt of authority which you find in this area. Many don’t see the possibility of further education, but end up competing for the same temporary jobs together with everyone else rather than study and improve their competitiveness,” says Abdulkadir Bulhan.

The area does not only have the Office of Opportunity but also the Place of Opportunity – a charity created by local youths for youths. Their aim is to counteract destructive forces and reduce the chance of people becoming outsiders. They organise activities, night patrols and arrange lectures which are relevant to the youths. Last summer they managed to find 14 summer jobs for local youths. The process included

real job seeker processes like writing applications, CVs and attending job interviews.

Swapping roles

Erik Ullenhag listens, asks questions — one of them is “If you were in government, what would you decide or change?”

“Help young people fight unemployment, do more outreach work to prevent young people from just hang around with nothing to do,” sum up Anam Islam and Akan Yetke.

“Create a functioning cooperation between authorities and people who have access to these areas. Early intervention is important as well as a good school, even if it is what happens outside of school which is often the most important. We also need to get the authorities to take discrimination seriously,” says Bashar Tancro Hussein, who leads the Place of Opportunity and coaches in Sweden, Kurdish and English.

Erik Ullenhag also raises the question of how you can describe discrimination. Is there a risk that the way it is described becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy?

“The problem [of discrimination] does exist, but if you feel sorry for yourself because of it you only amplify the problem. It is there, but you can get past it,” says Abdulkadir Bulhan.

The study visit is over and Erik Ullenhag is rushing to another meeting. He sums up the day.

“What’s positive is the belief in the future which is still there. Young people saying that if you get help and are allowed to get an education you will soon see results. What worries me is that there seems to be more drugs around and the consequences for people and for the level of crime as a result of it. The main issue here is safety. You could take it with a pinch of salt, but one of the school children answered my question about changing things by saying “I want the guns to go away”. That’s not the sort of thing you’d hear everywhere in Sweden,” says Erik Ullenhag.



Finland is learning the meaning of immigration

Finland has taken longer to adapt its labour market to immigration than other Nordic countries. It is more than ten years ago now that the then Minister of Employment Tarja Filatov (Social Democratic Party) gathered Nordic integration expert to a meeting outside of Helsinki.

THEME

11.02.2014

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN

“We want to learn from Nordic countries with longer experience,” she said in the autumn of 2001. At the time everyone was talking about the future labour shortage and the need to compete with other countries for the best skilled people. But with the 2008 economic crisis the tables turned. When NLJ in 2010 wrote about integration in Finland the national political debate was focused on how to limit immigration to deal with the high unemployment.

Economic cycle

So the debate is governed by the economic cycle. Immigrants still make up a small part of the Finnish population, little more than four percent, yet unemployment is still higher

than in Sweden, which has 14 percent immigrants. Unemployment among immigrants in Finland is also very high at more than 21 percent — the highest of all the Nordic countries. It would seem it is possible to combine a larger percentage of immigrants with lower unemployment.

NLJ met Tarja Filatov in the Finnish parliament to find out more about what has happened to immigration in Finland. She served as Minister of Employment in three governments between 2000 and 2007. She now heads the parliamentary committee on working life and equality. One of her tasks is to lead the delegation for Roma issues. It works to develop co-operation between the Roma community and the authorities,

and to support anti-discrimination work and promote equality.

The Social Democratic Party has, with encouragement from trade unions, taken a cautious approach to labour immigration.

“There have been very optimistic assessments for how many are needed.”

Shortage within certain industries

Filatov says there are industries which need immigration to cover labour shortages, especially within the health sector. In other areas there are no such labour shortages.

“There aren’t enough immigrants in Finland for some employers, and they ask for more.”

She says companies want more foreign workers in order to cut costs by offering lower wages and benefits in different types of contracts and by using subcontractors. This is especially true for the construction industry.

“And there is still discrimination out there.”

One problem, according to Filatov, is that employers have managed to cut wages to a level where it is getting difficult for people to survive on their take-home pay. Therefore work should be reorganised to make people more efficient and deserving of higher wages. Regrettably it is immigrants who get the blame for the worsening conditions, not employers, according to Filatov. She still thinks Finland can teach other countries a great deal. Language training for immigrants has improved a lot, as have anti-social dumping measures in the labour market.

Leading the way

Finland has been leading the way in several areas, she says. The Act on Contractors' Obligations and Liability means that companies which commission work from subcontractors must first make sure their tax, pension and accident insurance policies are in order. Wages must be paid to bank accounts to reduce the chances of people working illegally. Furthermore, all shops and service providers must give all their customers receipts to prevent the grey economy from spreading. Swapping information between different authorities, like the tax office and others, has also proven to be an efficient way of combating fraud.

Tarja Filatov is also a proponent of the cooperation on integration between municipal and state authorities which is happening on a local level through language courses and work placements, albeit with shrinking funding. She is also critical of the way asylum seekers are being treated, with many forced to go without working for long periods of time while they wait to hear whether they can stay in the country or not.

Finland has decided that all construction workers must display a personal identification card featuring their tax code. This has led to criticism from the EU against what is seen as a breach of data protection directives.

“I believe we can secure the system,” says Filatov.

The Social Democratic Party focuses on a fair working life. Tarja Filatov is for instance happy that the control of foreign labour again is being tightened to allow police to come along during workplace inspections, because nobody else is allowed to arrest people who try to flee the inspectors.

Populism

In recent years Finland has had its fair share of racism and attacks on immigrants. Even though the populist party Perussuomalaiset (the True Finns) has made more or less serious attempts at getting rid of racist politicians, a new way of talking about immigrants has been spreading. Even though attitudes towards immigrants are largely positive in a European perspective, Tarja Filatov believes the population, just like in other countries, seems to be divided.

Young people have an international outlook; they often study abroad for at least one semester and they have friends in other countries. But there are also people who are racists already at a very early age, with Islamophobia and a hatred of multiculturalism as driving forces. She knows there are researchers who aren’t speak out in public because they are afraid of physical violence.

“I experience this too as a politician. Ten years ago you might get a nazi card in the post after speaking out. Now your email inbox goes mad and you avoid answering your telephone for a couple of days.”

The first refugees came from Chile and Vietnam in the 1970s, but it wasn’t until the 1990s when new groups started coming, like Russians of Finnish heritage or Somalis. EU membership has meant a gradual opening of borders for labour immigrants from a majority of European countries. Just like in many other of the Nordic countries, many young people from the southern countries on the continent have come to Finland to look for work.

It is, according to Tarja Filatov, important that people realise what kind of immigration they’re facing; people from other EU countries who are entitled to free movement, people from countries outside of the EU or refugees. That debate is still to come in Finland.

"Every Polish worker's dream is a steady job in Norway"

The sizeable immigration from former Eastern European countries to the Nordic countries - and to Norway in particular - calls for integration measures which also include labour migrants, say Norwegian researchers.

THEME

11.02.2014

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

"If we want to keep a sustainable working life and welfare system in the Nordic region we need to aim integration measures not only at refugees but also at labour migrants, especially when it comes to language skills," says Jon Horgen Friberg at the Norwegian Fafo research institution.

Alongside colleague Line Eldring, Friberg has edited and written the report 'Labour migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in the Nordic Countries'. It was presented at the Nordic conference on an inclusive working life in Stockholm on 28 November last year. Together with research colleagues from Poland and the other Nordic countries they demonstrate in the report the movement of workforces between the old Eastern European countries and the Nordic region since the 2004 EU expansion.

They have examined who it is who are coming, how they are included into existing labour market structures and how protected they are from exploitation. They also looked at how well labour migrants are being integrated into the society in which they work. Work is often considered the most important tool for integration, but is it enough or are other measures needed? And do Polish workers really want to be integrated or are they just visiting? All of this varies, but one thing is certain: they want safer working conditions and better terms of employment.

"I have interviewed hundreds of Polish workers and never once met someone who didn't dream of a steady job in Norway," says Jon Horgen Friberg.

Working abroad in their own language

Integrating immigrants into the labour market is one of the major challenges facing the Nordic countries. Language and skills are considered key components and many integration projects reflect this. But the labour migration shows a different pattern. Hundreds of thousands of people have quickly

entered the Nordic labour markets without speaking the host country's language.

This has been especially true for labour migration taking place after the 2004 EU expansion. Between 2004 and 2011 330,000 labour migrants came to the Nordic countries, and to Norway in particular. If you count those who have come to do short-time jobs, the figure jumps to 600,000 over those seven years.

"We often talk about language and skills being the major challenges in the integration of refugees, so it is paradoxical that more than 100,000 people have entered straight into the Norwegian labour market without any [Norwegian] language skills," says Horgen Friberg.

Different countries — different criteria

Polish workers have been topping the list of those moving north in the hunt for jobs, and most of them have chosen Norway. Many have also found work in Denmark and in Iceland. Sweden has not seen as many labour migrants as the other Nordic countries, and immigration has mostly been dominated by asylum seekers.

The report is therefore focussing on Polish labour migration to the three capitals of Oslo, Copenhagen and Reykjavik. Who are arriving, what are they doing and what are their living conditions like? And what are the differences between the three countries?

Both in Oslo and in Copenhagen you find Polish workers in different parts of the labour market where insecure employment, temporary positions, subcontractor work and cleaning jobs are driving forces for low pay and bad working conditions. In Oslo people working for subcontractors are particularly exposed to salary dumping, while those in insecure positions are most exposed to exploitation and bad working conditions.

New rules aimed at preventing social dumping have been introduced in Norway lately, but Polish workers are still exposed to loopholes in the legislation. Denmark's labour market is more regulated through collective agreements than Norway's, and this explains why conditions are somewhat better there. Yet here too conditions for labour migrants are different from those for native workers. Iceland is a different story. Polish workers are included into the system but end up bottom of existing agreements. This means they will earn considerably less than in Oslo or Copenhagen, but on the other hand they enjoy a larger degree of job security.

Best paid in Norway

The reason why so many Polish workers have come to Norway is a structural labour shortage especially within construction and heavy industry — low status and low paid jobs which tempt few native workers. Norway remained relatively untouched by the 2008 economic crisis, and had jobs to offer when the rest of the world was struggling.

"We have seen migration based on demand where employers have adapted jobs for Polish supervisors and groups," says Jon Horgen Friberg.

Polish workers arriving in Copenhagen are often young, while those who chose Norway or Iceland are older. In Norway the average age for Polish workers is 36. Iceland sees entire families arriving, while in Norway Polish men were the first to arrive, leaving their families at home.

Those who stay for more than one year tend to settle down and there is an increasing trend of women and children joining their men. Living apart simply becomes too much of a strain in the long term. Most of those arriving in Norway have an education. 62 percent have vocational training while only 17 percent have further education.

"Many are skilled workers but they don't speak Norwegian and will therefore be used as a flexible buffer in the labour market. This means they become very vulnerable and end up in a very weak position in the labour market," says Jon Horgen Friberg.

A two-tier labour market

The large number of Eastern European workers has meant the emergence of a two-tier Norwegian labour market, he claims. Over time they risk getting stuck in a secondary labour market which lacks most of what is usually considered to be conditions of a good working life — having the opportunity to develop professionally, enjoying a good work environment, regulated working hours and a safe job. Migrants often think of themselves as a B team in the Norwegian labour market, and try to keep the dream of a steady job alive.

"We get self-perpetuating spirals. Without Norwegian language skills they are dependent on working for Polish supervisors and lose the chance of developing further," he says.

People used to think Polish workers would arrive to perform short-term temporary jobs and that they therefore would have no impact on the Norwegian labour market.

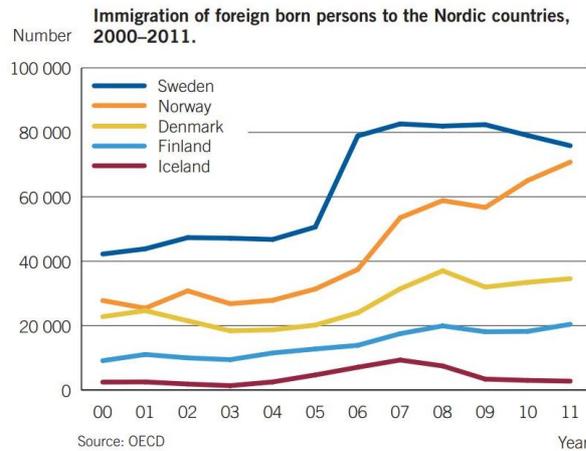
"It's a classic story. You import labour and get people instead," says Jon Horgen Friberg.

The debate around Eastern European labour migrants and their work conditions often centres on social dumping. A growing gap in the labour market is putting pressure on both welfare systems and labour market institutions in countries which traditionally have been aiming to minimise economic inequality.

When you can get cheap labour from foreign countries you also upset the power balance in working life. But those who represent cheap labour today risk ending up in marginalised poverty in the long term. That is why Jon Horgen Friberg thinks it is important to also work towards the integration of labour migrants and to increase their chances of finding work in the ordinary labour market, where they would enjoy decent wages and proper protection.

"The idea of cheap and flexible labour is not sustainable for the welfare state. Integration and social dumping are linked and you could ask what or whom you are most worried about - the worker who arrives here or the institutions.

"Those who have the worst conditions, likely low wages and a weak position in the labour market, are those who struggle the most to integrate and lead a normal life. But there is little focus on this and there is for instance no public ambition with employers or politicians to create a system which makes it easier for labour migrants to learn the language," says Jon Horgen Friberg.



Immigration of foreign born persons 2000-2011. Source: OECD/Nordic Pocket Facts. Statistics on Integration 2013.

Jobs are key to all Nordic countries’ integration policies

All of the Nordic countries are attractive targets for refugees and labour migrants alike. But there are major differences both between which groups arrive and how they are received. Finland and Iceland have always stood out, but now the differences are increasing at a faster rate also between Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

THEME

11.02.2014

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Until the 1980s the three Scandinavian countries followed what researchers call a multi-cultural integration model. Immigrants could decide where they wanted to live and the general belief was that integration would happen naturally. Although immigration cost some money, it was considered to have a positive impact on growth.

Integration is a complex process:

“If people are to be considered, and consider themselves, worthy citizens they must be given access to certain basic resources which are valued in the society in which they live. Social rights create social cohesion - integration - between a country’s citizens,” write researchers Karin Borevi and Gunnar Myrberg at the University College of Malmö, and refer

to the definition introduced in 1950 by British sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall.

An integration model under strain

As immigration increased, both as a result of external issues like the fall of Yugoslavia and war in the Middle East and because of more and more family reunions, the integration model began to feel the strain.

The Nordic welfare states face special challenges when it comes to migration. Grete Brochmann, who led the major Norwegian study of immigration’s consequences for the welfare model, describes it like this:

“The model is dependent on high work participation and relatively equal income distribution in order to maintain a generous and universal welfare system. Meanwhile, a flat salary

structure could create high thresholds for those trying to gain access to working life and well developed welfare rights can weaken the incentive to take on paid work.”

Both immigration and emigration influences the welfare model’s sustainability. If the costs of financing the model rise it could impact on the population’s view of how welfare should be distributed and how universal these rights should be,” she points out.

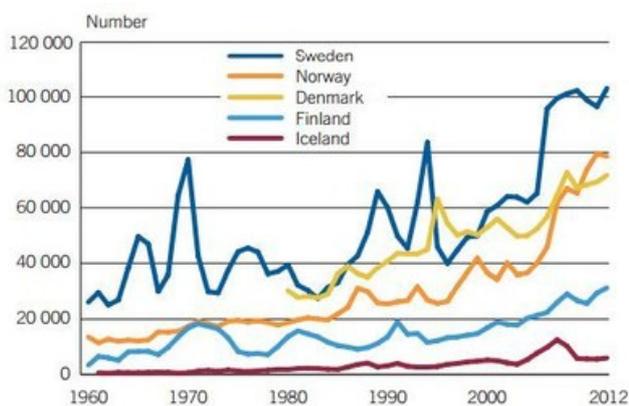
Migration a special challenge in the Nordic region

In countries like the USA, where even immigrants with few qualifications can find low-paid work, the immigrants do not challenge the foundations of the social model to the same extent. But immigrants could also have just the right qualifications for the country they move to. High levels of immigration could therefore be a positive thing. There is no correct answer for what the effect of immigration is. Everything depends on which groups are arriving and how quickly they can be integrated.

Politicians who want to influence integration can use a number of tools:

- They can try to limit how many people arrive to the country and what kind of immigrants arrive.
- They can limit immigrants’ rights to settle where they choose and try to control this to make sure people are placed in areas which need labour.
- Immigrants can be given skills through language courses and other relevant education to help them find jobs.
- The rules governing the welfare system can be changed.

Looking at immigration in a long-term perspective, from 1960 to 2010, it is clear that immigration has not fallen even in countries with a more restrictive immigration policy, like Denmark. On the contrary, immigration has increased over the past latest decade, although it eased off somewhat after the 2008 economic crisis.



Data for Denmark is available from 1980. Native born persons who re-immigrated are also included in the graph. Source: Nordic Pocket Facts. Statistics on integration 2013.

Immigration has changed in character, however. Refugees and family reunions dominated until 2004. After two rounds of EU expansion labour migrants have dominated. EU rules on the free movement of labour apply to EEA countries Norway and Iceland. Norway is almost on the same level as Sweden in all measurements of the number of immigrants.

There were major variations to which immigrants came to which Nordic country between 2000 and 2011.

Denmark	%	Finland	%	Iceland	%
Poland	8	Russia	16	Poland	38
Germany	6	Estonia	16	Lithuania	6
Norway	5	Sweden	5	Germany	5

Norway	%	Sweden	%
Poland	15	Iraq	12
Sweden	10	Poland	6
Lithuania	5	Denmark	6

Source: Nordic Pocket Facts. Statistics on Integration 2013.

Poland is the dominating country of origin over the latest decade, with Iceland and Finland representing the extremes when it comes to destinations. 38 percent of immigrants to Iceland during this period came from Poland. In Finland they weren’t even among the ten largest groups of immigrants. There, Russians and Estonians dominate. Sweden is one of the European countries to welcome the most refugees from Iraq. Denmark has the most equally divided immigration - no group is larger than eight percent.

Hard to see effect of tighter rules

It is hard to see any major effect of political decisions on the immigration statistics. External factors like war in the Middle east and the introduction of free movement of labour in the EU/EEA has been more important. Despite the fact that Sweden and Finland were the only two countries without temporary limits on labour migration after the EU expanded with eight new former Eastern European countries in 2004, most Poles chose to go to Norway, tempted by higher wages and a better labour market.

Most of the conflicts in immigration politics stem from the housing of refugees. Denmark, Norway and Sweden stand out.

- In Sweden refugees can choose where they want to live if they have the means to do that.
- Norway’s system is similar to the Swedish one, but financial housing support is only made available when integration authorities have been involved in finding housing and space on

an introduction programme in cooperation with local authorities.

- Danish authorities have sought to strengthen their control of housing. Asylum seekers will routinely be housed in an asylum centre while applying for asylum. When they are granted residency, they will be "placed" in housing by the Danish Immigration Service.

Protests against the housing of refugees mounted when the number of asylum seekers began to increase towards the end of the 1980s. Swedish authorities had planned to build three main refugee centres, and ended up with 17.

Sweden's Migration Board encouraged all Swedish municipalities to welcome refugees in 1987, when a sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers put pressure on capacity. The aim was for each municipality to accept three refugees per 1,000 citizens. This did not happen without protests. The referendum on asylum centres which was held in the municipality of Sjöbo in Skåne that year cleared the way for the establishment of the immigration critical political party Ny Demokrati (New Democracy) in 1991. The party later split and disappeared out of politics. What followed was the Sweden Democrats, who won parliamentary seats in 2010.

In Denmark the Danish People's Party was founded in 1995 and from 2001 to 2011 it supported the centre-right government in parliament. Denmark's immigration policy changed tack during those years. New restrictions on family related immigration were introduced and the welfare system was restricted for new arrivals.

Norway, which for many years had integration policies similar to Sweden's, moved towards a more Danish approach in the early 2000s. Grete Brochmann's 2011 study of welfare and migration marked a sea change in the Norwegian debate. It estimated the long-term impact of immigration and concluded that some groups of immigrants put great strains on public spending. The study bluntly puts it like this:

"The generous and redistributive welfare state, which should include all legal residents, makes it necessary to choose and limit potential new members from abroad."

After the 2013 elections the Conservatives and the Progress Party formed a coalition government with parliamentary support from the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats. Immigration issues proved to be the most difficult during government negotiations, but the four parties finally agreed on a detailed policy.

Jobs a main strategy

All of the Nordic countries have a main strategy for improved integration which focuses on giving immigrants language skills and labour market training to help them find jobs. This is reflected in a shift of responsibilities. In Sweden, for instance, the Public Employment Service was given the respon-

sibility for integration measures for new arrivals from 1 December 2010. The Ministry of Labour was put in charge of coordinating integration policies from 1 January 2011.

Language and labour market training is mainly offered to refugees. But the level of its success depends mainly on employment levels. If there is high unemployment, immigrants struggle to find jobs no matter how many courses they have attended.

Not even in Norway, with its high demand for labour, are results very impressive. Since 2004 new refugees have had the right and obligation to follow a two year long language and society course. The aim is for 65 percent of participants to go on to study or find work. Yet when Statistics Norway summed up the results for those who finished the course in 2010, only 54 percent were in work or education. That was the worst result since the reform was introduced.

Institutional racism?

In Sweden there is much debate whether the bad results can be blamed on the immigrants or whether they are hindered by so-called institutional racism. In Denmark and Norway the responsibility for integration is laid more squarely at the feet of immigrants themselves.

When politicians don't succeed in managing or controlling the stream of immigrants and when language and labour market training does not have the desired results, only tool number four remains: to adjust the rules of the welfare system.

Norway's 5,500 kroner (€600) a month cash-for-care benefit, given to parents who want to stay at home looking after their child in its first year, has been used as an example of what is being called social tourism, or welfare export. When the benefit goes to a Polish labour migrant's family in Poland, it represents several times the purchasing power it has back in Norway.

The counter argument is that these are rights which have been earned by labour migrants on an equal basis with Norwegian labour. EEA regulations also say these kinds of benefits should be exported.

If politicians tighten the belt too much they risk creating a kind of guest worker who lives in the country on different conditions. As Grete Brochmann pointed out when she presented the study on migration and welfare:

"The welfare model is both part of the problem and the solution when it comes to the integration of immigrants. Despite the fact that welfare tools can pacify they can also help people qualify, prepare for working life and provide quality of life for newly arrived families."



Steingrímur Ólafsson with his son Ingólfur Hersir, wife Marín Hrafnisdóttir and daughter Hrafnhildur in Norway. Photo: private

Positive prejudices benefit Icelandic immigrants

Being Icelandic can be an advantage if you're looking for somewhere to live and work in Norway. Icelanders themselves believe their historical roots in Norway are often the reason they're well received by Norwegians. One anthropologist thinks Icelanders have an advantage over other immigrant groups in Norway.

THEME

11.02.2014

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR

The number of Icelanders in Norway has doubled since the 2008 finance crash. Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir, a research student at the University of Iceland, is looking at Icelandic immigration to Norway and attitudes towards Icelanders compared to attitudes towards other immigrants.

In her anthropological study Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir focuses on how, unlike other nationalities, Icelanders are considered to belong to Norwegian society, and how they compare themselves to people from the rest of the Nordic region, Europe and non-Western countries. She also looks at how Icelanders are being welcomed in Norwegian society, what they think

about their immigration to Norway and how they are being met, including in the Norwegian labour market.

Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir has interviewed 32 Icelanders who moved to Norway after the economic crash and eight Icelanders who already lived there. She has also followed the Norwegian online immigration debate.

A warm welcome

The study is ongoing but Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir has already presented preliminary results. She says that Icelanders feel they have enjoyed a warm welcome in Norway. They say they have a good reputation in the labour market and that Norwegians feel they are working hard.

“Icelanders meet positive attitudes among Norwegian employers,” says Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir.

Some of the Icelanders reckon their nationality benefits them.

Icelanders are met by “positive prejudices” according to Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir. One of the participants in her research compared it to a game of cards where the cards had been dealt in the Icelanders’ favour. Later it depends on the individuals how they make use of the advantage they have been given. Nationality can be an advantage, in other words.

In her research, Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir lists the Icelanders’ descriptions of how they were welcomed. Some were met with scepticism but this soon changed when it became clear they were from Iceland, she explains.

Icelanders have sometimes used their nationality to make their stay in Norway easier. Icelanders who have been lived in Norway for a longer period of time have advised new arrivals to say they are from Iceland when looking for a place to live, as they feel this will help. Some also see this as an advantage when looking for work.

“But many also think their nationality doesn’t play any role at all, especially if there is tough competition for a job,” says Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir.

Welcome back home!

Steingrímur Ólafsson has lived in Stavanger for just under two years. This past year he has trained to be a materials manager for the international oil company Songa Offshore’s platforms. Steingrímur Ólafsson has always felt welcome in Norway.

“Norwegians are usually positive towards us Icelanders. When I had just arrived in Norway they sometimes said “welcome back home,” explains the Stavanger resident.

Steingrímur Ólafsson thinks the Icelandic people’s Norwegian origins make it easier for them to come and live in Norway than for immigrants from distant countries. He points out that Icelanders speak a language not dissimilar to Nor-

wegian, they share the same culture and have a similar social structure as Norway.

“It is no big problem for Icelanders to adapt to Norwegian society,” he says.

He does not think there is any discrimination in Norway or that Icelanders would knowingly exploit their nationality. He points out that committed workers who behave in a nice and sensible way will always be popular in the workplace. It matters little, then, where you come from.

Not immigrants

Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir has studied the online immigration debate. She says Icelanders sometimes are held up as the opposite of Muslims. One online contributor might welcome Icelanders while he or she displays anti-Muslim prejudices.

“Contributors to online debates sometimes highlight the family bonds between the Icelandic and Norwegian peoples by saying things like Icelanders are just Norwegians who emigrated to Iceland and who have now returned to Norway,” says Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir.

But there are also online debate contributors who defend Norwegian Muslims.

Icelanders are not considered to be immigrants to Norwegian society, according to Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir. And Icelanders themselves don’t consider themselves to be immigrants, even though they have moved to Norway.

“It is a paradox that Icelanders who have just landed in Norway are welcomed back home while others who are born and raised in Norway but have immigrant backgrounds are often considered to not belong in Norway,” she points out.

“So there is basic discrimination in society,” says Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir.



Solveig Horne, minister with a blue-blue view of Norwegian integration

“I am now in government,” says the Progress Party’s Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion Solveig Horne. She will stick to the cooperation agreement with the Conservatives and the supporting parties the Liberals and Christian Democrats. There’s a lot of good Progress Party politics right there, says the government minister. She has “no comment” about party colleagues who call for more Progress Party politics.

PORTRAIT

11.02.2014

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: ILJA C. HENDEL

Some political party colleagues were seriously critical when they heard Solveig Horne would give the 2013 diversity award to the Norwegian armed forces. The Progress Party is opposed to the use of the hijab in the forces, while the forces themselves allow it. How did you experience this criticism yourself?

“I will not comment on that.”

Is it not the case that the Progress Party is against the use of the hijab in the armed forces, in the way the armed forces have opened for in their integration policy?

“I am part of the government, which comprises the Progress Party and the Conservative Party, and one of my tasks in this government is to give out some awards, and my task was also to give out the diversity award to the armed forces. The armed forces have done a lot of good work with recruiting mi-

nority youths, whom we also need in Norway's forces. More than that I am not going to comment."

Have you changed your mind?

"Both the Conservatives and the Progress Party are very clear that we do not want to see religious symbols and clothing in the armed forces or in public services."

The Nordic Labour Journal has been granted 30 minutes with the Progress Party government minister some 100 days after she was appointed.

"It's been full on from day one, hasn't it," the minister says to her media relations advisor.

She has been in the spotlight since the very beginning. If you search the name Solveig Horne in the newspaper archive Retriever for same month she became a minister, the results jump from 35 to 400 hits. At one point things got so bad because of certain things she had expressed in social media in the past that Prime Minister Erna Solberg had to come out and say she had full confidence in her minister. There has now been 1,200 archive hits on her name since she got the job. Her party leader and Minister of Finance Siv Jensen's name pops up 9,000 times on Retriever over the same period of time.

"But it has been good fun too. It's supposed to be full on when you are a politician on this level," she says, now turned towards us.

Solveig Horne is the Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion in the blue-blue Conservative and Progress Party coalition government. The Conservative leader Erna Solberg is Prime Minister and the Conservatives have another ten government ministers. Solveig Horne is one of seven government ministers from the Progress Party.

"My focus is on the protection of children and family politics, as well as the integration and housing of refugees," the minister says. She is also overseeing consumer issues, the drawing up of a universal discrimination and equality law, the inclusion of people with physical handicaps and more.

Quicker housing of accepted refugees

The focus has been largely on the housing of refugees pretty much from the beginning. Many of them have been stuck in reception centres long after being accepted as refugees because there are not enough municipalities willing to house them.

One of the first things the blue-blue government did was to send a letter to all of the country's municipalities asking them to accept refugees, and the very first thing Horne did was to call Progress Party mayors to tell them that this was a challenge they had inherited from the outgoing government.

What was the response like?

"They recognised that this was a shared challenge which we must figure out how to solve. Right now more than 5,400 people with permission to stay are sat in reception centres waiting for a municipality to house them. These are very large numbers," says Solveig Horne.

She wants to get a good cooperation going with the municipalities. One commentator in the daily Aftenposten suggested the state should take on the entire responsibility, but she disagrees:

"The municipalities, that's where people live and that is who we need to listen to. I want to be a team player together with the municipalities and to listen to what challenges they have."

Tightening asylum and immigration policies

The government minister also wants to highlight the correlation between immigration and integration policies, and she says something needs to be done.

"This government made it very clear in its agreement with the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party that we will follow restrictive and good immigration and integration policies. The Minister of Justice faces an important task of tightening integration and immigration policies, speed up the processing of asylum applications and family reunions while quickly returning illegal immigrants."

A group of undersecretaries from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion will look at the entire immigration chain as a whole. The aim of a tighter immigration policy is to release resources from asylum centres to be used on housing.

"The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) says they need to build more reception centres because more asylum seekers are coming to the country, while at the same time people who have been granted permission to stay are still sitting in reception centres. I want to turn this support around. Rather than spending more money on reception centres, more of it should be given to the municipalities so that they can cover more of their integration costs. This way we can house people quicker and the UDI would free up capacity in the existing reception centres."

Is it possible to know how many asylum seekers can come to the country? There is for instance a great need to accept more Syrian refugees.

"Yes, in the government's agreement with the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party we say we will accept 1,000 Syrian refugees, and we stand by that. If we were to change this, the Minister of Justice must renegotiate with the other parties."

How do you see the money which now goes to the UDI being used for integration?

“We have started by increasing the integration grant, we have simplified the integration system, we have written letters to all of the municipalities asking them to house refugees and we have established a committee of undersecretaries to look at integration challenges as a whole. I have also been visiting many municipalities to listen to the challenges they are facing.”

When you were listening, what did you hear?

“That municipalities are very positive about housing refugees but that they see the challenges of finding space because there is already pressure on the property market. They also see that accepting refugees costs more than it brings in, so it is important to set up good language training to get people into jobs quicker.”

“Get them into work”

Figures from Statistics Norway show only 54 percent of immigrants who attended Norway’s introduction programme in 2010 had entered the labour market or started education in 2011. What do you think about that?

“This is very serious. If we are to succeed with integration people must get an education, they must get language training and we must get them into work. So of course when so many fail to enter education or work after a two years introduction programme, we need to see whether the programme is good enough, flexible enough and whether it safeguards the interest of every individual who will be passing through it.

“People are different after all. Some are illiterate and have no education whatsoever, others have a higher education and others still have basic schooling, so we need the training to be better targeted at the individual’s needs. I’m not saying that we will extend the introduction programme but we need programmes which are good enough to get people into education and work.”

By visiting municipalities Solveig Horne has got more ideas to explore.

“Yesterday I went to Ålesund. They have done a good job by accepting minor asylum seekers who are put through elementary school. They have set up a year 11, an extra year after elementary school, to prepare them for their upper secondary education. Now the Directorate for Education and Training and the Labour and Welfare Administration have been tasked with finding better solutions for a smoother transition from elementary school to upper secondary education.”

Another municipality runs a project aimed at getting refugees into work first before giving them language training

in the workplace plus more work-related training in the evening.

“This is a pilot project we want to study closer. I think we need to look at whether the Norwegian language training on offer in the municipalities is good enough. Refugees are also different, some are illiterate and others arrive with an education. The government has also said we want to consider making it easier to get the education from your home country accepted here.”

A question of attitudes

Presumably this is also a question of attitudes. One of your party colleagues recently said immigrant youths get angry faster than other youths. Does this aid integration?

“Look, the Progress Party has always wanted a stricter immigration policy. We will integrate those who get permission to stay and demand that they get an education and find work. Our party political programme states clearly that they must be integrated and this means municipalities must be covered for the costs related to integrating accepted refugees. We have also said very clearly that those who are refused permission to stay must be transported out, and the Directorate of Immigration has to speed up their processing of applications to make sure applicants get a quick response to whether they can stay or not.”

The government has also said it will expand the cash-for-care benefit for parents. Isn’t paying parents, women, to stay at home for longer contrary to the idea of good integration?

“No, not at all. It must be possible to think two thoughts at once. The cash-for-care benefit is a tool which gives families a choice and flexibility while they parent small children. This is for the very youngest children.”

While you were an MP you suggested the benefit should be linked to citizenship. Have you moved away from that idea?

“This government says it very clearly, and we have the support of the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party in this, that we must consider making the cash-for-care benefit local. This means it would be a state benefit administered by the municipalities.

“But I am a government minister working out of the coalition agreement which we reached, and I will make policies based on the agreements we have with the other [supporting] political parties.”

Nordic cooperation

You have been a deputy member of the Nordic Council of Ministers over several periods, and now you are part of the cooperation between Nordic ministers. How is that progressing?

“I believe it is important for politicians to learn from others and for others to learn from us. We don’t really have to travel

far to get good ideas, because the Nordic countries are very similar. In my first three months I have already met the Nordic ministers for equality and the ministers for integration, and we have exchanged experiences.”

Who has inspired you the most?

“I think they have achieved much in different areas. Sweden and Denmark are perhaps the countries we can learn the most from.

“It has also been interesting talking to the Swedish Minister for Integration, Erik Ullenhag, and I will definitely keep in touch with him.”

A desired legacy

When you finish your job as a government minister, what do you want your legacy to be?

“I want families to have been given greater flexibility and for there to be more focus on families, that children in care have been given a better life than they have today and not least that we have managed to house people who have been granted permission to stay.”

Fewer deaths at work

The number of deaths in Nordic workplaces continues to fall, according to preliminary figures collected by NLJ for last year from Finland, Sweden and Denmark. But there has been an increase in fatal accident in Norway, a trend which has repeated itself for the past three years.

NEWS

11.02.2014

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN

“It looks like we no longer can talk about a fall or stabilisation of the number of workplace related accidents in Norwegian working life,” says Ingrid Finboe Svendsen, Director of the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority.

NLJ’s preliminary figures remain to be controlled and are still not quite comparable, but they indicate a trend. According to Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority statistics 48 people died performing paid work in 2013 compared to 37 the year before. The figures for Sweden were only 33 compared to 45 in 2012 and 57 in 2011. In Denmark the number of deaths reached 36 last year compared to 40 people in 2012 and 40 in 2011.

Statistics from Finland will not be ready before March-April, but the preliminary figure is 19 deaths. Head of workplace safety at the Federation of Accident Insurance Institutions, Janne Syvä-Aho, still reckons the final figure to be closer to 25-30 deaths. The numbers for 2012 and 2011 were 28 and 26. Deaths during work related travel are not included in these figures.

According to Syvä-Aho, the differences between the number of fatal accidents stem first and foremost from different industry structures. In Finland the three most dangerous sectors are heavy industry, construction and transport. The primary sector is not included, but it is in the Norwegian figures. The number of accidents also tend to follow the economic cycle.

“During a depression there is less manufacturing, construction and transport.”

Finland has slowly managed to reduce the number of deaths. In 1963 452 people died at work, ten years later the number was 321. In later years the number has stabilised at around 40-50 deaths with an additional 200-210 deaths as a result of workplace-related diseases. There are other reasons besides safety campaigns behind the improved figures.

“You could imagine that first aid has improved so that people no longer die like they would have ten years ago. These figures are difficult to interpret,” says Syvä-Aho.

The annual international World Day for Safety and Health at Work is coming up — it falls on 28 April every year. The campaign was launched in 2003 by the ILO, the UN’s agency for labour issues. The ILO estimates that more than 2.3 million people die because of their work every year. Out of these 321,000 are pure accidents, while the vast majority are a result of various work related diseases like cancer, cardiac and vascular disease or respiratory disease.

A research overview from The Swedish Work Environment Authority published in 2010 shows that such estimates are still subject to “considerable degrees of uncertainty”. In only a few cases is it possible to establish with certainty that an illness is work related. The researchers still conclude that at least 1,000 deaths a year in Sweden are work related, many times more than the number of pure workplace accidents.

Recommendations ready for new Danish employment policy

There will be major changes to measures aimed at unemployed people on benefit if the Danish government follows the recently published recommendations from the so-called Carsten Koch committee. A new employment policy is expected to be ready before the summer recess.

NEWS

06.02.2014

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Cuts to the job centres' much criticised activation offers for the unemployed and more focus on unemployment funds. These are among recommendations from a committee led by former Minister for Taxation Carsten Koch. The government has asked it to prepare the ground for a reform of the employment system for unemployed people who have signed up to an unemployment fund.

After one year in the making, the much anticipated recommendations are now ready and have been sent to the social partners for consultation, before being presented to the government in February 2014. The content will not be made public until then, but leaks suggest an employment policy with a range of new elements to it.

Unemployment funds to play greater role

One of the committee's more controversial proposals is that unemployed people with a good chance of finding new work quickly should be allowed to choose whether they want to deal with their job centre or the unemployment fund during the first six months of unemployment.

With that Carsten Koch is interfering in a dispute between municipal job centres and unemployment funds which has been running for years; whose responsibility is it to work with the unemployed?

Today's rules say unemployed people on benefits must attend meetings and hold conversations both with their municipality's job centre and with their unemployment fund manager. The unemployment funds feel this is unnecessary, and they have long been pushing to take over the entire responsibility for people during their first six months of unemployment.

Carsten Koch does not want to go that far, and the municipal job centres and the employers in The Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) are also very much against the idea of strengthening the role of the unemployment funds. They do

not believe the funds to be better positioned than the job centres to find jobs.

Meaningless activation targeted

If the politicians choose to follow Carsten Koch's recommendations it will also mean an end to forcing unemployed people to take part in guidance and retraining. Instead they will be offered the chance to agree on measures directly with their job centre. This recommendation comes after massive criticism from job centres which have argued that forcing the unemployed to attend special courses and retraining programmes has been both a waste of money and of the time of the unemployed.

The Carsten Koch committee does, however, stress that the unemployed will continue to be available to the labour market and that they will still have to be available for work in order to be able to collect unemployment benefits.

The committee also wants to give job centres a far more proactive role in their cooperation with businesses, and they should systematically offer help in terms of recruitment, guidance, retraining and the retaining of workers when they for instance need long term sickness leave.

Education for lower benefits

Another noteworthy proposal from the committee is to give unemployed people over 30 the chance to take vocational education in return for a cut in their unemployment benefit. This means the unemployed will pay parts of the bill themselves in order to return to the labour market. The committee does not say how much the benefits would be cut, but people should be offered a loan which would take them up to a regular benefit level.

Koch also suggests the system should be better at targeting the unemployed who really need help. Not all unemployed people should be offered six weeks education of their own

choosing, which is the case today, the committee says. Unemployed people who can easily find work should lose their right to such training.

The committee also recommends speeding up the activation for unemployed people over 30. Today this doesn't kick in until after nine months of unemployment. The committee wants to see activation happening after six months, for instance in the form of internships.

The committee has also looked into which activation measures actually work. And they all do — except state wage subsidies. The committee found no positive activation effect stemming from that. Wage subsidies could play a positive role as a social measure, however.

Around in circles in darkness

The government acknowledged the need for an employment policy reform last year, in the wake of severe criticism of municipal job centres' attempts at getting unemployed people back into work. The Minister of Employment, Mette Frederiksen (Social Democrats) agreed there was a need to reboot the measures aimed at the unemployed, which cost Denmark 6bn Danish kroner (€804m) every year.

“For too long the measures have been running around in circles in darkness. This has led to controls and meaningless activation rather than real retraining and lasting employment. It is our duty to think again,” said Mette Frederiksen as she commissioned the Carsten Koch committee to do their work.

The government will not comment on the Carsten Koch committee's recommendations until they are made public later in February. After that the government will draft its own suggestion for reform. The aim is to secure a broad parliamentary majority backing and support from the social partners, and to pass the reform in parliament before the summer recess.

Renewed focus on Danish working environments

Denmark's construction industry will fight to limit workplace accidents. It's the latest in a range of government initiatives aimed at improving the physical work environment.

NEWS

06.02.2014

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Workers in the building and construction industry are nearly twice as likely to suffer from serious workplace accidents compared to other workers. While the number of workplace accidents is falling elsewhere, the construction sector is seeing an increase. As a result the industry has joined the government in a campaign aimed to turn this bleak statistic around.

13 percent of all serious workplace accidents and one in five deaths happen within the construction industry, even though it employs just six percent of the Danish workforce. The number of accidents per worker has risen by six percent in four years, while the number of serious accidents are up by 45 percent.

Many rooftop falls

The government is preparing a 50 point action plan to improve safety. It addresses developers' and entrepreneurs' preparedness as well as the execution of construction work. Most serious workplace accidents involve falling, for instance during roof repair work. This represents nearly a quarter of all accidents. Falling is also involved in many of the industry's fatal accidents.

"The only way to reduce the number of construction sector accidents is for everyone to take responsibility and make this a joint effort. I expect all parties to the action plan will do whatever they can so that we can turn the trend," said Mette Frederiksen, the Minister of Employment (Social Democrats) in a press release when the action plan was launched.

Planen indebærer blandt andet et initiativ rettet mod lærlinge, da mange lærlinge erfaringsmæssigt kommer til skade som følge af usikre arbejdsmetoder,

The plan includes an initiative aimed at apprentices, as experience shows they are often among those who are injured because of unsafe work methods. It also includes various information and guidance measures, including information meet-

ings aimed at small businesses which will focus on accident prevention. Smaller businesses figure heavily in workplace accident statistics.

Foreign workers worst hit

The initiative comes in the wake of the 2013 budget agreement between the government and the Red-Green Alliance, and the Minister of Employment has since said she wants to see the working environment higher up on the political agenda. She also says she wants to focus on social dumping in terms of safety and the working environment, when focus so far has mainly been on low wages.

Last year Mette Frederiksen told the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions' newsletter A4:

"It is of increasing concern to me, if we — as we have been witnessing when it comes to wages — enter a downward spiral where the foreign workers will be the ones to both lower work efficiency and break the rules on working environments and safety. It means Danish workers being pushed into a position where they are compromising their own safety. This could for instance happen on a construction site where builders will stop using safety wires."

The action plan highlights how foreign labour is particularly hard hit by workplace accidents within the construction industry.

The government has also strengthened the controlling powers of the Danish Working Environment Authority, and this has led to more control visits also to construction and building companies. In 2012 the authority identified 78 illegalities which increased the risk of accidents for every 100 control visits it performed. In 2013 the number rose to 94.

Public developers' important role

The development of the action plan included mapping the extent and type of accidents in the construction and building industry. The government also examined the latest research

on the topic. This showed that accidents are best prevented by introducing measures which focus both on the individual situation and on the framework in which it exists. The research shows that you can get lasting and considerable effect by implementing both structural safety measures — with focus on how work is executed — and by implementing integrated safety measures by introducing various activities in a workplace, e.g. a combination of campaigns and concrete measures.

The action plan also points to the great potential for preventing accidents together with public developers — the state and municipalities — because they are responsible for a sizeable chunk of the total construction activity. They are also in a position to pass on positive experiences of how to prevent accidents from construction firm to construction firm.