

Portrait

Ingrid Ihme, chosen to sort out NAV

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An eye for the individual

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Apr 15, 2015

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An eye for the individual

How do you help young people who are losing their footing as they enter adulthood? How do you motivate youths who are not in education, employment or training find the right track to their future? These were key questions when the Nordic countries recently discussed how to fight youth unemployment.

EDITORIAL

15.04.2015

BERIT KVAM

Youth unemployment is still the great challenge facing politicians and policy makers, researchers and others trying to find good solutions. We are starting to see what might work.

This could be “the good meeting”, “bridge building”, “mentor support”, “motivation” or simply having an eye for the individual. When people get help to find out what they are interested in, something happens. The good meeting could be crucial for young people entering adulthood. The good conversation can stop someone from falling outside of the system and help the individual find a meaningful existence.

“Building a bridge to education” is an example from Denmark. The project has had good results and focuses on mentor support, training and help to find internships which can ease the transition from studying to getting a job.

“It looks like meeting a mentor once a week can help young school-leavers with poor grades,” says the project leader at the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment. Personal counselling was also one of the elements helping Iceland’s youths into activity when the crisis hit.

The good conversation is also crucial to the project which the Swedish Public Employment Service has started together with the country’s municipalities. At Fryshuset in Stockholm the employment service works with Stockholm City to help young people who are far outside of the labour market. They have often lost faith in society, school, employers and authorities. Yet when they are seen, heard and met where they are, and are allowed to express what it is they want, they are able to move on. But the good conversation is not enough. Skilled helpers like psychologists, job advisors, employment officers are needed — as we discovered in this month’s theme: A Nordic helping hand to marginalised youths.

What nevertheless turns out to be of basic importance for change is that measures aimed at helping marginalised youths into jobs or education must build on the youths’ own

inner motivation. You need an eye for the fact that marginalised youths are very different from each other, says the Danish researcher and author of a new book on motivation, Noemi Katznelsens. An eye for change is dependent on having an eye for that difference, also among marginalised youths, an eye for the individual.



Building bridges to education helps youths move forward

Denmark has had success supporting marginalised youths to make sure they get an education. Mentor support, teaching and help finding apprenticeships makes the difficult transition into studies and work easier.

THEME

15.04.2015

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: TOMAS BERTELSEN

25 year old Simon Bondorff Rasmussen has tried staring into a black hole. Today he is optimistic about the future. He is part of the Danish state-run project 'Brobygning til Uddannelse' (building a bridge to education) which has helped him start an education as a plumber.

"Getting started has been fantastic, and I am very happy to get the education I'm about to get," says Simon Bondorff Rasmussen.

He has been part of project 'Brobygning til Uddannelse' via a sub project, Way2Go, at the Technical Education Copenhagen, TEC. When Simon Bondorff Rasmussen started at Way2Go he was not very optimistic about the future. He was

claiming unemployment benefit and says he spent most of his time on the sofa smoking a lot of hashish.

"I lost my mother a couple of years ago and suffered a minor depression and started abusing hashish. It was a black hole which grew deeper and deeper."

Mentor help led to internship

The project targets young unemployed people between 18 and 29 on state benefit, in other words not the strongest but not the most vulnerable youths. Simon Bondorff Rasmussen is one of 3,000 youths in this group who has benefited from the project's support in the shape of a unique and close coop-

eration between the young person, the job centre, technical college and the labour market, all linked by mentors.



Simon Bondorff Rasmussen's mentor in the project has helped him identify his chosen education and occupation, and when he told his mentor that he would quite like to work for a plumbing firm, the mentor put him in touch with one.

"My mentor has been incredibly good at getting me going. 15 minutes after telling him I was interested in plumbing, my mentor had got in touch with a plumbing firm. He has also given me support to go the extra mile and make a good impression."

To begin with Simon Bondorff Rasmussen spent a week with the plumbing firm in order to understand what it means to work in that kind of workplace. Simon Bondorff Rasmussen was enthusiastic and the joy was mutual: the plumbing firm invited him to stay for another week and then offered him an apprenticeship. Without a mentor, Simon Bondorff Rasmussen reckons it is unlikely he would have had such success:

"I turned up ten minutes before work started in order to make a good impression, and I must have succeeded because I am now working as an adult apprentice."

The plumbing education is part practical work, part schooling, and Simon Bondorff Rasmussen was particularly excited about meeting the plumbing installation technicians in the firm where he now works. He was a bit worried about living up to expectations, because he had still not had a job for a very long period of time.

Another hurdle for many youths in the bridge building project is having to go back to school. Many have had experiences from school and struggle getting up in the morning or get into fights with teachers and other students. Simon Bondorff Rasmussen has just started the school part of his education, and has not felt the transition to be difficult. His mentor has also been with him in school and the two of them have been speaking with advisors and teachers together.

"I don't think I would have got as far without a mentor who could give me a final push to get out and talk to people, and I would highly recommend mentor help to young people like me. It has been of great help."

From the street to school



20 year old Simon Slott May agrees. He has also been part of project 'Brobygning til Uddannelse' and is now half way through his electrician training:

"Without the project I would probably still be roaming the streets with my friends, not getting an education and only taking odd jobs when I needed money."

He became part of the project when he at one stage needed money for his rent and went to the job centre. This is where he was offered a concrete bridge building programme, Way2Go, and accepted.

Simon Slott May has taken part in other projects for young people without a job or education, and likes Way2Go the best because of the way the bridging programme works and its use of mentors:

"The mentors at Way2Go don't just see me as another cog in the wheel. They care about me and help me with all kinds of stuff which otherwise would have been insurmountable — for instance writing a proper application and getting a driver's licence, which I needed in order to get my apprenticeship."

Another benefit he has gained from Way2Go is that it has helped him identify working goals:

"I always worked a lot, but I never knew what I was doing. I do now, and this gives me a completely different motivation in everyday life to get out of bed and go to work or school."

He now feels so well set up that he only has sporadic contact with his mentor. Sometimes he drives past the mentor's office and pops in to say hello, and it is important to be able to do this:

“I can look after myself now and I have an extra job on top of my education. I work in a call centre and for many months now I have been the top seller in my department. But it is nice to know that my mentor is still there until I finish my education.

The difficult transitions

Both Simon Slott May and Simon Bondorff Rasmussen live on their own without their families in their own flat. Both say they have struggled with the challenges of daily life in the past, for instance getting up in the morning. They are not alone. Many vulnerable youths need very basic support for basic practical things in a transitional phase, before they truly settle into an education programme, thinks mentor Brian Carmohn Späth at Way2Go.

Brian Carmohn Späth is a maintaining mentor at Way2Go. The title maintaining mentor is chosen with care, says Brian Carmohn Späth. That is precisely what the young person needs the most help with — maintaining focus, he thinks.

“This group of young people particularly struggle with transitions into something new, and this is where they need help so that they don’t give up when they’re half way there.”

The project differs from others that exist for young unemployed people in that the mentors are helping the young person focus on the issues which will help them finish an education. Many other projects have a broader aim. This is partly why this project is so successful, thinks Brian Carmohn Späth.

“I have been a mentor at other projects, and this project stands out because the mentor role is so specific. I have concrete goals to aim for, and that focus is also really good for the young people in the project.”

From project to permanent offer

He reckons that four in five of the young people he has been a mentor for will end up being self sufficient. Number five is typically not ready for school, often because of personal problems.

One example is one young man who turned out to have a major abuse problem. After attempting to take his own life he got psychiatric treatment, but Brian Carmohn Späth has signed the young man up for a school internship, which is waiting for him after the summer holidays when he finishes his treatment with conversational therapy and medication.

Way2Go’s results are so good that this is now a permanent offer for municipalities, says Ulla-Birgitte Nies, project leader at TEC, which cooperates with ten job centres. This means that municipalities now pay to put young people through a bridging programme with the aim of getting them started with and keeping them in an education.

A bridge to education across Denmark

The Danish project of building bridges to education for marginalised youths has proved so promising that it is now being rolled out across the whole of Denmark on a permanent basis.

THEME

15.04.2015

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The project “Brobygning til Uddannelse” (Building a bridge to education) has given so many good results that it will now become part of Denmark’s future employment measures. 3,000 youths have taken part in the project, financed by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR). Preliminary results show four in five young people who have been taking part felt the programme was relevant and a sufficient push to make them move forward with their lives.

The results are so promising that the government and STAR wants Danish vocational schools and job centres to set up bridging programmes based on the model used in the project. 19 million Danish kroner (€2.5m) have been set aside to help vocational schools and job centres get started, and a tool has been developed for this purpose, says Jens Erik Zebis at STAR.

“We have good reason to believe that this works,” said Jens Erik Zebis as he presented the project at the conference on how to fight youth unemployment, organised by the Danish government and the Nordic Council of Ministers on 25 March in Copenhagen.

The project is aimed at young unemployed people between 18 and 29 who receive unemployment benefits, which means not the strongest but not the most vulnerable youths. Zebis calls the project’s aim “ultra ambitious”. The success criteria is that people in the target group, who often have both skills and social challenges, not only start an education but that they finish it too. And they cannot do this without help.

The project is not yet over and has not been evaluated, which means there still is no hard evidence that it works. But a mid-term evaluation provides very clear indicators, says Jens Erik Zebis. Among the group of youths who have been part of the project, ten percent more start an education compared to youths who have not been part of the project. 10 out of 12 of the project’s sub-projects have achieved significant results.

The project’s most important tools have been mentor support, education, apprenticeship support and to get young

people into vocational training. Jens Erik Zebis highlights the mentor role as a key factor for the project’s success:

“There are indicators that mentors for this group of people is the way to go. Giving a young person one hour’s mentor help a week has a significant and positive effect — especially for those who have left basic education with poor grades.”

There is a great need for measures that actually work: Nearly 40,000 young Danes on unemployment benefit lack a professional education. This means 90 to 95 percent of all people under 30 on unemployment benefits have not finished a professional education. This is a challenge for the government, which aims to get 95 percent of all youths to finish a youth education.

Motivation key to get marginalised youths into education

Measures aimed at helping young people into jobs and education should support the youths' own inner motivation. To do that you need to realise that young, marginalised people are very different from each other, says a Danish youth researcher and author of a new book on motivation.

THEME

15.04.2015

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

All young people today know how important an education is, yet a considerable number still have no education or job. As a result, all the Nordic countries have various measures and projects aimed at getting young people with no education into training. In order to succeed, the projects and various measures should work with the youths' inner motivation and keep in mind that all marginalised youths face very different challenges, says Noemi Katznelson, Associate Professor and head of the Centre for Youth Research at Aalborg University Copenhagen. She is one of Denmark's leading experts in marginalised youths.

"The young person's own motivation is crucial for whether they succeed in getting an education, and today's youths know very well how important an education is. All young people have a high degree of outer motivation for getting an education. But many marginalised youths lack an inner motivation, and it is necessary to support this kind of motivation," says Noemi Katznelson.

She is involved in a range of research projects studying the obstacles and solutions to getting marginalised youths into education and jobs. She is also the co-author of several books on young people's motivation and learning, and was invited to speak at a Nordic conference on the fight against youth unemployment on 25 March 2015, hosted by the Danish Ministry of Employment and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Here Noemi Katznelson proposed that the Nordic countries make working with young people's inner motivation a central part of any future measures aimed at helping marginalised youths getting an education.

"You can get far by making young people study, but motivation is young people's driving force. It has been proven that young people's motivation is very important, and there is a need to work with the quality of that motivation."

A critical eye on the term motivation

She recommends a critical examination of the term motivation. Many think of motivation as an individual skill. As a result, previous youth measures have focused mainly on finding out which kind of education and jobs young people are motivated by. We need to get away from that kind of thinking, says Noemi Katznelson. Motivation is more like a sum of experiences. Knowledge and relevance can be motivating, for instance, when a young person sees that maths skills are the key for moving forward. Relations can also be motivating. Some young people might be motivated to take part in an educational programme if they meet nice people in that programme.

"Motivation is a complex entity, and it is important that experts in the field work with different aspects of this with different youths."

Five profiles of marginalised youths

Measures aimed at getting marginalised youths into education and jobs must not treat all young people as one homogeneous group. They are very different and this should be mirrored by the way you work with the youths' motivation, says Noemi Katznelson. She illustrated to the conference the large differences between marginalised youths by presenting five profiles:

I just can't stand the pressure: A new group of marginalised youths who have professional skills but are psychologically vulnerable and feel the expectations placed on them are so big that they perhaps drop out of several youth training schemes. They only see limitations inside themselves.

I am not used to studying: Has been an unskilled worker and must overcome obstacles when it comes to further training.

I am used to manage by myself: Has absent parents, perhaps with abuse, and manages on their own from day to day. Perhaps sleeps over with friends and is a competent problem solver in the short run but lacks educational aim.

I just want to be normal: Has perhaps been admitted to psychiatric care and has a deep longing for normality and dreams about education and work with no basis in reality. This leads to failure and divisions.

Tattoo artist or lumberjack?: Very unclear about education and identity. Challenged by the fact that an education is more than just a gateway to work. It is also the answer to the search for an identity and meaning.

She sees three tendencies which are creating increased polarisation among youths. Measures and projects aimed at reducing youth unemployment must understand these and confront them in order to succeed:

- Most youths get more backing from home than before, and youths who lack this backing are finding it even harder to manage.
- Increased vulnerability because of increased individualisation and an explosion in expectations among youths where being perfect becomes the norm.
- Young people live like youths for longer than before, and it becomes even more difficult to see young people who are not managing the demands of adult life and they become marginalised as a result.



Elin and RS are two of the youths who have been getting help at UNGKOMP. To the left; Petra Jansson and Anna Caballero from the Public Employment Service. The mobile phone is used to structure the day — and for encouraging texts

New concept at Sweden's employment service gains young people's trust

Good treatment and rapid measures targeted at the needs of young unemployed people, good coordination between municipalities and the public employment service — a proven way of achieving progress. The concept was developed in the project 'Unga in' and is carried forward in UNGKOMP.

THEME

15.04.2015

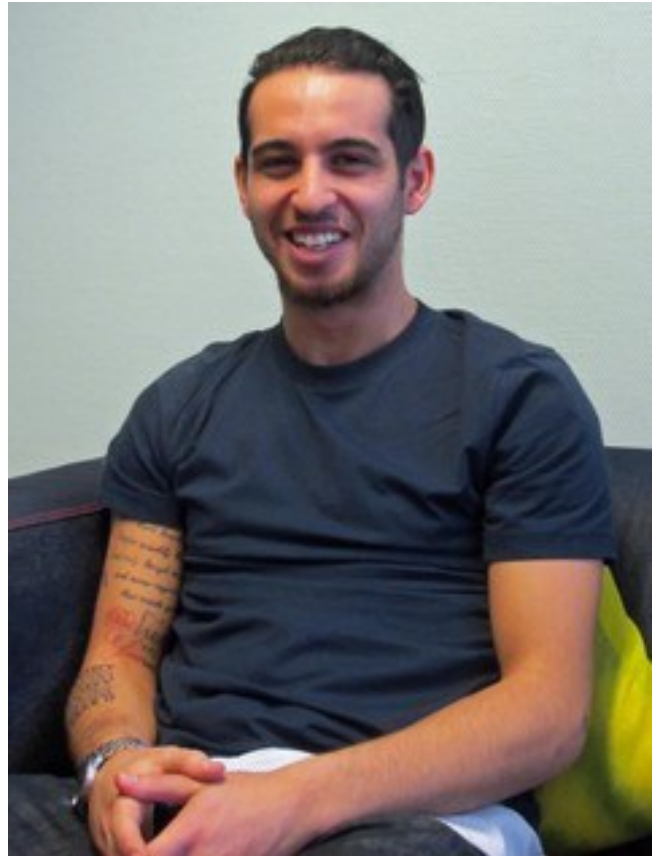
TEXT AND PHOTO: GUNHILD WALLIN



"If I hadn't got the help I did, I would never have had it as good as I do today. I am happy every time I go to work," says Elin Stor (22), who got support from Unga in to find her dream job as a library assistant.

She is striking with her pink fringe sticking out under a green, knitted hat. Her eyes are shining behind her glasses despite the seriousness of her story about the long and often painfully winding road to work.

Next to hear sits a young man who asks us to call him RS. He is 23 and does not want to be named because he works with children and young people in a reception class and in an after school club — a job he thinks is wonderful.



"If you told me four years ago I would be doing this, I would not have believed you. I used to be more impressed by what I saw in the Godfather films," he says.

Petra Jansson and Anna Caballero, both from the Swedish Public Employment Service, are listening intently. They throw in the odd comment to the young people's stories. "You are the ones doing the work, we just provide the tools," is their message. Anna Caballero, an employment officer, knows them both well. Petra Jansson, who has been the national project leader for Unga in, which is now used as a platform for UNGKOMP, is meeting them for the first time.

The task: to create trust

We meet in a staircase leading down to UNGKOMP's quarters in Fryshuset in Stockholm, where both the employment service and Stockholm City share localities. There is a friendly and easy-going atmosphere, far from bureaucracy or a public office environment. Young people who are far removed from the labour market come here, and get easy access to everything the employment service and the municipality can offer when it comes to finding them jobs or getting them into education. The idea is also to improve the contact with the many young people who are struggling to find a job or start education.

The problem is a considerable one. According to the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, MUCF, in 2012 117,025 Swedish 16 to 25 year olds were not in work, internships or education. The risk of becoming an outsider is higher for those born abroad, those who have not finished their ba-

sic education and those with parents who have low levels of education. There are also many youths who are registered as unemployed. Sweden's youth unemployment is also high compared to other countries, and UNGKOMP is particularly aimed at those who have been trying to find jobs through the employment service for a long time.



"The people we meet have lost faith in society, in school, in employers and in the authorities. Our greatest task is therefore to create trust in society among the young and a willingness to be part of it. It should be cool to be an adult and it should not be something young people ought to be afraid of," says Anna Caballero.

Being seen where you are

The young people themselves represent the starting point in the concept which is being used today. They were quite simply asked to explain what they wanted and which help they needed.

"They often ask for simple things. They want to be seen where they are and they want a visit to the employment service to give added value. They don't want to be made to perform tasks which seem meaningless," says Petra Jansson.

The ordinary employment service often does not work very well for young people who find themselves far removed from the labour market. They easily vanish in the crowd, thinks RS. He used to hang out with his gang doing "silly things" as he puts it.

"What you don't understand is that going to the employment service can be the same as loosing face. It's 'shameful' to go there, and asking for help is a failure, you have too much pride to do it. But if you offer me something which motivates me, I can go because I want to," he says.

His meeting with Unga in, now UNGKOMP, changed everything. Here you find a psychologist, a social consultant, a job advisor, an employment officer and young employees with

similar backgrounds as the target group. You also find all the resources which the municipality and employment service have to offer.

"You can also say that the cooperation with Stockholm City has been important to me," he writes in an email.

"Wow, I find all the help I need here and that gives me safety and it creates trust. Things have gone really well since I came here," says RS.

Personal support

The first contact does not happen behind a PC in an office environment. Instead there is an introductory conversation on a sofa, where the young person is told which resources are available, but also what is expected from him or her.

"It doesn't matter how much we push for people to do something, if the youths themselves aren't prepared to do their bit," says Anna Caballero.

The entire working group works with personal support. This means you can follow the client to other authorities in order to coordinate the youth's plan, giving them a feeling of control and participation when it comes to their own development. All of the people working here also provide support to the young people as and when they need it.

RS got a so-called youth job, which allows him to work while spending some of his time studying. He is currently working as a safety officer.

"To have a job, a salary, it makes everything easier. I also knew that if I did well I could move on up. You mature and realise the consequences of doing silly things, not just for yourself but for other people who matter," says RS. His dream is now to become a social worker.

Many of the young people who end up or are at risk of ending up as outsiders might have an undiagnosed disability. That was the case for Elin Stor. From the day she learned to read, her passion was always the Swedish language and her grades were high until she started college. Then things changed with higher demands for assignments and her grades plummeted. She hit an all-time low when she ended up with the second to lowest grade - a G ("pass") - in her favourite subject Swedish.

"You just sink. It was so hard. I love being intelligent, I read all the time and then I only get a G in Swedish which is my favourite subject. What is my worth then?" says Elin Stor.

She joined the writer's course at Fryshuset, but quit during her second year. For a few years she got by doing odd jobs and working under bad conditions for a large hotel. Elin Stor was feeling worse and worse, couldn't face working anymore, had no money and on top of everything owned a much-loved cat with costly dental problems.

"I was unemployed with a sick animal. It just didn't work. I thought that my cat should not suffer because I was feeling bad. That became my driving force," says Elin Stor.

She went to Mäster Olofsgården in Stockholm, a trust helping young people find work and which also runs studios in creative subjects. She got an internship at a Science Fiction bookstore in Stockholm's Old City, was allowed to stage a creative writing course and was offered the chance to run a writing studio at Mäster Olofsgården.

"How are you doing today?"

When she felt at her lowest she was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder - ADD. Suddenly she understood why she could not concentrate and follow the college curriculum. It was not her fault, she had simply not been given the right conditions to allow her to master her disability. Now she has participated in courses in how to handle her ADD, and she uses her diagnosis when she applies for a job. Her ADD is both her best and worst side. It helps her focus, but it can also make her want to do too much and she becomes too tired.

Elin Stor applied to join Unga in, came on board and started planning her future in more detail. She is hugely appreciative of the help she got there. It's about jobs, future plans and support. It's about receiving pep talks and backup, not least being called up by someone asking "How are you today?" That short question can change the entire day, she says. Her plan is to improve her grades, attend the Swedish School of Library and Information Science and eventually set up a second-hand bookstore with a vegan café.

"I want to be realistic and follow one bit of my dream at a time," she says.

Proud employment officer

Both youths say goodbye, and we who are left finish off our long conversation.



"I am passionate about our cooperation. We are a multi-competent team. We are also so lucky as to be working in a setting where I can feel proud about telling people I am from the employment service," says Anna Caballero.

"Cooperation and co-habitation with the municipality is crucial when we work with multi-competent teams. Thanks to the broad skills-base we are able to center our resources around the needs of the youths. This cuts time and it's cost-effective. What we are doing here is focussing on meeting the individual and re-package everything which can be found within the employment service," says Petra Jansson.



Over half of those taking part in Starfatorgið have found work or are now in education

Iceland's Starfatorgið: 50 percent found jobs or started studying

The financial crisis was tough on young Icelanders. Many were unemployed for so long that they no longer qualified for unemployment benefit, only welfare money. Between 2012 and 2014 they were sent to Starfatorgið ('the labour exchange'). Over half of the young people participating in Starfatorgið got a job or started studying.

THEME

15.04.2015

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: GUNNAR V. ANDRÉSSON

Young people in Iceland had great problems finding jobs after the 2008 financial crash. At the time unemployment was only 1.6 percent, but rose to eight percent by 2009 and tipped

eight percent in 2010. In 2012 unemployment was just over six percent.

It was not easy for 20-25 year olds to find a job. They had little experience from working life. Many had been away from

working life for a long time. Young men struggled the most. 620 people participated in Starfatorgið during 2012, more than two thirds were male.

“It was tough,” says project leader Tryggvi Haraldsson at the job centre Vinnumálastofnun.

“There were very few new jobs. Young people represented a group at risk from being shut out from the labour market before we took action with the project Starfatorgið for young people,” he continues.

Using the Stockholm model

The Reykjavik city council decided to activate young people on social benefits. The city worked with the municipalities in the capital region as well as the employment service. The aim was to help young people find jobs or to study using a labour exchange (jobbtorg) at the Reykjavik employment service and in other places in the capital region.

Iceland got the idea from Stockholm. Municipal social workers sent long term unemployed youths to the employment service. They were obliged to go there two to four times a week to see their personal advisor. Failing that, they would lose their benefit money. It was just like going to a place of work.

Role-play

Tryggvi Haraldsson explains how six advisors at the employment service in reality gave personal coaching in how to apply for jobs. The employment service's task was to find jobs for all age groups, but in this case they targeted the young in particular. They would get extra service because not only did they have no jobs, but no education or experience either. Some of them also struggled with substance abuse.

The social workers met the youths, talked to them and mapped their private circumstances. They would help them find suitable courses and develop their working ability. Sometimes role-play was used in order to prepare the youths and make it easier for them when they went to look for work in the real world.

Three young men get jobs

The company Áberandi makes signage and has cooperated with Starfatorgið. Áberandi has given three young men aged 17-19 jobs for one year or longer. They were involved in the production of different kinds of signage.

“We felt a social responsibility to activate young people when the people from Starfatorgið contacted us. That's why we decided to participate in the project,” says Áberandi's leader Jón Ásgeir Einarsson.

“The boys did a good job. You could say it was a kind of job training, at least to begin with. It took time to train them,” continues Jón Ásgeir Einarsson.

“We'd be very happy for Jobbtorget to contact us again. It was fun to see how the boys developed into becoming good colleagues,” he says.

Starfatorgið recommended

Tryggvi Haraldsson is happy with what Starfatorgið has achieved. A Starfatorgið survey shows 92 percent of the young people would recommend Starfatorgið to their friends. Tryggvi says 60 percent of those who finished the project found work or started studying.

“This is a good result if the group lacks any motivation,” says Tryggvi Haraldsson.

“People in this group don't easily get a job,” he says.

Half found work

85 percent of those who took part in Starfatorgið are no longer using the service. More than half have got jobs or are now studying and 14 percent are not able to work. The rest have either moved or joined some kind of rehab programme.

Tryggvi Haraldsson thinks the Starfatorgið project has shown that it pays to focus on the weakest group among the unemployed. Starfatorgið will continue as part of Iceland's employment service.



Minister of Labour Robert Eriksson presents the Vågegeng Committee's report

Experts propose a more labour targeted and user friendly NAV

One year has passed since Norway's Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Robert Eriksson appointed the Expert group tasked with undertaking a comprehensive review of the Labour and Welfare Administration NAV under the motto 'From bureaucratic reform to user reform'. Now the report is ready: 'A NAV with possibilities.'

NEWS

15.04.2015

TEXT : BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: ØYVINN MYGE/ASD

"A brave report and exciting proposals," the Minister said when he was given the Expert group's report on 13 April 2015. He promised that the politicians would also take brave action. But first he was going to have a good think.

The day after the head of NAV was made to step down.

"NAV is entering a new phase," explained the Minister, who points out that we are at an important crossroads concerning NAV's future development.

NAV is organised as a partnership between the state and the municipalities. This week the Minister has also renewed

the partnership agreement with the municipalities concerning NAV offices.

“My top political priority is to secure a better functioning labour and welfare administration, says the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Robert Eriksson (Progress Party).

The government platform agreed by the coalition partners the Conservatives (H) and the Progress Party (FrP) clearly states that “there should be a comprehensive review of NAV with the aim of reducing bureaucracy for the users, in order to help more people off benefits and into work”.

The idea for a joint administration for labour, benefits and social services was born in 2001. In 2006 the administration was set up under the name NAV. Until spring 2011 NAV was organised through large and small offices in all municipalities and major city districts, all in all 457 NAV offices. The individual NAV office was meant to be the only door you would need for all your labour and welfare needs.

The 2006 NAV reform had three main aims:

- more people in work and activities — fewer on benefits
- simpler to use for clients and adapted to the clients’ needs
- a wholesome and efficient labour and welfare management

The same goals formed the basis for the review of NAV which the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs ordered, and for the Expert group’s proposals.

The committee has presented its recommendations, and sum them up in five points:

- NAV must establish better contact with the labour market and employers
- The services must become better adapted to the needs of the individual client
- This means less central control and better leadership at the local NAV offices
- The client must become more important than the system
- There is a need to secure knowledge-based services and skills in the meeting with clients.

More labour market focus

NAV and work has become too separated, according to the Expert group. If you don’t improve the contact with employers, you will not be able to help more people find work, warned Sigrun Vågeng, who heads the Expert group, as she presented the report: a NAV with opportunities, better user handling, more room for action and closer to the labour market.

This got a response from the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, who says the A in NAV (“Arbeid”, meaning ‘Work’)

must become bigger, and the contact with the labour market must improve.

The Vågeng committee proposes to develop NAV’s jobs database, in order to improve the link between job seekers and employers and to create more transparency in the labour market.

“NAV must get a better overview over the labour market, and we need to develop a database in order to improve the services we offer to people who look for work and those who want to recruit people. This can also bring better working life skills to the NAV office.”

Better working life knowledge

The NAV Working life centre helps businesses which have entered into a three-partite agreement on an inclusive working life, and it has considerable contacts among employers. One of the aims is to help reduce levels of sick leave. People who work at the working life centres know the labour market well, while the NAV office is turning more and more into a provider of employment services from private service providers. The committee thinks this needs to change. One solution is to incorporate the Working life centres into the NAV offices.

Better leadership

“There is enough central control, we need better leadership at the NAV office,” the Expert group says. They propose that the NAV office is given more freedom and authority to decide necessary measures locally, and to develop special leadership programmes for NAV office leaders which will empower them to make their own decisions.

More individually targeted help

The Expert group also highlights the importance of the meeting with the individual client.

“There needs to be more attention on the client and not on the system.”

“Young people should be in education, not in work, in today’s Norway,” says Sigrun Vågeng, and points out that the right to upper secondary education can disappear for some and lead to young people falling outside of the labour market.

“Young people between 20 and 24 can lose their right to upper secondary education because they end up in between the right to upper secondary education and the right to further education for adults. As a result, young people who are motivated to finish their upper secondary education could be left waiting for three years before they can finish their education.”

More knowledge and services

The Expert group highlights the need for better skills and more knowledge in the meeting with people with handicaps.

“The assessment of people’s ability to work must be improved and it must focus more on the individual’s potential. Those who perform this assessment should be specially trained for the task.”

More knowledge of what works is also needed, as well as more testing and trials in cooperation with competent research institutions.



FrP concerned with NAV’s future

“It has always been an important task for the Progress Party to see how we can prepare NAV for the future,” says the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Roger Eriksson.

He highlighted three proposals in the Expert group’s 250 page report as being particularly exciting. Reducing the number of NAV offices is one issue which engages him in particular.

“At small offices with three employees in small communities you quickly get very narrow conditions and little competence.”

Simultaneously, the government has presented its proposal for municipal reform. The government wants fewer but larger municipalities and more tasks solved in the municipalities, and to “move power and authority closer to the people”.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs says that NAV must become more focused on the clients than the system, and that local leaders must be given more freedom to operate locally.

“More people need to get into work. That’s why we need a NAV office which is more in touch with the labour market, with the skills and opportunity needed to implement measures which can help people in their local labour market.”

It is not yet clear whether the working life centres which now hold the knowledge about the labour market will be incorporated into the NAV offices. This must be debated with the so-

cial partners, because the working life centers are part of the joint agreement on an including working life.

NAV is facing a crossroads, says the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Robert Eriksson. He wants the NAV office to be more focused on labour, more locally managed and more user friendly.

“We need to develop a set of rules which puts people first, before the system,” is his mantra.



Ingrid Ihme, chosen to sort out NAV

“This must be the most demanding and exciting group of the decade. I am proud to have been part of it,” says Ingrid Ihme, head of Telenor Open Mind, and one of the seven people chosen to sit in the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs’ Expert group which has been assessing possible changes to Norway’s Labour and Welfare Administration, NAV.

PORTRAIT

15.04.2015

TEXT AND PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

The work has been delivered: A NAV with new possibilities, better users meetings, increased scope for action and closer to the labour market. That is the title of the Expert group’s final report dated April 2015.

The title goes to the core of what Ingrid Ihme identifies as the Expert group’s main message: NAV needs to be better aimed at the labour market, NAV offices need more authority and users need better help.

I visit her at home. As I ring the bell for the second time, the front door opens and there she is. Only just home from work she leads me smilingly into her private rooms, a warm and cosy place in the middle of a modern block of flats in the centre of Oslo. We sit down at the dining table in a big, open space kitchen and living room, she serves coffee and chocolate and I turn on my tape recorder.

“I won’t forget when the telephone rang.” I can almost see how her heart skips a beat as she tells me:

“Luckily I had just been reading about the group when the telephone rang and a man saying he was a state secretary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs asked me if I would like to be a member of the Expert group.

“I just answered yes immediately. I just felt I could not turn this assignment down.”

This is how she became one of six members in what the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Robert Eriksson now calls the Vågeng commission — named after the group’s leader, Sigrun Vågeng, the Director General of Norway’s National Institute for Consumer Research. After one year of hard work, Ingrid Ihme is overwhelmed not only by her own contribution, “it has been like having to full-time jobs”, but the entire group’s work capacity. Not least is she impressed by Sigrun Vågeng who she calls a clear and competent leader.

Director

Ingrid Ihme was not asked to participate by coincidence, of course. Telenor Open Mind, where she is the director, is a successful work training programme for people with impaired work abilities. In 2006 Ihme asked researchers from SINTEF Health to evaluate the programme, and the conclusion was that it had succeeded in reaching its main goal of being a launch pad into society for people with impaired work abilities. Since then the programme has developed to include Telenor Integration, which provides internships for job seekers with immigrant backgrounds with high relevant skills.

“I was no expert, but now I should be able to get a master’s degree in NAV,” says Ingrid Ihme. She does not try to downplay her own competence as a NAV user, that she used to receive NAV support, and that Open Mind is also supported by NAV and cooperates with NAV Working Life Centre.

Ingrid Ihme was herself a participant at Telenor Open Mind’s first programme in 1996. When she finished her two year education she was made director for the programme. Open Mind has 25 participants at any one time. Five new ones are accepted each semester. Initially the programme helped people with physical impairments, now it involves more people with psychological problems. Telenor Integration has the same number of participants. The programme has been exported to several countries; Telenor Open Mind can now be found in Bulgaria, India, Pakistan and Sweden. There is also a branch in Kristiansand in Norway.

Challenging

“It has been so much work, so much to read up on, and so challenging,” says Ingrid Ihme about the work in the Expert group.

“The mandate was so broad that it took a lot of time to find out about things and to understand the NAV system. Luckily the Expert group had a broad composition with people with completely different skills sets.”

You don’t have to walk to work, as long as you come... is Ingrid Ihme’s slogan. She is physically handicapped, a wheelchair user, she needs a lot of personal assistance and adaptation. But in the group she represented employers and a different member represented the users. The group also had two researchers, a pensioner with NAV office experience, a welfare director at the County Governor’s office and the leader herself whose experience includes being Director General at the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities and at the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise.

“Those who put this group together have been incredibly clever, everyone brought different skills sets into the group. I have learnt so much from the others.”

The Expert group also spread these skills over two reference groups, it had an administration at the ministry and it held meetings with researchers and others who could share from their own experience.

“We had two meetings with the reference groups where we got input from the social partners and from the organisations. They have been very constructive and have contributed with much useful input which we have listened carefully to,” says Ingrid Ihme.

“We have also used the reference group meetings to check that we are focused on the right issues. Very often it turned out that we were in agreement on many things. When you look at NAV, some things are fairly obvious. We have seen this, and many of the organisations have seen this.”

It has been a journey — metaphorically and literally. The group has visited eight NAV offices from Kristiansand in the south to Trondheim in the north. She has been struck by the differences in how things are being done.

“Everybody works in different ways. Some are focused on work but there are different priorities,” says Ingrid Ihme.

An authoritative NAV

The Expert group’s core message is that NAV must become more focused on the labour market.

“Each NAV office must be given more local freedom and get more knowledge about the local labour market. It is all about creating a more authoritative NAV office which is less tied up with fulfilling state-imposed targets.

“The NAV office must be given a better local leadership which must be given the freedom to make decisions and to put users and user meetings first. They must be given space to take action. Those who are closest to the users know what is needed. This requires good leadership and good procedures.

“Consecutive government ministers have simply increased the number of spaces provided through labour market measures from private providers and made NAV into a commissioner of services.”

The group is now proposing to change this.

“NAV must be given its core competence back, which is to make sure people find jobs. This means the Working Life Centres which have been the link between NAV and the labour market, and which is where the labour market knowledge sits, must be integrated into NAV.

“People working for NAV are doing a fantastic job. All our criticism is directed at the system. In the group we are focused on giving those who work in NAV their authority back, making sure that they are able to do their job and use their own judgement.

“This has been a great honour. I feel that I have been listened to. I am now an expert,” smiles Ingrid Ihme, Director at Telenor Open Mind.

Mediator needed to help with working conditions for posted workers

The Swedish government should appoint a mediator or a working group to help the parties in certain trades agree on which conditions in their collective agreements that should also cover posted workers. This is the proposal from the Inquiry into new rules on postings, which presented its conclusions on 31 March. Another proposal is to introduce subcontracting liability for subcontractors' debts to posted workers in the construction industry.

NEWS

15.04.2015

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

The inquiry looks at how the “Enforcement Directive” adopted by the EU in 2014 should be implemented in Sweden. The directive is aimed at improving the enforcement and fulfilment of the old Posted Workers Directive from 1996.

The directive lays down, for example, that employers should be able to easily find information on what terms and conditions of employment they have to apply when they post workers to a foreign country. In Sweden this has not worked at all so far, the inquiry says. One reason is that trade unions and employers' organisations have completely different views of what in their collective agreements constitute “minimum rates of pay” in relationship to the posting of workers directive, and what is included in “the hard nucleus” of protective regulations which posting companies are obliged to observe.

The inquiry points out that Denmark has a system where the social partners agree on the conditions for posted workers, and that something similar might be needed in Sweden in order to fulfil the EU Court of Justice's demand for predictability, accessibility and transparency. The government should therefore consider appointing a mediator or a working group for the relevant trades, the inquiry recommends.

Another proposal is to introduce a subcontracting liability for the construction industry. In two regards, the liability should be stricter than the minimum set out in the enforcement directive. A worker who has not been paid by the employer should be able to turn to any contractor higher up in the chain, and the liability should become strict, i.e. the contractor should not be able to escape liability even when it has tried to make sure the subcontractor is a reliable actor.

In that regard the Swedish subcontracting liability should resemble what exists in Norway. Yet in contrast to the Norwegian model, the liability should only cover posted workers' wage claims, not those of domestic workers, the inquiry proposes. This is partly down to the short amount of time the inquiry has had at its disposal, but it also points to the collective agreement on main contractor liability which the Swedish trade union for construction workers, Byggnads, and the Swedish Construction Federation signed last year.

Another EU win for Finnish trade unions

Finnish trade unions have had another major victory in the EU Court of Justice. This time it is about collective agreement rules which restrict employers' rights to use agency workers. The judgement is important also from a Swedish point of view.

NEWS

15.04.2015

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

Since 1997 the collective agreements for different trades in Finland have provided rules which restrict employers' rights to use agency workers. This is allowed only in times of peaks of work or for limited tasks which cannot be carried out by a company's own staff. It is also not allowed to use agency workers for longer periods of time to do the undertaking's usual work.

When the EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work was to be implemented in Finland in 2011, employers thought these rules should be abolished. The Directive says it is allowed to restrict or ban the use of temporary agency work only if it is justified by the general interest — and that was not the case here, the employers argued. The trade unions, on the other hand, felt the restrictions were consistent with the Directive, and as a result they are still part of the collective agreement.

Some employers have followed their conviction and simply refrained from complying with the collective agreement. As a result, one of them, Shell Aviation Finland OY, was taken to court by the AKT trade union for breach of the collective agreement, and the issue ended up in the Court of Justice of the European Union: are these limitations permissible or not?

The Finnish Labour Court, which brought the question, seemed to suggest the limitations were in breach of the free movement of services. The Labour Court also asked whether Finland really had implemented the Directive on Temporary Agency Work in a correct manner. This was important from a Swedish point of view too, because Sweden has implemented it in a similar manner as Finland.

Now both countries can breathe a sigh of relief. The EU Court of Justice did not raise any criticism of how the Directive had been implemented.

But what did the Court say about the most exciting issue — whether the collective agreement's restrictions are permissible or not? The EU Court of Justice did not take a stand

on that issue! And perhaps that is the most important thing about the judgement: the EU Court of Justice simply did not get involved and thought it was none of the Finnish Labour Court's business either. The practical consequence is that the collective agreement rule stands.

So the question regarding what restrictions and prohibitions against temporary agency work are justified by the general interest, according to the Directive, remains unanswered. But the EU Court of Justice's advocate-general, who actually answered that question in his opinion, considered the Finnish rules to be compatible with EU law.



Estonians are returning home

The Baltic states are losing active citizens fast, but in Estonia the authorities have started counting them back in.

NEWS

15.04.2015

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN, PHOTO: TERJE LEPP/NORDEN.EE

We are sitting in the auditorium of the splendid Kumu art museum in the Estonian capital Tallinn, listening to a debate about labour and migration around the Baltic Sea. For the third year in a row this event is sold out, an indication of how much interest there is in this subject.

Since the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania gained independence in 1991, tens of thousands of their citizens have travelled abroad to make a better life for themselves. Migration was one of the hottest topics in the Estonian general election earlier this year.

For the Baltic countries the current debate is about a brain drain, people in their prime who leave perhaps never to come back. In a Nordic perspective this is about tackling the challenges immigration brings.



Photo: Wikipedia

I had travelled from Helsinki the night before with the Superstar, a ferry owned by Estonian shipping company Tallink. Men and women returning after a week's work in the neighbouring country were all around me. It is only a two hour

journey, and tens of thousands of Estonians commute weekly or monthly across the Gulf of Finland. Many of them are construction workers, others are cleaners or work in agriculture. These are mainly low-salary jobs, but in a country where the median wage is just over €1,000 a month it is tempting to make three to four times that amount. In addition to these 30,000 or so commuters, nearly 50,000 Estonians have moved permanently to Finland.

An estimated 100,000 Estonians work part or full time in Finland, which represents one in ten person of working age.

The number of people travelling between Helsinki and Tallinn is now so high that the authorities are seriously looking into the possibility of constructing a tunnel which would create a metropolis; 'Talsinki'.

Also immigration

At the seminar Tiit Tammaru, Professor at the University of Tartu, explained that the differences in living standards in the two countries and access to people with the right education are the two main drivers for labour migration.

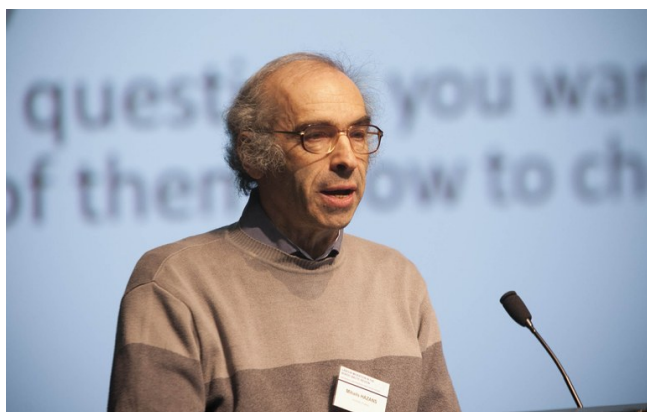
"Not everyone is prepared to move to another country, of course."

He pointed out that Estonia, after many years of emigration, now also experiences an increase in immigration. As the living standard and access to well-paid jobs improves, people move back home. The number of people returning home is the same as the number who have left since the 2008 financial crisis.

"Estonia is an emigration country, but also an immigration country," said Tammaru.

There are different patterns of emigration in the three Baltic countries. Estonians move almost exclusively to the culturally and geographically similar Finland, while Lithuanians and Latvians mainly go to the UK, with Norway as their top Nordic destination.

Latvia doing badly



Latvia lost ten percent of its population in the emigration wave after the year 2000. Researchers have reached 14,000 of the 260,000 who left the country, and a survey shows few of them have any plans of moving back. Only 17 percent say they will move back "for sure" or "probably" in the next five years. The same number of people plan to retire in Latvia, according to the research presented by Professor Mihails Hazans from the University of Latvia.

Latvia is the most vulnerable of all the new EU member states when it comes to population size, suffering from an unfortunate demographical development and emigration which puts the welfare system and economic growth at risk.

Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, a researcher at the Nordic Centre for Spatial Development (Nordregio) in Sweden, said the Baltic migration movements were interesting in an EU perspective. We know from experience that people quite happily can have multiple identities and links to two, three or four different mental worlds.

Innovation Professor Rainer Kattel from the Tallinn University has found that innovations are closely linked to migration and diversity. He also pointed out that diasporas are important for export companies in many ways. One reason is that their members understand the target groups.

Welfare a problem

EU Citizens move freely across border in search of jobs, but social security is not keeping up. Welfare systems are difficult to maintain in a world where labour becomes more and more mobile.

Annika Forsander, Development Manager at the Ministry of Employment and the Economy in Helsinki, told the seminar that the cross-border labour movement was increasing at a much faster pace than were the attempts for making social security, like pensions, more mobile. This is not a new problem. Right now a Finnish campaign is trying to get Finns who have moved home after working in Sweden in the 1960s to apply for the pension they are entitled to. This applies to around 20,000 people.

"This is a very complex issue which challenges the entire basis for the welfare state," said Annika Forsander.

The EU Commission is currently discussing how to update regulation covering social benefits to meet the modern world. The so-called mobility package should promote a mobile workforce while also stop misuse. Denmark is one country which has seen a lively debate over whether EU citizens should have the right to claim child and unemployment benefits from day one in their new country. There is still not much evidence that welfare tourism exists to a large degree in the EU.

Many categories

In today's world there are so many categories of immigrants that one single model will never fit all. In Sweden, for instance, half of new arrivals are welcomed for humanitarian reasons. In Finland, on the other hand, refugees and other groups at risk make up a small fraction of the total immigration figure. The biggest groups are foreigners who have established families with Finnish citizens, or people who come to work and study.

In Sweden people are generally convinced that immigrants will sooner or later become useful, and in 2008 the government decided to scrap the labour market test for non-EU applicants. In other words, employers could decide for themselves which kinds of workers they needed. The idea was to use immigration to bridge the labour shortage and to tempt highly educated experts to move to Sweden; computer specialists, medical doctors, plumbing technicians, engineers.

An evaluation done by the Malmö University shows that the results are far from meeting expectations. It shows refugees from non-European countries exploited the chance of getting a work permit. Former refugees employed new refugees already living in Sweden, in trades which already had a surplus of labour like restaurants and cleaning. The number of experts arriving to work in sectors suffering from labour shortages, however, was lower than it had been before the reform was introduced. The findings are published in the report 'The World's Most Open Country'.

The Tallinn seminar was organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers in cooperation with authorities, universities and Nordic embassies.