

Theme

Three main strands for Norway's
Presidency of the Nordic Council of
Ministers

Editorial

The Nordic DNA

In Focus

Roskilde municipality thinks new to get
refugees faster into jobs

Theme

Refugees as labour market resource –
can Norway learn from Sweden?

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Theme: Nordic working life facing up to changing times





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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Berit Kvam

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.arbeidslivinorden.org

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The Nordic DNA

More than 90 percent of Nordic women prefer to work outside of the home, according to the ILO survey which was presented at the Global Gender Dialogue conference during the labour ministers' meeting in Helsinki. Luckily, Nordic women's participation in the labour market is unique. Is there then anything we could learn from women in completely different parts of the world?

EDITORIAL

15.12.2016

BY BERIT KVAM

The Nordic region has spent more than forty years working together on gender equality. That is why the ILO wants to listen to the Nordic experiences. The Nordics are in the lead when it comes to work participation rates, but could learn some tricks about women in leadership roles from countries like Bangladesh. That became clear during the joint ILO and labour ministers' conference, where gender equality was discussed during the summit with the ministers and global experts.

You need high employment levels to have high levels of welfare. There is also a link between work and well-being. Figures from Gallup show the Nordic region in the lead on well-being. The negative side to living somewhere where a job is taken for granted, is that long term unemployment can feel like a very serious thing, more serious than the loss of a partner, says Andrew Rzepa from Gallup in Nordic men blind to women's working life challenges.

It is worth noting this, since long term unemployment is a problem in the Nordic region too, not least in Finland according to the OECD. One of the challenges which Norway wants to focus on during its 2017 Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, is how to get more young people with psychological health problems into education or work.

The Nordic cooperation is always developing. But it does not look like the labour ministers will introduce mandatory continuing and further education in the near future, like Poul Nielsson suggests in his review of the Nordic labour market. The word obligatory did not sit well with the ministers.

Women's employment shows the importance of work when it comes to welfare. The most pressing issue for the labour ministers is the integration of refugees into the labour market. In this month's Theme we focus on this in a report from Denmark, which shows how Roskilde municipality has been thinking outside of the box in order to quickly get refugees

into jobs. "Quicker into jobs" was the refrain also among the Nordic labour ministers in Helsinki. Danish policies differ somewhat from the ones adapted by Norway and Sweden. Here, politicians have worked with the social partners to make sure refugees get paid according to collective agreements. In Refugees as labour market resource, you can read about how Nordic labour ministers exchange measures and policies in order to find the best solutions for how to best meet the challenges.

ILO Deputy Director General Deborah Greenfield in Portrait says she was impressed with the dialogue between the ministers. She also noticed how obvious the tripartite cooperation seems to be to them.

"It is remarkable," she thinks.

"It is a part of the Nordic DNA."

Three main strands for Norway's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers

“This is exciting,” state secretary Christl Kvam told the Nordic Labour Journal as she debuted at the Nordic ministers’ meeting as a representative for the upcoming Norwegian Presidency.

THEME

15.12.2016

TEXT: BERIT KVAM

Nordic cooperation takes a new shape and enters new arenas. Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers Dagfinn Høybråten presented several challenges around the theme. “New Nordics 2.0 – the Nordic region’s time is now” is one example of the ongoing reform work. On the recommendation of the Secretary General, the cooperation ministers agreed on 15 September “an ambitious reform package which will help increase the Nordic Council of Ministers’ relevance for the Nordic governments, business and civic society”.



“All arenas have their own dynamics. I think part of the challenge of following up the Secretary General’s ambition to

make this an interesting political arena for ministers might be to have more time to examine fewer issues but in a more thorough way,” suggest Christl Kvam.

When Norway takes on the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2017, the Norwegian programme will follow three main strands: The Nordic region in transition, the Nordic region in Europe and the Nordic region in the world.

“When it comes to labour market issues, we will strive to be topical and relevant, and to make this a topical political arena for discussions around important questions.”

The most important questions which Norway will focus on are how to get more young people into education or work, the development of a more fragmented labour market and new ways of being linked to the labour market. It is also about integrating refugees into the labour market.

“The labour market’s demand for skills and change is accelerating. It is getting harder for young people with psychological health challenges. It is important to develop new knowledge, to share and to learn from each other,” says state secretary Christl Kvam.

On 27 February, the Department of Health and Care Services will hold a summit on young people and psychological health. On 28 February the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs together with the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Health and Care Services organise the Nordic conference on youth, work, education and psychological health. The central question: How do we get more young people with psychological health issues to finish an education and take part in a labour market with increasing demands for change and skills? Which challenges do the Nordic countries share? How can we learn from each other?

The Nordic labour market model is being challenged by changes to how people are linked to the labour market. Together with the ILO, the Nordic region is focusing on the fu-

ture of working life towards the ILO's centenary celebrations in 2019. As a contribution to the centenary, the Norwegian Presidency stages a conference on the sharing economy on 22 and 23 May. The question is: How does the sharing economy influence the labour market, and which strategy do we need in order to face this development?

“For the Nordic countries it is important that refugees get into jobs quickly. Norway will follow up the discussion around the challenges and the work which is already underway,” says Christl Kvam, and invites participants to a conference on the integration of refugees into the labour market in June 2017.

Refugees as labour market resource – can Norway learn from Sweden?

There is an important Nordic debate on how to integrate refugees faster and better into the labour market. At the Nordic ministers' meeting in Helsinki, the exchange of experiences and new policies inspired discussions and new ways of thinking.

THEME

15.12.2016

TEXT: BERIT KVAM

“I thought it was exciting to listen to the Swedish minister of labour today because she was so clear that receiving 163,000 refugees is an opportunity and a resource which Sweden needs for its labour market,” an inspired state secretary Christl Kvam told the Nordic Labour Journal. She represented Norway on behalf of the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Anniken Haugli.

Employment and unemployment are core issues for the Nordic labour market model, where negotiations and tripartite cooperation are central. A high employment level is a prerequisite for the welfare system. So all of the labour ministers are focused on getting people into jobs or education as quickly as possible. Employment among refugees and immigrants is generally much lower than in the rest of the population. This can become a strain on the welfare system.

“When Ylva Johansson talks about refugees as a resource, I listen,” state secretary Christl Kvam tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

Birth deficit

“I have been the county governor in a county with a birth deficit, and see that this is more of a solution than a problem. Eight in ten municipalities in Norway have a birth deficit today. We can start talking about refugees as a resource which we need in order to face the demographic challenges of birth deficits combined with an ageing population.

“This could be an opportunity for Norway's rural areas when they look for ways of handling the challenges to come, when many of the municipalities will have an increasing number of inhabitants over 67.”

Norway received 31,000 asylum seekers in 2015. So far in 2016 there have been less than 300. 17,000 are still in asylum reception centres. In its white paper *From reception centre to the labour market – an effective integration policy*, the

government argues for an earlier and more work-related integration process. This challenge is of great interest for the state secretary at the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

“Our goal is a more successful integration process. We are targeting our measures by making the two year long introduction programme for new arrivals more work-related, and by giving the Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) a clearer role when it comes to mapping skills and measures. Skills will be registered as early as at the refugee reception centres. Together with the social partners, we are also fast tracking the process of getting people with relevant skills into the labour market, and we will use the labour market more than before for language training.”

Fast tracking from 2017

The fast tracking will be in place from 2017. One of the aims is for the parties to find more labour market measure workplaces in the ordinary labour market. The government will provide wage supplements and support for measures which make use of mentors in the workplace, while the newcomers' salaries will follow tariffs.

The state secretary also explained that an expert commission had been established.

“I believe we can share some experiences here of what we haven't managed to do, as well as good examples. That's why in 2017 Norway is planning a big Nordic conference on how we can introduce refugees into the labour market.”

Sweden lacks labour

Sweden's challenges are of a different dimension. The country received 163,000 asylum seekers in 2015. That was the highest number of asylum seekers per capita ever registered in an OECD country. Three in four are below 30. 70,000 were school age children and there were 35,000 unaccompanied

minors. Without belittling the challenges, the Minister for Employment and Integration Ylva Johansson underlined the opportunities which the newly arrived bring.

“The demographic is perfect for the age distribution in the Swedish population,” says Ylva Johansson.

“It is a great challenge to get everyone into the labour market, but at the same time this is an opportunity when it comes to our demographic development. Sweden enjoyed a strong four percent growth last year, and this year’s expected growth is 3.7 percent. The big problem in the labour market is a lack of labour.”

In the autumn budget, the government has identified 19 main paths to strengthen the work with improving the newly arrived’s chances to establish themselves quickly in working and social life. Municipalities will be given more resources, and new housing legislation gives the Swedish Migration Agency the power to allocate accommodation. Education and work experience will be mapped already in the asylum phase. Early language training will also be offered at that stage. The county administration will be tasked with coordinating early measures.

The government has also launched the so-called 100 club, which offers package solutions for large companies which can accommodate 100 asylum seekers. The youth guarantee will be extended to include refugees. Waiting times with the authorities will be shortened and the government is allocating more money in order to strengthen already existing measures.

“We face big challenges when it comes to getting more people into education. After the two year long introduction programme, only seven percent go on to study more. This is our big challenge,” says Ylva Johansson.

Together with the social partners, Sweden has tried out fast tracking access to certain occupations. From 2017 this measure will be extended. The parties will welcome the newly arrived with occupational training, and make sure they have their skills tailored if necessary.

Lack of housing

A lack of housing is another challenge, according to the government minister.

“It is difficult to find housing for people where the jobs are.”

Another challenge is gender differences.

“A growing number of people outside of the labour market are born abroad. We have removed the cash-for-care benefit, because it led to women staying at home. We are also looking at whether the child benefit has the same effect.”

Ylva Johansson takes a humanitarian approach when she talks about the new citizens. The younger ones are compared

to her own teenage children who need support and guidance. But it becomes a problem when women start their new life in Sweden by giving birth.

“Of course when you have fled hell on earth and finally been given a permission to stay, you want to start a family and give birth to the children you did not dare to have earlier. But it is a challenge that many start their time in Sweden by becoming parents and staying away from working life. That’s why we are using the employment service’s support for those who are outside of the labour market.”

When it comes to labour market inclusion, private companies in Sweden are best, municipalities second best and the state the worst. From now on more people should be given the opportunity to get internships in the state, promises Ylva Johansson.

“Public authorities will take in 1,000 newly arrived between them every year in the period leading up to 2018.”

Big differences in the Nordic region

“The situations in our countries are very different,” says ambassador Kristin Arnadottir, who represents the Icelandic minister.

“We do not have the kind of problems described here. 90 percent of immigrants are in the labour market. No other country has so many included in the labour market.”

The representatives for the autonomous areas do not have the responsibility for receiving refugees. Rapid change also colours the political landscape. In Iceland the parties had still not found a government solution after the elections. Denmark’s prime minister formed a new government before the ministers’ meeting. The new minister had not had much time to prepare.



Roskilde municipality thinks new to get refugees faster into jobs

Getting newly arrived refugees quickly into work is a high priority with Roskilde municipality. Experience shows that early and employment-focused activation helps all parties.

IN FOCUS

15.12.2016

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: TOMAS BERTELSEN

Abadi Tefade Tewlde is one of around 550 refugees and family reunification members who have arrived in Roskilde municipality in the past three years. The municipality has an active policy for getting refugees into the labour market as quickly as possible. He arrived two years ago from Eritrea, and now has a permanent job as a caretaker.

“I am very glad for my job and my colleagues are nice. We work well together and help each other,” says Abadi Tefade Tewlde.

He and five colleagues are employed by Roskilde municipality’s integration department, and the small team solves a range of practical tasks across the municipality’s more than

30 refugee centres. This is where newly arrived refugees are being housed until they get a permanent place to live.

“We cut hedges and mow lawns, look after the heating system and provide transport when refugees are moving in and out of the centres,” explains Abadi Tefade Tewlde.

The job covers 25 hours a week, but Abadi Tefade Tewlde is ready to work full time whenever he is given the opportunity, because he is married with three children aged three, five and eight.



One of Abadi Tefade Tewlde's colleagues is Mohamad Rydahl, who was also once a refugee. He came to Denmark 20 years ago from Iraq, and back then the integration process was not anywhere near as good as it is today, thinks Mohamad Rydahl.

"Today the municipality is far more active when it comes to helping refugees to quickly get a traineeship or a wage subsidised job, and that is a great leap forward. When I came to Denmark, I got Danish lessons four hours a day, and apart from that nothing happened. Nobody helped me get in touch with the labour market, I had to do all that myself."

Many in traineeships and wage subsidised jobs

Abadi Tefade Tewlde's mother tongue is Tigrinya, and he also speaks Arabic and English. He can speak and understand quite a bit of Danish after having had Danish lessons for 18 months. This makes him a valuable employee for the municipality's integration department, says the head of integration there, Maria Tvarnø.

Before Abadi Tefade Tewlde got his permanent position, he had a traineeship with in-work training for six months at Materielgården, the municipality's own contractor. That worked so well that Maria Tvarnø decided to offer him a permanent job.

"Abadi Tefade Tewlde is one of several refugees who have got a permanent job with Roskilde municipality after having been in a traineeship with training and perhaps in a wage subsidised job. We consider it to be very important for refugees to quickly get out to a workplace. It gives them a Danish network, they learn more Danish and they learn about conditions in a Danish workplace and about the demands and expectations linked to getting a job.

"Most refugees consider an ordinary job with a normal salary to be their best chance to be able to care for their own families themselves, and create a new life in Denmark," thinks the head of integration.



Bhane Mamu, a refugee from Eritrea in the kitchen at the nursing home Trekroner in Roskilde, where he works. To the left of him Hanne Jensen Sode and Michael Plummer, to the right Necla Sentürk.

Roskilde municipality therefore puts a lot of effort into creating traineeships and wage subsidised jobs for refugees, both with municipal and private employers. The municipality has a dedicated integration department which takes care of its overall integration drive, including receiving and integrating newly arrived refugees. There is a lot of support for the from the city council and from the businesses, says Maria Tvarnø.

"At any one time, Roskilde municipality has 70 to 80 refugees in traineeships, and the numbers are rising. The number of new refugees who have gone on to find jobs with wage subsidies and ordinary jobs is also rising.

There are exactly 40 refugees in wage subsidised jobs and another nearly 40 new refugees have found an ordinary job. This is progress we are very happy about, says Maria Tvarnø. Another 20 or so new refugees have started an education.

New thinking from the municipality

Roskilde municipality's integration department spends a lot of energy identifying businesses which need labour, and where refugees can make a difference. Maria Tvarnø is very focused on the fact that the municipality's measures for refugees should have a real work perspective.

"Both traineeships and wage subsidised jobs are temporary, but we are very careful to create traineeships and wage subsidised jobs which can bring refugees closer to the goal: A real job or an education."

Getting businesses to agree to a binding cooperation on recruitment and to keep refugees on their books demands creativity and the desire to think new, the head of integration thinks.

"We will be ready to go the extra mile with the businesses. We have for instance got a cooperation deal with a large conference centre in Copenhagen, the Bella Centre, where some 20 refugees are now trainees. To make this work and to make it a success, some of my colleagues have for a period of time been stationed at the Bella Centre.

She hopes and expects that the Bella Centre will offer some of the refugees wage subsidised jobs. She is very excited about how many of them will get that offer. The head of integration is also developing another major project – a driver’s education for new refugees in cooperation with a transport sector temping agency.

“If we get that up and running, we are looking at 30 spaces, and there is a great chance that this would lead to jobs. Because we know that transport managers are struggling to find the necessary manpower.”



Far from all refugees experience that a traineeship or a wage subsidised job leads to a permanent position. Bhane Mamu is one of those who failed to secure a job – for now, at least. Like Abadi Tefade Tewlde, he fled from Eritrea and has soon finished a traineeship with the company Madservice Roskilde, which makes food for the municipal nursing homes. Both his boss and his colleagues are very happy with his work, but there is no money to hire him on a permanent basis, explains Pia Fastholm at Madservice Roskilde:

“We appreciate Bhane Mamu a lot. He does something good for the whole staff. He is really nice, industrious and helpful, so it is really sad to have to wave him farewell. But we have no spare capacity, so we cannot keep him on when his wage subsidies position stops. Hopefully his stay with us has made it easier for him to find work somewhere else,” says Pia Fastholm.

Denmark and refugees: Traineeships and wage subsidised jobs work best

Denmark has redoubled its efforts to get newly arrived refugees quickly into working for companies. Earlier they had to learn Danish first.

THEME

15.12.2016

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Get more newly arrived refugees into jobs, and as quickly as possible after their arrival to Denmark. That is what the Danish government and the social partners have agreed, and as a result they have expanded the number of measures which give financial support to private or public companies which take on refugees as workers.

Both public and private companies often use traineeships, a publicly funded measure, as a way to give refugees an introduction to the workplace. And if the internship goes well, some companies choose to use wage subsidised jobs as a way of keeping the refugee in the workplace for a longer period of time.

Traineeships and wage subsidised jobs are the two measures which so far have worked best when it comes to getting newly arrived refugees into the labour market, shows research from KORA, the Danish Institute for Local and Regional Government Research.

In a fresh report, KORA has looked at municipal integration measures aimed at the labour market, and concludes that measures like guidance and further training do not bring refugees or immigrants any closer to finding jobs. But temporary work and wage subsidies do, together with traineeships – especially in private workplaces.

The report also shows that these measures are not enough, however: Very few newly arrived refugees are in work. 75 percent of newly arrived refugees have had less than three weeks of work during their first three years in Denmark.

In order to improve refugees' integration into the labour market, another measure has been launched. The government and the social partners have introduced a new two year long integration education programme (IGU) for newly arrived refugees. It is a supplement to the existing measures aimed at integrating refugees into the workplace, and came

into force on 1 July 2016 – for now as a pilot measure lasting three years.

The first IGU position has been filled, but it is too early to say just how popular the new measure will become.

At Roskilde Municipality the head of integration, Maria Tvarnø, has not yet created any jobs to go with the new measure, but she expects it will happen.



Nordic countries are trailblazers, but few women reach top positions

Women in the Nordic countries participate in the labour market to a greater degree than in any other country, and there are many good examples to be found here. But some glass ceilings remain unbroken, concluded the conference “Global Dialogue on Gender in the World of Work” which was held in Helsinki in late November.

THEME

15.12.2016

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, FOTO: BERIT KVAM

“One important reason to have this dialogue is to look at the Nordic model and see what can be copied in other parts of the world. I am aware that there are different economic and political conditions, but you could still learn from good examples and perhaps use them to create pilot projects,” says Susan Maybud, senior gender specialist at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in the throng outside the conference hall.

It is late November in central Helsinki. Government ministers from all of the Nordic countries and autonomous areas have gathered in the parliament building together with ILO representatives, researchers and the social partners, for the first “Global Dialogue on Gender in the World of Work”, an event jointly organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the ILO.

What is the state of women’s participation and conditions in the labour market? Where have the Nordic countries got to,

compared to other parts of the world? And which challenges are on the agenda, including for those countries which are considered to be the most gender equal? This is one of the dialogues which the ILO is helping organise in the run-up to its centenary celebrations in 2019, and it is also part of their focus on the future of work.

A long tradition

The ILO's Susan Maybud considers the Nordic countries to be trailblazers, or moral authorities, when it comes to women's participation in the labour market, and as a result there are many examples to be highlighted. Swedish women were participating even when the ILO was founded 98 years ago, and there was awareness very early on that for women to be included in the labour market, you needed to have activities and engagement on many levels; politically, with the social partners and in research.

It is also important that gender equality becomes an issue which gets the support from men, which is the case in the Nordic countries to a large degree, she points out. Nobody can achieve a gender equal labour market on their own.

"Nobody can achieve progress through research alone, or through good policies alone. You need everybody to cooperate – the social partners, politicians and researchers," says Susan Maybud.

There are still things left to do in order to improve gender equality in the Nordic labour markets; the wage gap and men's willingness to take parental leave for instance. But she has also noticed a tendency to be humble in the Nordic countries which means we often don't brag about what we do well.



"There is a modesty which perhaps keep you in check, which I like a lot. In the ILO, however, we have no problem saying that you are doing well, and we can be a platform to showcase your good examples," says Susan Maybud.

Nordic men want working women

The Nordic countries are no doubt in a good position when it comes to women's participation in the labour market. The fact that women have jobs is more accepted in the Nordic countries than in other countries. In a recent survey by

British Gallup, "Gender equality in the world of works: Nordic Perspectives", both men and women were asked whether they wanted paid work, to stay and home with the children or whether they would prefer to do both?

The answers show that the Nordic countries stand out, especially compared to Eastern European countries. 88 percent of Nordic female respondents wanted to either work or combine work with children, while just nine percent would contemplate staying at home. In Eastern European countries, one in four women wanted to be a housewife. The answers from the men show even more pronounced differences. Just four percent of Nordic men wanted their women to stay at home to look after children and the household, while 31 percent of Eastern European male respondents said the same.

"Also, a majority of Nordic men do not consider themselves to be the family's main earner. This is a strong result from our survey, and shows that women play a considerable role in Nordic societies," says Andrew Rzepa, who led the Gallup survey.

The same survey also underlines the importance of work. Citizens in the Nordic countries experience the highest levels of wellbeing in the world, where 65 percent of the respondents say they have a good life. One in three say they struggle, however, while two percent say they are suffering.

"The fact that women have been given the chance to work to such a degree has resulted in better societies. You value life more. We also know that long term unemployment has a bigger negative impact on people's wellbeing than when a partner dies," says Andrew Rzepa.

Many glass ceilings still to break

Yet even if the Nordic countries have come a long way, there are still many glass ceilings to be broken. This was also the theme during the one and a half day long dialogue, which mainly focused on two challenges – combining work and family life, and Nordic women's struggle to reach the highest positions of power.

There were many examples of both problems and solutions. Women still take most of the parental leave in the Nordic countries, but there are many ideas around how you make men take a greater share of the leave. Iceland has introduced a system where a certain number of months are earmarked for the father, and before the economic crisis hit there was a marked increase in the willingness among fathers to take parental leave. After the crisis, the fathers have been taking less leave.

Finland is currently reviewing its parental leave policies. Greenland, which has set working hours for all between 8am and 5pm, wants to introduce more flexible working hours which are easier to combine with having small children. There is also a will to improve parental leave, considered to

be one way of tempting back the many young people who have moved to Denmark to study and who stay there.

The Nordic countries' challenges were also contrasted by reports from the Philippines, Egypt, Mongolia, Togo and Bangladesh. Several of the developing countries are working with large informal sectors, and where do you start then? This is a challenge which is growing in the Nordic countries too, as more and more people become self employed, noted the Finnish minister Jari Lindström.

Parental leave and masculinity is compatible

Many of the participating non-Nordic countries lack the social security systems which play such an important role for female labour market participation. Yet work is underway, and in Bangladesh for instance a lot has happened in a very short amount of time, says Sabrina Islam. She is the managing director for the Lily Apparels Ltd. company, and also on the board of the SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers.



Many Bangladeshi women work in the textile industry, which gives them a freedom which was unthinkable not long ago. They used to face a predetermined life in the cities starting families at an early age with many children. Today it is possible for many to live on their own and make their own money. Sabrina Islam has been given many ideas from listening to examples and by looking at the link between social security systems and gender equality. She has also listened with in-

terest to how men engage with children. Bangladesh still has some way to go in that respect, she says.

One example mentioned during the seminar has created some ideas. It comes from Sweden and was a poster campaign featuring the big wrestler HoaHoa holding a little baby in his big arms. The idea was to show that parental leave and masculinity is perfectly compatible.

“I think we might be able to do something similar in Bangladesh in order to change people’s perception of parenthood. For instance by using some of our famous and worshipped cricket players or pop musicians in a similar picture. It takes time to change a way of thinking and a culture, but this could be a start,” says Sabrina Islam.

Creating a gender equal labour market is not necessarily a question of money, underlined the ILO’s Laura Addati.

“The Nordic countries started early. Could they afford it or did they choose to do it? All countries can afford this. It is a challenge, but it is an investment which pays off,” she said.

Legislation influences people’s choices

One challenge facing all of the Nordic countries is to reduce the gender segregated labour market.

“The segregation in the labour market, as in different occupations for women and men, is one of the key issues for this conference. Men and women make different choices when it comes to parental leave, education and jobs and careers. There are reasons for this, but are they good and is this the way we want things to be? Legislation and rules play a big role for how people choose,” said Anders Geertsen from the Nordic Council of Ministers as he summed up the conference’s first afternoon.

The three-partite cooperation is a common thread in the Nordic countries. Politicians have passed legislation and done what they can to create opportunities for women to take part in working life, for instance by providing care provisions for children and older people, and through legislation and general measures like parental allowance.

“The Nordic social partners take the initiative for gender equality and equal pay themselves, and most companies have trade union representatives on their boards. Trust is also key, that is the very foundation which means citizens know they get something back for the taxes they pay,” said state secretary Christel Kvam from Norway.

Few women in the top

Another challenge facing the Nordic countries is that women do not reach top positions of power. Here too, many are looking for solutions.

Minister Jari Lindström from Finland explained how state owned companies must have 40 percent women on their

boards, and they work with this in an EU funded project in order to exchange experiences and find new knowledge.

“Companies which have a mixed gender board have proven very successful, and companies have been very active in this,” said Jari Lindström.

Norway passed legislation for gender equal board rooms as early as in 2006. This has prompted a change, yet it has not lead to more female top leaders. When women reach a high position in a company it is often within the so-called softer areas, like human resources and communication, but not within areas which are directly linked to economic results, said state secretary Christel Kvam.

She believes that one way of getting rid of the gender segregated labour market is to encourage young people to make unconventional choices, which does not only mean that women should study technology, but also that young men should you choose jobs in the care sector.

“Norway is top when it comes to women's participation in the labour market. Family life and female leadership are intimately linked. You must be able to do both. That's why the Nordic region has done so well. We have seen the link and created unique opportunities for combining family life and work,” she said.

Progress cannot be taken for granted

After one and a half days of lively debate and knowledge exchange, the ILO's Shauna Olney hesitantly summed up the very first dialogue on gender in the labour market. Her doubts were linked to summing up something which is constantly changing.

“Gender issues are integral to Nordic societies, and you have been trailblazers. This has not happened by chance, it was a choice, you took a risk and showed willing to make controversial choices.

“For instance the earmarked months the parental leave in Iceland. We saw how fathers lost some of their willingness to take parental leave after the economic crisis, which is something we could learn from. What we achieve is fragile and progress cannot be taken for granted,” said Shauna Olney.

Nordic men blind to women's working life challenges

The Nordic countries stand out with higher levels of well-being than anywhere else in the world, explained by the fact that women are expected to be active in the labour market and make an important contribution to household income. Yet men do not understand that women are facing a harder time in the labour market than themselves.

THEME

15.12.2016

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“The more women contribute economically to the households, and the more obvious it is in a society for women to have paid work, the more content they say they are. Their well-being reflects the level of gender equality in society,” says Andrew Rzepa from Gallup, who presented the survey ‘Gender Equality in the world of work: Nordic Perspective’ at the conference ‘Global Dialogue on gender in the World of work’ in Helsinki in late November.

Part of a global study

The survey has been a special assignment on commission from the conference hosts – the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Nordic Council of Ministers. It forms part of a global study covering 140 countries which will be presented on International Women's Day on 8 March 2017 in Washington. The idea is to give the countries' leaders some facts to turn to when they discuss gender equality in the labour market and which challenges they should address.

Andrew Rzepa highlights several issues he finds worth mentioning from the survey. The first is the fact that there is such strong support among both men and women for women's paid labour in the Nordic countries.

“The Nordic countries stand apart when it comes to female empowerment. It is not only commonly accepted that they work outside of the home – 99 percent believe it is OK. This might seem obvious, but it is not in the rest of the world,” he says.

The survey asked whether it was completely acceptable that the woman in the family took paid work outside of the home if she wished to do so. In the Nordic countries, 99 percent answered yes, compared to 87 percent in Eastern European countries. Age also influenced the answers given – younger men and women are generally more positive to women working away from home. Higher education also plays a role.

Few Nordic men dream of housewives

The survey asked women whether they preferred paid work, staying at home to look after children and housework or combining domestic work with paid work. Men were asked what they preferred their wives to do. It turned out that among Nordic men, four percent wanted their wives to be housewives, while 31 percent of men in Eastern European countries wanted their women to stay at home. Nine percent of Nordic women said they would consider staying at home, while 25 percent of women in Eastern Europe wanted to do the same.

The survey also shows a clear link between participation in the labour market and perceived well-being. The Nordic countries have the world's highest scores for well-being – 65 percent say they are happy with life, 33 percent say they are struggling and two percent say they are suffering. There are some differences between the Nordic countries. In Denmark, Finland and Iceland, 69 percent of the respondents say they are happy, while 65 percent say the same in Norway and 60 percent in Sweden.

“Individuals who have the chance to work express more contentment with life. Research also shows that long-term unemployment has an even more negative influence on people's well-being than losing a partner,” says Andrew Rzepa.

Women are important providers

He also describes another result from the survey as very important – who do people consider to be the main provider? Around one in three women in all of the Nordic countries say that they themselves are – with the exception of Iceland. 82 percent of women say they fall into the two categories “the main provider” and “a significant provider”.

“This shows that women play a significant economic part in society and that there are different social norms in the Nordic countries,” says Andrew Rzepa.

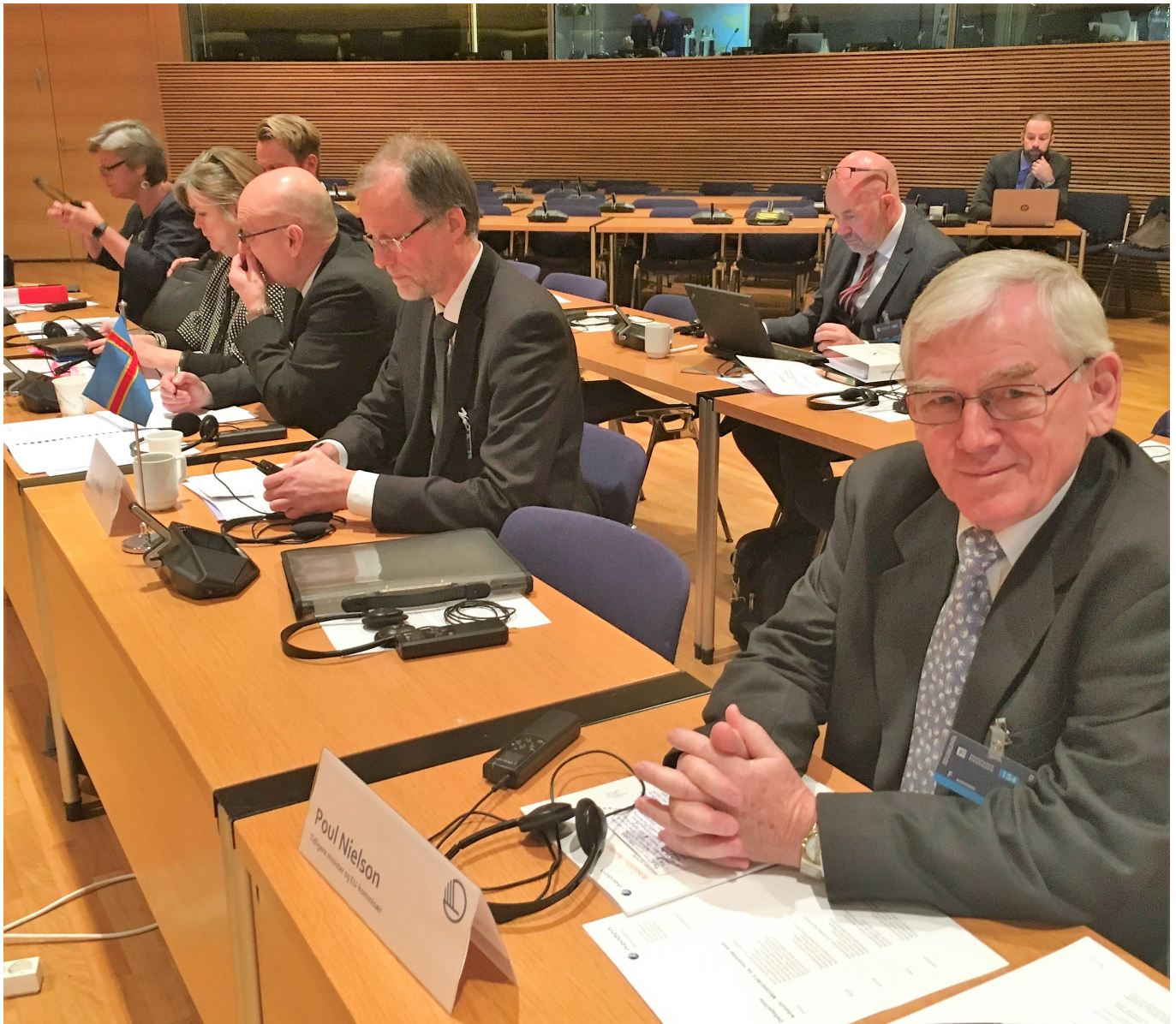
But there is still a way to go. There are considerable differences in how men and women answer the question whether men and women with the same education and experiences have better, the same or worse chances of getting a good job. 60 percent of men and 48 percent of women believe the chances are equal, while 31 percent of men and 47 percent of women believe the chances are worse.

“Men don't acknowledge or understand the reality which women face in the labour market, they don't see the difficulties women have to deal with and there is a big gap between how women and men see this. This is a problem,” says Andrew Rzepa.

Low level of work engagement

With the high degree of well-being in the Nordic countries in mind, the last part of the survey comes as a surprise. It shows 75 percent of the Nordic respondents do not have high levels of work engagement. The results come from adding up the answers to a range of questions about being able to influence your work situation, if you have the right working tools and whether you understand what is demanded from you. On average 13 percent in the Nordic countries say their work engages them, compared to 32 percent in the USA.

“This is about how efficient companies are when it comes to engaging their employees, so we see there is still a lot of work to be done. And this has nothing to do with well-being, but it has to do with individuals who don't give it their all. It is an issue between the leader and the employee, people want to be engaged,” says Andrew Rzepa.



Mandatory continuing and further education – possible in the Nordic region?

“The process is underway,” comments the former Danish government minister and EU Commissioner Poul Nielsson. In November 2014 he was asked to review the Nordic cooperation on labour market issues. At the labour ministers’ meeting in Helsinki he presented his proposals for reforms and got reactions from the ministers.

THEME

15.12.2016

TEXT AND PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

How do you create new life and more engagement within the Nordic cooperation? How can the Nordic region become a stronger force in the EU or create closer cooperation with the ILO? How can you vitalise the Nordic cooperation? These were some of the questions which triggered the task of reviewing the Nordic cooperation on labour market issues.

The report was delivered in June 2016. In the course of his work, Poul Nielsson has travelled the length and breadth of the Nordic countries, visited the EU, ILO and OECD. The report has been presented at the various Nordic political weeks and it has gained attention far outside of the Nordics.

One issue which has gained a lot of attention is the proposal for mandatory continuing and further education. When he now meets the labour ministers for the first time to present and discuss how to follow up the report, this word ‘mandatory’ presents a problem.

“I can follow you very far,” says Sweden’s Minister of Labour and Integration Ylva Johansson, “but do you have to use the word mandatory? From a Swedish perspective that is a dead end street,” she says.

Without the word mandatory this could be a good starting point for benchmarking between the Nordic countries. But it is necessary to take a more measured approach, she thinks.

“Sweden has initiated an expansion of mandatory education for young people, and made schooling up to college level obligatory, but time is not yet ripe for establishing a mandatory continuing or further education on a Nordic level.”

The labour ministers then decided to send the proposal for mandatory continuing and further education to the education ministers for further comments.

A necessary provocation

“This is a positive first step for an idea which after all is out of the box. I believe there is a meaningful provocation in the expression mandatory. It signals that this is serious. It is good to have a gradual growth in measures. This is after all what is happening in all of the countries, but going from there to having a system where continuing or further education is a permanent part of working life – that is something else.”

The word mandatory provokes reactions. What do you think about that?

“Yes, that nearly always happens, but without reactions the idea would not have been very powerful.”

“Poul Nielsson’s report highlights some important issues which we must address,” says state secretary Christel Kvam at the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

“But at the same time it carries a somewhat double message. The report mirrors how things have been until now. We who work in the departments and directorates in Norway and in

the other countries work so closely with the changes which are taking place, that getting a status report which is meant to set the course towards 2021 is probably not appropriate. But as a report which highlights important issues it is interesting.”

How does the future labour market look like, do you think?

“I believe all of the Nordic countries have established commissions to look at the sharing economy. What does it mean when you get technology which to a large extent replaces organisations. While we used to create organisations in order to link customers to products, technology now does this for us.

“We get new people in working life who define themselves as neither employers or employees. I have challenged the parties in Norway and said it is up to employers’ organisations and trade unions to make themselves more attractive to new workers or new people who get involved with the sharing economy. This is not a political responsibility, but we are dependent on people succeeding in doing this.

“The three partite cooperation is very central to the Nordic model, but only if the parties to the cooperation are representative. If the parties don’t succeed I fear that we will get a kind of insurance based system. The dialogue we are dependent on in order to solve future challenges, depends on us having representative parties to talk to,” says Christel Kvam.

Poul Nielsson thinks the debate shows a distorted picture of reality.

“The picture of change which is being drawn in the debate is larger than the changes we see in real life.

“In my report, what I call the fragmentation of the labour market with many self employed people plays a big role. All in all I feel you should look at this with the greatest care, if not scepticism, because most people become self employed out of necessity.

“This is ultimately a threat to the survival of the Nordic model, which at its core is built on a well-organised labour market on both sides. This is also what will come under threat with the erosion of the traditional structures. Of course you could say that I present a very conservative and defensive attitude, but isn’t it a cynical laissez faire attitude to just say let the new stuff roll?”

What should be done?

“First of all, the two sides of the labour market must see how they can facilitate and define new ways of working which are of interest to their organisations. I mentioned the Danish Artist Union as an example for the ministers. Their members are self employed. They are actors or other artists and musicians who work freelance. The Danish Artist Union has solved this by hiring many lawyers who can offer support and

help and service the members so that they keep control on everything.

You say you have a 10-15 year perspective for your proposals? Is that an anachronism in rapidly changing times?

“You’d have to ask the ministers that. What is a bit contradictory is that all the problems were acknowledged before I wrote my report. What I could do which was new was to comment on it and link it together with the workings of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and then provide views for how you can strengthen those workings. You could say this is the prioritised order of the day in my report. The fact that ministers include it in their work plan is exactly one way of revitalising what the labour ministers do.

“Then there is of course the acute dimension here because of the migration pressure. This makes it even more necessary to take action in the areas I have described. There is also a pressure in the fact that the Nordic region acts more proactively and in unison, creating a more forceful influence in international organs like the EU and the ILO. I have been arguing very strongly for this.”



The ILO's Deborah Greenfield: In dialogue with the Nordics on gender equality and the future of work

Deborah Greenfield was part of the transitional administration from Bush to Obama, she served as Deputy Solicitor for the U.S. Department of Labour, she was a legal expert for the USA's largest trade union AFL-CIO. Now, as the Deputy Director General, she is about to take the ILO into a new era. Meeting Nordic labour ministers, Deborah Greenfield is impressed with the discussion.

PORTRAIT

15.12.2016

TEXT: BERIT KVAM

“What strikes me is that a key ingredient In the Nordic model is reflection and self-reflection, criticism and self-criticism

and it is done without an edge or judgement. There is a stock-taking at periodic intervals about what's working and what's

not working, and a commitment to pursue what works and to learn from each other. That is one thing that impressed me," she says.

The Nordic labour ministers have invited a formidable guest; Greenfield has more than 30 years' experience as a labour and employment attorney in important positions, and five years as Deputy Director General at the ILO. Yet she is still learning, she says, and enjoys getting an insight into how the ministers cooperate.

"It looks like the Nordic cooperation is continuously evolving."

It suits her well. The ILO will be celebrating its centenary soon, and has initiated a dialogue about how the organisation should develop to face the future. The centenary celebrations call for a new declaration. Its content is being thoroughly discussed by the 187 member countries; nationally, regionally and globally. The result will not be ready before the dialogue allows it to be



Deborah Greenfield's areas of responsibility are policy development, research, statistics and statistics development across the field of labour and employment which the ILO addresses. The Nordic region's desire to develop a cooperation on the gathering and processing of statistics is just up her street. Finding comparable figures is a great challenge for international cooperation.

She has a discrete charm. If there is a dress code at the ILO, which has the world as its office, she fits perfectly, elegant and ready to play professional roles anywhere in the world, faultless.

She is struck by the self-evident manner in which the Nordic labour ministers talk about the tripartite cooperation.

"It is a familiar model in the ILO sense. But I think since the Nordic countries are so close to each other and have worked together for so long, there is a comfort level with saying: look this is not working in my country."

The work method is new to her, and the Nordic region has been part of setting up the ILO as a tripartite organisation where employers, employees and governments are equal partners in developing policies, programmes and standards for the labour market. Norway and Denmark were there from the beginning in 1919, Finland and Sweden joined the year after.

It is remarkable, she thinks, how integrated this work process is in the cooperation between the ministers.

"This grounded assumption that the social partners are and will be involved, and the solution comes from that tripartite model.

"This is not so common in the USA or other parts of the world. It is part of the Nordic DNA."

She has a broad professional background and was also an advisor in the Obama administration. *But from Obama to Trump? What does she think about that?*

"I'll refer to what Obama has said. We have orderly transitions of power and I saw it and experienced it when we went from the George W. Bush administration to the Obama administration. We will just have to wait and see."

And in relation to the ILO?

"We don't have any indication right now that the cooperation will be any less."

The pressure of globalisation is felt everywhere

Globalisation seems to present the same challenges across the world, she thinks.

"When Nordic countries talk about the challenges of youth unemployment, I recognise it from discussions in many less developed countries. The problem is not on the same level or of the same size, but it is the same phenomenon," says Deborah Greenfield.

There is an ongoing debate whether to extend the cooperation with the ILO beyond for instance national ILO committees, that Nordic countries take a place on the ILO governing body on a rotational basis and take part in all meetings with a tripartite delegation.

What does she think about that?

"The cooperation with the ILO is already very strong, not only through participation, but the Nordic countries are also generous with their development aid. But there is always room for more cooperation, particularly in terms of the Fu-

ture of Work initiative, by sharing results from research and taking part in the forums which we will now have in order to develop a new declaration for 2019. Sharing which policies the Nordic countries think are viable to make sure that the work of the future is decent work. I think those are ways of deepening the cooperation.

“I also hope that it will be possible to find more ways in which to share the Nordic model. Not as the only model available, but since the Nordic countries are facing many of the same challenges as other countries, albeit not on the same scale, there are experiences worth sharing, also from other countries. We could have a fruitful dialogue here,” says Deborah Greenfield.

The future of work and gender equality

The ILO and the Nordic region cooperate on the Future of Work initiative ahead of the centenary celebrations. The dialogue will help define the content of a declaration on the ILO's future work. Deborah Greenfield, whose areas of responsibility include research, is keen to learn from the knowledge which can be found in the Nordic region, and she would like the Nordics to contribute wherever possible.

“We wish to build a strong knowledge base, so we are keen to see the results from research in the Nordic region. It will also be possible to take part in a global commission. After 2019 I expect that the Nordic region will be playing as active a role as it wishes.”

Global Gender Dialogue is the dialogue on gender equality. What are your expectations here?

“I believe that like in many of the other dialogues we have in the ILO, the best outcome is twofold: The first is to share views, which can often be opposing ones. The second is to identify the way forward, and then to use the ILO on a global, regional and country level to actually implement policies.”

As the conference on Global Gender Dialogue shows, the Nordic region is not yet quite there either when it comes to gender equality.

If you were to contribute actively to create change, where would you concentrate your focus?

“I would push at a number of things. I think I would take a hard look at occupational segregation, because we are not only talking about getting more women into work – we must also look at where they work and where men work. So if we use wages as a measure, maybe the most important measure of equal quality of work, occupational segregation plays a huge role in that.”

The division of labour does not work well, is it necessary to think differently? If women's work was valued more, perhaps more men would choose differently. Perhaps we must address wage levels?

“Well. I think I agree, but I would put it slightly differently. The care economy is growing, particularly in developed economies with increasing levels of digitalisation. We must find a way to value these jobs differently, but I think before we do that, it is important to make sure these jobs carry the necessary protection – equal wage, social protection and the like.”

OECD on Finland: Easy to get another job

Unemployment is high at over eight percent. But it is relatively easy to get another equivalent job. That is often forgotten in Finland. Thank the level of education for that! This is how leading daily Helsingin Sanomat comments the OECD's fresh country report.

NEWS

15.12.2016

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING

“The Finnish labour market model has proven to be fairly flexible. Dismissals are common, but a majority of displaced workers gain re-employment quickly. The Finnish labour market is effective from the perspective of the majority of its labour force.”

These assessments from the OECD's new country report “Finland – Back to Work” have been highlighted by many commentators and the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

The OECD's country report analyses the Finnish labour market, especially in terms of dismissals and chances of getting new jobs. It also investigates political measures supporting employment.

5.5 percent of Finnish workers are hit by mass dismissals and factory closures every year. That is a considerably higher proportion than in comparable OECD countries, especially Sweden.

Not older people and blue-collar workers

Five in six laid-off Finns find new employment within one year. That is comparable to Swedish figures. Perhaps it is not the labour market model that is flexible, but the labour force which is mobile, suggests the OECD.

There is room for improvement in the situation for older people (above 55) who are dismissed, and for the long term unemployed, according to the OECD report.

Since the finance crisis it has become more difficult to find a new job, especially for blue-collar workers. There are also regional differences, and the labour force's mobility plays a limited role.

The employment minister finds support for own policy

The funding of public employment services is lower in Finland than in many other OECD member countries.

“It is useful to get fresh research data on how Finland's labour market is doing on an international scale,” says Minister of Labour Jari Lindström (The Finns Party) in a press release.

He promises government reforms to unemployment benefits and employment services. These will make it more attractive to accept a job and it will give unemployed people better job seeking support, according to minister Lindström.

Activation or “forced interrogation” for unemployed

The OECD praises the new mandatory interviews at job centres which unemployed people must undergo every third month. OECD countries have had good experiences with this, Christopher Prinz tells the *Iltalehti* tabloid.

“We have noted that such meetings are especially effective for those who find themselves in the most difficult situation,” says Prinz, and refers to research from different countries. But the “forced interviews” are very controversial among unemployed people and the Finnish opposition.

Finland's unemployment benefit system are described as comprehensive and fairly efficient.

According to the OECD, it is not possible to make considerable reductions of benefits down from current levels, but people on benefits should be encouraged to work, for instance by sharpening their responsibilities when it comes to job seeking. This is something Finland is already doing, as unemployment benefits are being reduced and benefits which hinder people from accepting work are being removed.

The reform leads to savings of at least 200 million euro worth of unemployment benefits. This is a measure which the OECD has recommended for Finland earlier.

”Finland could do more for laid-off workers”

The OECD report is not uniquely positive about Finland’s labour market. Finland could do more to help vulnerable laid-off workers, it says.

The OECD encourages Finland to focus more on public employment services and to aim resources towards identifying future long term unemployed at an earlier stage. Finland is criticised for shrinking resources of employment offices.

There is almost no individual and face-to-face assistance once registered as a jobseeker, according to the OECD report. More intensive and individual support is needed, according to the OECD.

Layoffs not always positive

The use of temporary layoffs is criticised. Layoff schemes can help against unnecessary layoffs, but the procedure can also turn into an attractive option for employers to bring forward unavoidable redundancies. Layoffs can delay and make it harder for workers to seek and find new jobs.

Let employers carry more of the costs in order to avoid the possible over-use of that method, encourages the OECD

Mixed reception

The OECD report has had a mixed reception with Finnish commentators. Some write that they are happy to see that Finnish workers get support from abroad, since the centre-right government is more interested in supporting the rich and limit workers’ rights, as they see it. Others think it is always wise to do the opposite of what the OECD recommends.

But the labour market is also criticised for being slow and for giving far too much protection to employees, when companies are struggling.

Helsingin Sanomat also highlights the fact that most unemployed people get a job on the same level as the one they lost. It is also clear that a high education level is very important for people’s chances of finding new jobs.

A flexible and good labour market is built from the classroom and up, according to HS.



Jyrki Katainen: Populism threatens stability and risks increasing unemployment

The EU Commission's Vice-President, responsible for jobs, growth, investments and competitiveness, is attacking populism, praises the circular economy and defends the EU Pillar of Social Rights in an interview with the Nordic Labour Journal.

NEWS

15.12.2016

TEXT AND PHOTO: BENGT ÖSTLING

Katainen is looking forward to higher employment figures and a recovering EU economy, which is being helped by positive factors like the low oil price, a relatively weak Euro and economic stimuli. The effect of recent years' reforms are beginning to show with the recovery.

Vice-President Jyrki Katainen visited Helsinki the day after the Italian referendum, which led to a change of government.

Populism = instability = threat to employment

Populism makes decision-making difficult both nationally and within the European Union. And populism was also a factor in the American presidential election, Katainen said.

“All political situations which create more insecurity are poison both for enterprise and economic stability.”

Populism makes it harder to make decisions and it increases insecurity. This shows in member states in the form of falling employment figures, and it makes it difficult to maximise citizens' wellbeing, said Katainen.

A seasoned politician, Katainen understands there is a need to create an outside enemy – for instance the EU.

Jyrki Katainen underlines that the will of the people should be respected, be it in the UK or Italy. It could for instance be about a resistance to globalisation.

“People’s fears must be taken seriously. However, we need to explain better what we do, and for example why rules based on trade are vital to us.”

The sustainable economy – does it bring jobs?

Vice-President Katainen has become a messenger for the sustainable economy. The former prime minister from the Finnish centre-right National Coalition Party is now talking about “green values”.

One year ago the EU Commission passed a raft of legislation in order to stimulate Europe’s transition to a circular economy. Global competitiveness is to be increased, sustainable economic growth should be encouraged and new jobs created.

But the National Institute of Economic Research in Sweden pointed out in a recent opinion piece in the DN daily that going for a circular economy will not lead to increased employment, nor will it help economic growth. The circular economy should instead focus on the most important task facing environmental politics – fighting climate change.

Jyrki Katainen maintains that the circular economy has a big potential for creating jobs.

“The circular economy has a unique potential,” according to Jyrki Katainen. For Europe, the Nordic region and Finland it could mean an enormous opportunity for positive change, which the European economy most definitely needs. If it is executed correctly, the circular economy has several positive consequences, for the environment, jobs and growth.

“Dizzying opportunities”

According to the EU Commission, the circular economy could save EU businesses 600 billion euro. That is eight percent of their annual turnover, and it could create 580,000 new jobs.

Just by renewing waste treatment you could create 170,000 jobs before 2025, says the Commission. The circular economy presents dizzying opportunities, in other words, for sustainable growth, productivity and employment.

The EU Commission supports research projects looking at the circular economy to the tune of 650 million euro with the framework of the research and innovation programme

Horizon 2020. There is also financing for a transition to a circular economy to be had through the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which is currently being extended, as well as through the EU’s structural funds.

“Work” becomes something entirely new

There are great challenges in Vice-President Katainen’s sector. The world is changing rapidly, with many challenges to employment.

“The finance crisis’ social and economic consequences are still being felt in Europe, despite the fact that employment figures are up,” says Katainen. Employment figures have increased three years in a row. The number of people in work has not been higher since 2009. Unemployment is down, but still at an historically high level. The EU economy has made a moderate recovery, with a growth of 1.8 percent for the union as a whole.

“It is very possible that the term ‘work’ will change a lot in the coming years. Parallel with traditional jobs we see the emergence of new business models and new types of employment, for instance within the sharing economy.”

Digitalisation influences how we work. Changes to the labour market will also probably mean changes to the terms and conditions for how jobs are being carried out. It is therefore very important that people’s rights and duties are being understood correctly by all parties.

Social pillar gives better labour market and social system

The planned EU Pillar of Social Rights aims to create a new economic and social approach within the EU. There should also be improvements to European labour markets and social benefit systems.

The aim is not to standardise social systems. But while the history and traditions of member states will be respected, employment and social benefit policies in member states should be steered towards the EU’s common principles.

Another major challenge and key to Europe’s development is professional skills and competencies, according to Katainen.

“We must make sure that we can meet the needs for knowledge and the needs of the labour market. To improve employment rates it is key to secure skills and refresh occupational know-how. Education and professional skills must be prioritised. Member states must be encouraged to improve the quality of their education.”

Tripartite dialogue should continue

“Of course we need a functioning dialogue between the social partners. A social dialogue is important for a social market economy to function,” according to Katainen.

Active participation from the social partners is crucial both in the EU and on a national level. Through it, you can find a ba-

sis for planning and executing an economic and social policy which looks to the future.

The European Pillar of Social Rights does not interfere in the social partners' national rights. On the contrary, the social pillar recognises the key roles played by the partners, underlines Katainen.

Useful Nordic cooperation

The Finnish Commissioner Katainen highlights how useful the Nordic cooperation is. Despite their different starting points, the countries in the Nordic cooperation have a great potential within the European Union. The Nordic Council of Ministers is already cooperating on a range of issues, for instance on common standards and regulations, notes Katainen.

“If the Nordic region became a more cooperative player, the Nordic countries could have even greater influence within the EU, and get more out of the union. The Nordic countries benefit from working together to reduce border obstacles and promote the freedom of movement for goods, labour and services. This strengthens Nordic competitiveness and employment. The Nordic cooperation is also a guarantor for easing and developing the freedom of movement.”

Promising new proposals on the freedom of movement

The freedom of movement of labour is a basic principle for the EU, and a major part of the internal market. The Commission is trying to protect the freedom of movement for labour, and to get rid of obstacles.

“At the same time the Commission is aware of the new challenges and tries to address them. To avoid misuse we must find a balanced solution which maximises the benefits and minimise the unwanted consequences. The Commission is looking into different alternatives, where social benefit issues play one part.”

The idea is to create a more solid, better functioning and more integrated European labour market, explains Katainen.

“The freedom of movement of labour must be built on understandable and clear-cut rules. We must clarify how the social advantages emerge, and how we can take them with us.”

Commissioner Katainen wants to guarantee that pensions, for instance, can follow pensioners without any fuss when they move across borders. He promises new proposals on the freedom of movement of labour, perhaps as early as before Christmas.

In mid December the Commission made proposals to facilitate labour mobility, ensure fairness, and provide better tools for cooperation between member states on social security coordination.

The balanced proposal facilitates free movement of workers and protects their rights, while reinforcing the tools for national authorities to fight risks of abuse or fraud. It creates a closer link between the place where contributions are paid and where benefits are claimed, ensuring a fair financial distribution of burden between member states.

Nordic countries positive to EU social pillar – but want to set wages themselves

We urge that the proposed European Pillar of Social Rights takes into account the special features of our labour markets and respects the role played by the social partners in the Nordic Region. That is what the Nordic countries' labour ministers write in a joint declaration to the European Commission.

NEWS

13.12.2016

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

Last spring the Commission invited governments, interest groups and ordinary citizens to contribute to a draft for something which it called a European Pillar of Social Rights. With “pillar”, the Commission meant something like a joint European strategy or programme where member states should commit to putting social issues on the agenda again, after years of cuts and economic crisis.

Supported by this, the EU should be able to work towards ironing out differences between member states' employment and social policies; everything from labour legislation and employment conditions, to education, social insurance and housing. It would be obligatory for Euro members to take part, but other member states would also be allowed to join.

The Nordic labour ministers write in a joint statement addressed to the Commission that a pillar of social rights is relevant for all EU and EEA countries. Good working conditions are fundamental for citizens and necessary in both EU and EEA countries also in order to create a level playing field for enterprises.

The Commission's first draft includes a range of proposed principles aimed at guiding the member states' social reforms. But the draft says nothing about how you go about making the members do what they are expected to do. The Nordic labour ministers argue that this in any case cannot be allowed to change the division of competences between the EU and member states.

In other words: The EU must not take over more legislative power from member states. Instead, the ministers say, the “pillar” should represent a joint vision and principles for a more prosperous EU, which can be achieved by using tools and processes which already exist.

What they mean is procedures which work through political pressure, and not through binding regulations, like for instance joint guidelines for employment policies which the EU countries' governments regularly adopt and which each country is then expected to follow.

The labour ministers also highlight the Nordic experience that it is possible to combine social progress with growth and job creation. Growth and social progress are mutually reinforcing, and the social pillar should reflect the Nordic success factors in this respect. They underline that different countries have different starting points and different strengths and challenges, and that a pillar of social rights must take these differences into account.

The labour ministers make a clear stand on one issue. In a paragraph on salaries, the Commission's draft mentions minimum wages and their levels. It says wages should evolve in line with productivity developments, “in consultation” with the social partners. This is where the labour ministers put the foot down. The pillar must respect the important role which the social partners play in the Nordic region. Their autonomy and right to bargain collectively on wages and other terms of employment must be upheld.

The social partners' key role and large responsibility have contributed greatly to the positive employment and social outcomes of our countries, underline the labour ministers.

After taking the answers from the public consultation into consideration, the Commission will present a more concrete proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017.