

Portrait

Matilda af Hällström, entrepreneurial
Nordic Council lobbyist in Brussels

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Sweden: New jobs model for refugees
and long-term unemployed

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Europe takes on social injustice – does
the Nordic region show the way?

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Newly arrived depend on social networks
to find jobs

Nov 24, 2017

Theme: The Nordic Region and EU



Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 8/2017

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

Work Research Institute Oslo and
Akershus University College of Applied
Sciences, Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass,
NO-0130 Oslo

PUBLISHER

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

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

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



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Europe takes on social injustice – does the Nordic region show the way?

The social pillar has been missing from Europe's development. The Gothenburg summit presented a new future. Not everyone enjoys the result, and there are differences of opinion within the Nordic region too. When national interests are at stake, and businesses say no, you get disagreements.

EDITORIAL

23.11.2017

BY BERIT KVAM

One of Ylva Johanson's aims when she became Sweden's Minister for Employment was to help stop the trend of a Europe with increasing unemployment, widening gaps and the emergence of a European precariat. She was not alone. Sweden's government together with EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and his team has managed to redraw Europe's social safety net. The EU social summit in Gothenburg on 17 November gathered heads of states and governments from the whole of Europe.

But others were there too, as the Nordic Labour Journal shows in several articles – the social summit gathered organisations, youth representatives, the social partners and a large public audience for a two-day long debate about Europe's social future.

On the eve of the summit, The European Trade Union Congress, ETUC, challenged Europe's leaders to revive the European social model, which they say has been dismantled by a decade of austerity measures. They also warn that if the social pillar turns into nothing but empty promises, it would be a new nail in the EU's coffin, as the ETUC Confederal Secretary Esther Lynch says in the Nordic Labour Journal.

Europe is riding a wave of progress. Sweden leads the way with the highest ever employment rates. Yet it still takes a long time for many newly arrived people to find jobs, especially in Sweden. Their social networks are crucial here, but the gap between immigrants and others remains wide. Women and jobseekers with no upper secondary education are struggling the most. That is something which is to be addressed.

The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) have just reached an agreement in principle to help refugees, young people and the

long-term unemployed find jobs. The agreement is dependent on public financing for parts of the workers' wages.

The EU's social pillar also faces scepticism and opposition. Nordic employers fear it could undermine the Nordic model on the labour market, and intend to defend the model tooth and nail. Danish labour market researcher Mikkel Mailand believes that fight will be necessary.

Denmark is not one of the countries which asked for the European pillar of social rights. It has therefore been crucial for the Danish government to make sure the preamble to the pillar clarifies that this is about political principles, and not granting further competences to the EU, says the Danish Minister for Employment Troels Lund Poulsen.

The Faroe Islands with their 18 small islands in the Atlantic illustrate the Nordic region's diversity and the different levels of connection to the EU. While the Faroes have entered into some cooperation agreements, Iceland and Norway are members of the common market. Denmark, Finland and Sweden are member states. Yet Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg was still one of the heads of government present at the summit discussion on the social dialogue. She used the occasion to promote a concrete challenge to stop social dumping and work-related crime, which can be a slippery slope towards social depletion. She called for more European cross-border cooperation.

The Nordic Council's newly appointed lobbyist faces heavy odds. She is dealing with political differences and preferences, national models and what will best serve further development. You cannot take Nordic agreement for granted, as Matilda af Hällström says in the Portrait. She will work systematically for a better Nordic cooperation within the EU. As she applies cleverness and energy and a heart for Nordic val-

ues, it will be interesting to see what she can achieve.
We guess it's going the right way.



How can the EU's social pillar be turned into reality?

The EU summit in Gothenburg was a success for the Swedish hosts, but what will the social pillar mean for Europe's citizens?

THEME

23.11.2017

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL, MIKAEL SJÖBERG (TOP), NINNI ANDERSSON

There were two reasons why the EU held a summit on social issues and the labour market for the first time in 20 years.

First of all, after the EU has come through its hardest economic crisis in decades, there is new optimism. Never before have more people been employed. Unemployment is lower than it has been since 2008. It is now averaging 7.5 percent. As EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker pointed out, a lot of things have happened in the past three years:



Photo: Ninni Andersson

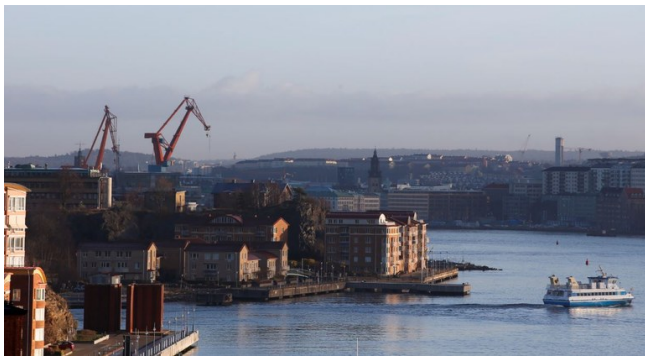
“The wind is back in Europe’s sails. Politically we are in a much better situation now. Nine million jobs have been created. The Commission of course cannot take credit for the fact that this has happened, but I am certain that we would have been blamed if nine million jobs had disappeared,” he said.

All 28 member states are experiencing growth. But it is not evenly divided, and years of austerity politics have taken their toll – especially in countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal. Brexit is a challenge, as is the demand for independence in Catalonia.

“The crisis led to greater gaps within Europe. The gap widened between those who had been living in a country for a long time and the newly arrived, between minorities and majorities and between different countries,” says Ylva Johansson, Sweden’s Minister for Employment.

“Widening gaps represent a threat. We have seen populism on the rise, as well as racism. We have seen the far right marching through Europe’s streets. It is absolutely necessary to change focus,” she says.

“We are here to put the people first, in a social Europe,” said Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven as he opened the summit at Eriksberg, an old shipyard in Gothenburg which is now a conference centre.



Yet the EU has limited resources. The EU budget is only 1.2 percent of the member states’ total budgets. Out of that, only one quarter – 0.3 percent – goes to social measures.

Then there is the issue of what in EU language is known as competence; whether a decision should be taken by the EU, or on a national level. The member states are not alone in wanting to keep decision-making rights on social and labour market issues, especially wage setting. Trade unions and employers want the same.

The social pillar therefore underlines that there will be no transfer of power from member states to the EU:

“At Union level, the European Pillar of Social Rights does not entail an extension of the Union’s powers and tasks as conferred by the Treaties. It should be implemented within the limits of those powers,” reads the introduction to the pillar.

The legal status of the 20 principles on which the social pillar is built is still unclear. But a citizen cannot use the text to demand individual social rights, unless the text is adopted into national legislation. But it might lead to social rights getting more focus from the EU Court of Justice, point out researchers who have studied the text.

“National social rights and working conditions has had lower priority in the EU Court of Justice compared to economic issues. The free flow of capital, labour and services is written into the EU treaty in a much stricter manner,” writes researcher Zane Rasnač from the European Trade Union Institute, ETUI.

Weak legal protection

According to her, this has become clear whenever the EU Court of Justice has been balancing the right to introduce collective measures in working life contra the freedom to establish businesses and the freedom to offer services.

The two most important judgements are Viking (about the Finnish Seamen’s Union FSU’s right to take industrial action in protest of the flagging out of a ferry) and Laval (a Latvian construction company operating in Sweden which was blocked by the Byggnads trade union for refusing to sign a collective agreement). Since the right to collective agreements does not have the same legal protection as the freedom to establish businesses and offer services, the two latter were prioritised by the EU Court of Justice in the Viking and Laval judgements.

When 28 member states now have managed to agree on a minimum standard in many areas, it is an achievement in itself. It has been very controversial in certain countries.

“President Viktor Orban has called the pillar one of the EU’s five attacks on Hungary. How did you get him to sign?” a Hungarian journalist asked Marianne Thyssen, the EU Commissioner for Social Affairs, the day before the EU summit opened.



“Did he say that? I didn’t know, but I visited Hungary and explained quite clearly what the social pillar is all about. I think it was misunderstood,” said Marianne Thyssen.

The rights of EU citizens under the social pillar can be divided into three groups:

- Equal opportunities and access to the labour market
- Fair working conditions
- Social protection and inclusion

There is a point dealing with the homeless, yet no proposals for how to improve the rights for people who have chosen to work in a foreign EU country.

“This is also in spite of the fact that the public consultation highlighted the protection of migrating citizens as one of the areas where problems persist,” writes Zane Rasnača in her study.

She calls it a missed opportunity.

“The pillar must be supported by legislation”

As the EU lacks both money and legislative power, what remains is for it to perform a coordinating role. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) therefore underlines that the agreement which has been reached must be followed up with more concrete measures as soon as possible.



“We are convinced that the Proclamation of the Pillar must be followed by an action plan for implementation, made of legislation and concrete initiatives,” said Luca Visentini, the ETUC General Secretary.

The EU Commission also has two other tools. The European Semester, introduced in 2010 to make sure EU countries coordinate economic policies throughout the budget year. The Commission can use this to present general and country-specific recommendations. The idea is that the social pillar will now become part of this coordinating policy.

The second tool is the scoreboard which is meant to survey indications of economic imbalances – a kind of early-warning system to show whether things are heading in the wrong direction. The idea is that the scoreboard should also have social indicators.



The people and trade unions take EU to task over the social pillar

With a mix of slogans from the trade union movement, cinnamon rolls and sweets, the Swedish government, led by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, tries to present the EU from a different perspective. During the social summit in Gothenburg the social partners were literally sitting around the same table as prime ministers and EU Commissioners.

THEME

23.11.2017

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL, MIKAEL SJÖBERG, GOVERNMENT OFFICE (TOP)

Stefan Löfven is the Swede who'd put 'social' back in democracy, read the headline in Politico, a publication covering the EU. The former welder and trade union representative has a working-class background which makes him unique among EU leaders. That is why he, with his credibility intact, could open the social summit with the following:

“As a former trade union leader, I am naturally guided in our common mission for fair jobs and growth by the popular motto: ‘United we stand, divided we fall’.”

A nail in the EU's coffin?

The day before the summit, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which represents 45 million trade union members across Europe, held a meeting. The message: It was

high time to revive the European social model, which according to ETUC has been dismantled during a decade of austerity.

“If the 20 principles in the social pillar proclamation really were realised, it would represent a new hope for workers who are still waiting to be allowed to benefit from the economic recovery. It would inject new life into the EU. If it turns out to be nothing but promises and nothing happens, it is a new nail in the EU’s coffin,” said Esther Lynch, ETUC’s Confederal Secretary.

- Some of EU citizens’ rights according to the social pillar include:
- The right to a good education and life-long learning
- The right to fair and equal treatment in working life
- Wages that provide for a decent standard of living
- Women and men shall have equal access to parental leave

The unemployed have the right to adequate support to reintegrate in the labour market Everyone in old age should have enough resources to ensure they can live in dignity

But who decides what is fair, decent, adequate or enough?



That was one of the questions put to the EU Commissioner for Social Affairs, Marianne Thyssen, when she met ‘the people’ in a meeting on the eve of the signing of the social pillar.

“That is up to the courts,” she answered.

The meeting was held at the Gothenburg School of Business, Economics and Law. After passing through security, participants were treated to sandwiches and the near ubiquitous cinnamon rolls. Nearly all of those asking questions represented different organisations, however.

“Where is the wine?” asked a Swedish Brussels correspondent who was covering the event.

“There is not a single EU event in Brussels where there is no wine,” she pointed out.



At the press centre at Eriksberg, the many hundred journalists had to settle with sweets instead.

Back at the

At the old yard, turned into conference centre, there were three parallel debates between the heads of states, the EU Commission and EU Parliament representatives and the social partners, in addition to different voluntary organisations.

Journalists and the general public could follow this online in real time – this had been personally requested by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven.

Lip-service?

The debate became quite heated at times:

“You promise that we young people will get jobs, but to get one you need experience from working life. How do we get that when no-one will employ us? So we are forced into badly paid, low-quality internships, or different platform jobs which don’t give us enough working hours to earn social rights,” said Zuzana Vaneckova from the Czech Republic. She is on the board of the European Youth Forum.

“We need fair jobs and growth. But we also need fair growth,” said Sérgio Aires, President of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

“I am talking about what I thought would be discussed here, about what has been revealed in the Paradise Papers, about tax havens and how the money we need for our welfare systems are disappearing.”

What happens when the EU summit is over and the EU machine of compromise and tug-of-war resumes in Brussels? Some participants carry in their pocket lip balm which was handed out by the Swedish hosts, emblazoned with ‘EU on your lips’. But will it go beyond lip-service?

“I see that you are all committed to the debate. The declaration on the social principles and the social rights is a joint responsibility. If we are to deliver results, we need the heads of government, the ministers for employment, social issues and education, the EU institutions, the social partners and civil society. If we are to succeed, we need to work together,” said Marianne Thyssen.

Employers: EU's social pillar threatens the Nordic model

Nordic employers fear the EU's new social pillar could undermine the Nordic model for the labour market. They intend to defend the model tooth-and-nail. That fight will be necessary, predicts a Danish labour market researcher.

THEME

23.11.2017

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The fact that 20 policies and guidelines in the EU's new social pillar are not to be legally binding for member states is seen as an important victory for Nordic employers' organisations. It means Nordic countries can continue following the Nordic model, where many solutions are being found through talks between employer' and employee's organisations rather than being imposed via legislation.

Yet it is a temporary victory. In the longer term, the social pillar could lead to the erosion of the foundations on which the model is built, according to Christiane Mißbeck-Winberg, Director of European and International Affairs at the Confederation of Danish Employers, DA:

"In the political preamble to the agreement on the social pillar it says that it does not touch the Danish model, but in reality the EU Commission has already introduced several concrete proposals for areas which are 100 percent within national jurisdiction. That worries us a lot," she says.

Among the issues that cause concern among employers is the EU Commission's desire to legislate for paternal leave, and a directive on employment contracts that will prescribe minimum terms in areas which until now have been built on agreements between the social partners.

A Nordic alliance

Mißbeck-Winberg says preventing this development will be one of DA's main tasks going forward. DA has already joined with Nordic sister organisations in this fight.

DA has penned a joint reaction to the social pillar together with the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, NHO. The four organisations say they believe the EU Commission is pursuing the social agenda from a completely wrong starting point.

"As employers we completely agree there is a need for social responsibility in times of high European unemployment, especially among young people. But we worry and do not understand why the Commission believes this can be solved by establishing rights. This is false security, because rights do not create jobs for the young unemployed in for instance southern Europe. This can only be solved through major structural reforms which secure growth and create jobs, and this is not part of the social pillar," says Christiane Mißbeck-Winberg.

Instead she recommends focusing on the element of the Danish model known as flexicurity:

"Flexicurity is *not* based on the principle that employees have a right never to be dismissed. Instead it secures proper conditions if this does happen, and the employee will be well prepared for finding new work because the labour market is dynamic and open. This is something we are far more positive to.

The EU Commission has previously been an ally for the Nordic countries when it comes to expanding the flexicurity model to the rest of Europe. There is now renewed interest in this, believes Christiane Mißbeck-Winberg, and this is an opportunity which should be seized.

EU rules through the back door

Mikkel Mailand is an associate professor at the Employment Relations Research Centre (FAOS) at the University of Copenhagen. He agrees with DA's Director of European and International Affairs that the EU Commission used to be a proponent of the flexicurity concept. But as the economic crisis set in, backing for member states disappeared, he says, and he believes the EU's social pillar can help move things in a new direction.

“The social pillar will probably not bring enormous change in itself, but it could help changes happen through the back door. The pillar is so comprehensive and broadly formulated that it can act as a resource for those who want a stronger social dimension in the EU, and to push politicians towards supporting European legislation and other regulations on social issues,” he says.

However, he does not see any immediate sign in the pillar that indicate the EU wants to change a central issue in the Danish and Nordic model: that wage formation happens through an agreement between the social partners.

Nordic employers are mobilising and getting together to defend the model. But they cannot expect joint backing for their drive from Nordic Governments, for instance when it comes to the pillar’s content, believes Mikkel Mailand.

“The Nordic countries have different views of the EU social pillar. The Swedish and Danish governments agree the proximity principle should be respected, while the Swedish government is more positive to the pillar’s content than the Danish government,” he says.

A key issue for Denmark

During negotiations about the pillar, the Danish government has been among the keenest proponents of keeping the social pillar limited to political principles, and not giving the EU the right to overrule agreements reached by the social partners. The Danish Minister for Employment Troels Lund Poulsen (the Liberal Party), sees it as a victory for Denmark that this was included in the agreement text on the social pillar which the EU Council of Ministers ended up adopting.

“Denmark is not one of the countries that has been asking for the European pillar of social rights. So it has been crucial for the Danish government to make sure the introduction to the pillar makes it clear that this is about political principles, and that the pillar does not grant any further competences to the EU.

“It has also been a priority for Denmark that the social partners’ autonomy be respected. From a Danish point of view we are happy that this has been made completely clear. We presented a declaration that contained these priorities, and got backing from Poland and Hungary,” Troels Lund Poulsen said after the social pillar was adopted.



Norway launches initiative against work-related crime during EU summit

Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg seized the moment at the EU summit on social rights. She launched an offensive against work-related crime. Norway offers to work with an EU country to develop a more efficient control system.

THEME

23.11.2017

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Norway is not an EU member, but part of the European Economic Area, the EEA. With a few exceptions, for instance processed agricultural goods and fisheries, Norway subscribes to the four freedoms too. With a strong economy, it is also one of the countries that welcome the most labour im-

migrants, with Poles, Lithuanians and Swedes making up the largest groups.

Erna Solberg was the first speaker during one of the three separate conferences during the summit, and explained how she had sent a letter to EU Commission President Jean-

Claude Juncker proposing concrete cooperation. Norway pays the equivalent of an EU membership fee in order to access the common market, but retains a greater level of control over this money. The offer therefore comes with the possibility of financing.

“The social pillar says that the laws and regulations of the country you are in must be followed. We now have so much mobility in the labour market that we need a system which makes sure this does happen,” Erna Solberg told the Nordic Labour Journal.

A priority issue

Work-related crime, or social dumping as it is known in Norway, has been a priority issue for her government in the past four years.

Work-related crime often involves breaking a range of different laws. It could be ID crime, fake wage payments, tax avoidance and trafficking. To fight this, Norway has established seven operative units across the country where police, tax authorities and NAV, the authority responsible for social security, work closely together and can share information. The cooperation has had good results, and it is needed because work-related crime is also becoming more organised.

One issue which has been exposed is the fact that foreign companies offering labour in Norway sometimes demand from employees that they pay back some of their wages or work for free when they return to their home country. Norwegian companies can cheat too, by only paying what the collective agreement says on paper, but not in the real world. New payment systems make it more difficult to track the money.

When authorities begin to investigate, the company files for bankruptcy and activities are moved to another company, often in a different country. That is why international cooperation is also needed.

“What common interest does the country of origin have to prioritise a question like this?”

“I understand that there are countries that have different and bigger problems than making sure workers who have been paid well in Norway get what is rightfully theirs. But it is an important question for the balance of the entire free labour market.

“Freedom of movement does not mean that serious companies should lose out to companies that cheat and break existing laws and regulations,” says Erna Solberg.

One dilemma for several Nordic countries is the fact that the social partners oppose the introduction of minimum wages as part of the fight against unfair competition. The President of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO),

Hans-Christian Gabrielsen, also participated at the EU summit.

“We absolutely do not want minimum wages,” he says.

In their place, Norway has introduced so-called universally applicable collective agreements. This means that if one part of the labour market is under great pressure from hired labour, a court of law could demand the collective agreement for a certain business is applicable for all businesses in this area.

“This was introduced as Norway joined the EEA, but it wasn’t used until 2004,” says Hans-Christian Gabrielsen.

He says there is increasing interest from several European countries for the model, including the UK.

Flexible system

Prime Minister Erna Solberg also supports the Norwegian model.

“I believe the legislation on universally applicable collective agreements works well for us who are members of the common market, but not in the EU. Other countries must of course decide for themselves whether they want it. But the Norwegian legislation is a flexible solution. We need to be able to enter into areas that are under pressure, like the construction sector in the Oslo region right now.

“At the same time many other parts of Norway do not need this kind of protection. Because with regulation you also get controls, paperwork and more bureaucracy. What you need is a flexible system,” she says.



The Faroese's tense relationship to the EU

50,000 people live in the Faroe Islands. There are 500 people in the EU. But do the Faroese want to be members in the big club and cooperate? The answer is a bit like the wind blowing across the stormy islands – it goes in all directions. Everyone wants closer cooperation, yet what that means depends on who you ask.

THEME

23.11.2017

TEXT AND PHOTO: RÓLANT WAAG DAM

Compared to the other Nordic countries, there is little talk about the EU in Faroese public debate. The Faroese government does have an office on the fairly central address of Aarlenstraat 69-71 in Brussels, where you find The Mission of the Faroes to the European Union. One Head of Mission and one

secretary works there. Apart from this, there is not one single Faroese politician, lobbyist or correspondent in Brussels. This is simply because the 18 little islands in the North Atlantic are not part of the European Union.

Three main agreements with the EU

The lack of full membership does not mean a total lack of cooperation, however. The first deal reached between the Faroese government and the EU was a 1980 fisheries agreement. Since then, this agreement has formed the basis for annual negotiations between the Faroes and the EU about the same fisheries rights.

This was the first of what today is a total of three main agreements between the Faroe Islands and the EU. The next one was reached in 1997, a free trade agreement for industrial goods between the Faroes and the EU.

The third main agreement concerns cooperation on research, and was reached in 2010. Beyond these three main agreements, there are a number of smaller ones covering issues like copyrights. But the latest cooperation agreement with the EU is seven years old.

One party and one politician are pro EU

So where are the Faroe Islands in relation to the EU today? Outside, is the short and correct answer. Do they want to come into the European fold? Not as such.

Yet there is one Faroese politician for whom the EU has been close to his heart: Sjúrdur Skaale, member of parliament for Javnaðarflokkurin, the Social Democratic Party.

“I think the EU is fantastic,” he told the Faroese national public broadcasting company Kringvarp Føroya on 18 March 2013. That was the day he published a 96 pages long report called ‘Yes to Europe’. Skaale was in no doubt. EU membership would be the best solution for the Faroe Islands, if some special conditions could be negotiated, he said.

Two years later the wind had changed direction. Before parliamentary elections in 2015, Skaale did no longer want to go for EU membership. He would rather discuss other opportunities, for instance EFTA.

Sjúrdur Skaale is one politician. There is also one political party which back in the 1990s decided to formulate an EU membership application. This was never sent, nor written, but the centre-right Sambandsflokkurin, the Union Party, is still the most EU friendly in the Faroe Islands.

18 months ago they suggested the Faroese government start negotiations with the EU to secure free access for Faroese fishery products.

“We have not tried this before. We also do not know what the EU would want in return,” said Bárður á Steig Nielsen, leader for the Union Party, at a press conference in Thorshavn on 7 March 2016. The proposal was enacted by the Faroese parliament, but nothing more has happened since.

EU boycotts Faroe Islands

Two years earlier quite a lot happened, though. In 2013 the EU introduced sanctions against the Faroe Islands due to a

dispute over the sustainability of Faroese herring fisheries. The then Faroese Prime Minister, Kaj Leo Holm Johannesen from the Union Party, explained the dispute to the Nordic Labour Journal in December 2013:

“The fisheries conflict with the EU and Norway is not about herring and mackerel, it’s about which principles should cover the North Atlantic.”

As a result of the conflict, the EU refused Faroese fishermen to export their fish to EU countries and banned them from docking in EU ports – including in Denmark.

The dispute lasted for about a year before the parties came to a political agreement on how to regulate the herring fisheries. One result of the dispute, however, is that even the most EU-friendly among the Faroese got slightly colder feet about the EU.

Closer cooperation

Membership or no membership. All Faroese politician want closer cooperation with the EU. What exactly that entails varies depending on who you ask. But they want closer cooperation because the Faroe Islands can benefit from it. So what can the Faroes offer in return? Nobody seems to have an answer to that question, since the Faroe Islands have not been sat at the negotiating table for the past seven years.

There is, however, one clear answer to why there is greater agreement on “closer cooperation” with the EU than there is on membership. EU membership can only happen via Denmark, or as an independent nation. So the Faroese have to decide what it is they want: Independence or connectedness.



Matilda af Hällström, entrepreneurial Nordic Council lobbyist in Brussels

It is an active 24-year-old which the Nordic Council has chosen to be its first local representative in Brussels. Matilda af Hällström is already busy finding out how the Nordic Council can improve its cooperation with the EU and within the EU.

PORTRAIT

23.11.2017

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: ASTRID LAURA NEERGAARD/NORDEN.ORG

While we were talking, the Danish foreign minister had tweeted that Sweden had let the Nordic corporation down in its fight over the European Medicines Agency (EMA). A wakeup-call, comments Matilda af Hällström.

“You cannot take Nordic cooperation in the EU for granted, it needs work. I see this more as a wakeup-call than a setback for Nordic cooperation,” says Matilda af Hällström.

The EU has just decided to move the EMA from London to Amsterdam as a consequence of Brexit.

“This is a clear sign that Brexit is happening and it will affect us all,” she says, and provides some comprehensive background:

“The General Affairs Council of the European Union voted over the new location of the European Medicines Agency

(EMA) and the European Banking Agency (EBA). A total of 19 cities had entered the competition to get the EMA. Helsinki, Stockholm and Copenhagen had all been actively lobbying for this.

“The voting system was very complicated. Milano, Amsterdam and Copenhagen made it to the second round. The Danish minister tweeted his discontent about the Swedes’ choice to not to vote for Copenhagen. In the last round, the result was 13 votes each to Milano and Amsterdam. According to the rules, in the case of a tie the Estonian presidency was to draw straws between the two. Amsterdam won the contested European Medicines Agency on a coin throw.

She is on home turf. This is her job. Not only trying to gather the Nordic countries for joint efforts, but also to explain and inform the Nordic Council members about issues and processes.

There has long been a lot of speculation about which cities should be given the important EU institutions after Brexit. EMA alone represents 900 jobs. This is one of many issues that Matilda af Hällström must keep on top of. Her morning often starts with reading the newsletter Politico Brussels Playbook.

“Be careful so you don’t suffer a burn-out,” warn experienced Nordic journalists. They know the honey trap from the inside, and know how easy it is to go at it too hard when you have a job you like and one that others measure you by.

“My mother says the same thing,” smiles Matilda af Hällström, as she expertly welcomes a group of 20 from the Nordic Journalism Course Århus 2017, introducing them to herself and to the Nordic Council in the offices she shares with the Danish Cultural Institute.

She wants to show that the Nordic Council has made the right decision when employing her. The job is for one year, with the possibility of another two. After three months, this is what she hopes will happen – that the Nordic Council will be so satisfied that she will be able to continue. Her tasks are very diverse, just like the five Nordic countries and three autonomous areas she represents. Her dream is easily summed up:

“That I will be seen as competent,” she tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

She has broad international experience:

“We moved so often when I was growing up, that I have not spent more than two years in any one school.”

She has studied in different parts of the EU; the UK, France and Finland, and has written a master’s thesis on Nordic identity and the relationship to Russia. It all amounts to good professional competence. Brussels is not an unknown place for her either. After two and a half years, partly as an

intern for Finnish MEP Nils Torvalds, partly as a lobbyist for Helsinki municipality and then in the communications agency Miltton Brussels, she knows the Brussels milieu well, and has established a good network for herself.

The decision to create the position was taken during the Nordic Council’s meeting in Copenhagen in 2016. Not everyone thought it was a good idea to have a representative in Brussels.

“I am here on a 54 percent mandate,” says Matilda half in jest, while explaining the spread of the vote and a split gathering.

“It was interesting that when they had an EU debate during the 2017 Nordic Council, they did not discuss the EU, but rather my working tasks. It is still fairly open,” she says. But how will she spend her time?

“According to the job description, I am to be a link between the Nordic Council and the European Parliament, and network in different settings and be a source of information. I don’t need to know everything myself, but I need to know who to ask.”

She has already been able to put requests and questions on the table. When the Commission presented a new transport and mobility package, she was immediately asked to expand on this. During the Bonn climate conference, COP23, she was a coordinator and secured a relevant MEP for a panel debate. She was a moderator herself on a different panel.

“And then I write speaking points, for instance when the Nordic Council visits Brussels during the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum, a cooperation which was established in the 1990s between EU and Russia, Norway and Iceland. It was one of the first initiatives aimed at bringing Russia into the western world.

“I think it will take some time to figure out the role. My job is to find out what the Nordic Council should be in Brussels.

“The areas I am to follow are clear: Energy and climate policy, EU transport, geoblocking, all the areas the Nordic Council works with.”

Nordic values are close to her heart.

“They are a kind of guiding compass.”

Changing Nordic identity – focus on security policies

“And now I arrive at my favourite area. How the Nordic identity has changed character since Russia’s annexation of the Ukrainian Republic of Crimea in 2014, and how Nordic cooperation which earlier did not include cooperation on defence and security policies, and not really on foreign policy either, also has changed character.

“The Nordic region has never had a joint position on defence and security policies, but after 2014 we started talking about the need for more Nordic cooperation in these areas, and the reason was Russia.”

Her master’s thesis analysed foreign policy documents from all of the Nordic countries except Iceland.

“Before 2014 and after the end of the Cold War, talk was emerging about the need for the Nordic region to actively cooperate on defence, but this was always for financial reasons. The 2009 Stoltenberg report said the same thing, that such cooperation can be of huge monetary benefit.

“But after 2014 the arguments have centred on the unstable situation in the Baltics. That has made defence cooperation the greatest driver and motivation for Nordic cooperation.”

The analysis is based on a discourse study of government white papers on foreign policy and foreign political values. The study shows that Russia is viewed in a different way post 2014.

“I think this is a pretty big deal. For a long time there was an effort to get Russia into the western community. In these foreign policy texts, Russia is increasingly depicted in negative terms after 2014.

“It is interesting to see how each Nordic country defines security as a term. Swedish foreign policy is about protecting Swedish values. Finland has a more traditional way of defining security. It is about geographical security, securing the border. We then see that Russia can be a threat to the physical, the geographical, but also to our values, and we see that Russia is not as democratic as we would have wanted. Everything the Nordic region values, like human rights, is not always equally respected in Russia. This way it is quite easy to create this enemy picture.”

Do you believe the Nordic countries are trying to create such an enemy picture?

“Yes I do. The Finnish and Norwegian texts employ stronger language to construct an enemy image of Russia, than the Swedish and Danish texts do. This is understandable, because Norway and Finland have a more traditional definition of security.

Values bring us together

Matilda believes our shared values represent the key to Nordic cooperation.

“Language is important, but shared values link us together in an entirely different way. Perhaps I say this because I am Finnish and understand the Finns. I know that they don’t speak Swedish. Our values represent the glue that keeps us together even though the language has been important historically for Nordic cooperation.”

What is the most fun about your job?

“Everything,” she says, and smiles.

“So far everything is fine. I get to meet people and put my abilities and knowledge to good use. Travelling is always good. I don’t think I could chose only one thing.”

But it can be challenging too to be a young woman:

“Being a young woman can be difficult, but I think that I must look past this and prove myself through my work.

“I think a little bit more about how to dress and behave, how I talk. It is difficult to describe, but I try to appear older. Ideally age should not matter, but I do want to behave in a way which makes people respect me.

“I want to prove to myself and to the Nordic Council that they made the right choice by recruiting me.”

And your dream?

“To do something important – to see that what I do makes a difference, and that it doesn’t just turn into paper in an office. Making a difference. I want to live in the EU and in Brussels.”

Matilda af Hällström is an unusual name. Does it have a history? Why af Hällström?

“My great-great-great-great-grandfather was Gustaf Hällström. He became a professor of physics at age 25. He discovered that water has the highest density at four degrees Celsius. He was ennobled by the Russian Tsar for this scientific discovery. When you are ennobled, the entire family is ennobled. He gave his four sons the name af Hällström and since then their children have been called af Hällström.

“I am not very scientifically minded, so if you ask me how to measure water’s density, I could not tell you.”

Newly arrived depend on social networks to find jobs

70 percent of newly arrived people in Sweden found jobs through social networks, compared to the 16 percent who found jobs via the employment service. The employment gap between native Swedes and those born abroad is still wide, however. It is particularly hard for people those with no upper secondary education, and for women.

NEWS

23.11.2017

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

Shazia Mughal was born in Pakistan and dreamt of becoming a lawyer. Instead she got married at 18 and moved to Denmark with her husband.

“I landed with broken dreams. Everything was so different,” she told the participants at the conference ‘From refugees to citizens – Nordic experiences of inclusion in the labour market’ held in Stockholm in November.

When she fell pregnant she realised she needed to learn more about the society in which she lived, but where do you start? How do you learn the language? The culture? To arrive in a foreign country is a culture shock and it takes time to build the trust that you have lost.

Today Shazia Mughal is one of 600 women in a Danish group called ‘Bydelsmødre’ – or Neighbourhood Mothers. They have been successfully working to break immigrant women out of their isolation and make them active in society. There is increasing focus on the situation for newly arrived women. They struggle more to find work, and the employment rate for that group is far lower than for men. This can make it hard to learn the language and it might lead to isolation.

A special focus on women

It takes between five and ten years for a newly arrived person to find a job in the Nordic countries. In Sweden it is very difficult – nowhere else in the EU does it take longer for newly arrived people to enter the labour market. Even though a strong labour market makes the situation a bit better, and two in three jobs go to people who are born abroad, women and people with no upper secondary education still fall outside. That is why Sweden will make labour market access, especially for women, a main priority during its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2018.

“The gap between Swedish born and foreign born people is still too wide – especially for women and people with no upper secondary education. The current situation calls for Nordic governments, authorities and the social partners to work hard to identify opportunities which will help more newly arrived people enter into the labour market,” said Annica Dahl, State Secretary to the Swedish Minister for Employment.

The conference was organised by the Nordic Welfare Centre together with Nordregio, on the Skeppsholmen island in Stockholm. The conference was fully booked long before the deadline, a sign of how important this issue is in the Nordic countries. The venue, a beautiful hall which used to belong to the Naval Academy situated on Skeppsholmen in the middle of Stockholm, was full to bursting by people from all over the Nordic region, ready to cooperate and exchange knowledge.

A range of good examples were presented for how to shorten the journey between seeking asylum and finding a job. There was also focus on the challenges ahead. In the autumn of 2015, hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived in the Nordic countries over a short period of time. This is being viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity. It also provided some perspective. A total of 60 million people were displaced in 2015. 0.4 percent of them came to the Nordic countries, while 86 percent of them live in developing countries.

“There are no signs that the number of refugees will decrease. The UNHCR estimates between 250 million and one billion people will be fleeing conflict and climate change by 2050. So we have a lot to win if we can get the refugees into the labour market,” said Kristin Marklund from the Nordic Welfare Centre. She is also the project leader for the Nordic Council of Ministers’ efforts to coordinate integration efforts across the Nordic region.

Making it quicker to find work

State Secretary Annica Dahl pointed out that Nordic leaders share the same challenges. There is a need to improve integration, and the process of finding work needs to become considerably quicker. The skills and experiences which foreigners bring must simply be put to better use.

One reason for the slow access to the Nordic labour markets is the low number of unskilled jobs available in all of the countries. Five percent of jobs in Sweden are unskilled, while 48 percent of the newly arrived only have primary education or less. Nordregio's report 'More refugees quicker into jobs' shows the employment gap between native born and foreign born people prevails in terms of lower wages and inadequate matching of skills.

"There are many reasons for employment gaps and bad matching. Foreign exams and experience is valued less than Nordic equivalents, and different types of fast-tracking do not pick up people with lower qualifications," explains Anna Karlsdottir from Nordregio, one of the report's authors.

The report points to other explanations like discrimination, a lack of validation, difficulties in building on existing educations, a lack of social inclusion and a lack of networks. These problems are found in all of the Nordic countries.

So how do you speed up the process between arrival and finding a job? Nordregio's work shows that it is important to map refugees' skills. This can start as early as during the asylum process, and includes competences, language skills and professional experience. There is also a trend among Nordic countries to start the mapping of skill earlier than before. There is also an increase in the use of digital tools.

Validation is another tool, and in Sweden there are 14 so-called fast-tracks which make it possible to build on foreign educations and make them valid in Sweden. Norway has similar fast-track solutions. These have been developed in cooperation with the social partners, but work best for people with higher educations, and are less helpful for those with a low education.

In Sweden there has been a lot of criticism directed at SFI, Swedish for Immigrants. Many do not finish their course, and results vary a lot. According to Nordregio, it is far more efficient to combine language and work training.

"We also see that Nordic employers trust educations from their own countries, and that refugees who are educated in the Nordic countries are much more successful in finding jobs," says Anna Karlsdottir.

Arbetsgivarna har större förtroende för de utbildningar flyktingar har som är inhemska, dvs nordiska

It also seems crucial to create social networks in your new life if you want to find work, and civil society plays an important

part in this. In Sweden, 70 percent of jobseekers found work through a network, while just 16 percent got a job through the public employment service.

"We also see how important it is to involve employers. Research shows that if you don't, it becomes harder to prevent discrimination in the labour market," says Anna Karlsdottir.

A solution to the labour shortage

Getting newly arrived people into work is a central issue for all countries. That can be seen not least in the way the media focusses on refugees; Nearly all the stories – and there are many – written about asylum seekers are about finding work. A job is seen as the gateway to society, but also an opportunity to contribute to the welfare system on which the Nordic model is built.

If we manage to reduce the obstacles that prevent the newly arrived access to the labour market, we all stand to benefit. Many sectors suffer from labour shortages, and the need for labour is set to increase. In Denmark it is becoming increasingly common for many municipalities to look at newly arrived people as a resource. In rural areas it is considered a positive thing to welcome newly arrived families, and there are signs in towns with a labour shortage that businesses and municipalities consider refugees to be part of their future recruitment strategy, says Lars Larsen, head of the Danish analysis and consultancy agency LG Insight, a company that works with these issues with many municipalities.

"Integration politics is increasingly seen as development politics. In Vejle municipality in Jylland, for instance, integration issues permeate all political areas," he says and adds:

"Perhaps we are seeing a trend where we in the future will be competing for refugees."

Sweden: New jobs model for refugees and long-term unemployed

The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) have reached an agreement in principle to make it easier for refugees and long-term unemployed to find jobs in Sweden. To make the agreement binding, both organisations' affiliates must accept it. It is also dependent on public financing of parts of the workers' wages.

NEWS

23.11.2017

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

Centre-right parties in the so-called Alliance have long been arguing that the comparably high minimum wages set out in Swedish collective agreements make it more difficult to access the labour market for people with low education and little working experience. In August they presented a proposal for a new employment form and declared that an Alliance government would make passing this into law its highest priority, if the social partners could not agree on a similar solution.

Under the proposal, the newly arrived – i.e. refugees – in their first five years in Sweden and young people under 23 with interrupted upper secondary educations could be employed in temporary so-called *inträdesjobb* (entry jobs) for up to two years. This would be full-time employment, but wages would be 70 percent of the collective agreement's lowest pay. 30 percent of working hours would be “considered to be spent learning the job”, but the employer would not have any responsibility to organise or pay for any education.

The proposal was met with expected opposition from both the government and trade unions, but it was also problematic from a legal point of view. Firstly, the kind of legislation proposed by the alliance parties would interfere with existing collective agreements, which is not allowed according to ILO conventions on the freedom of association and collective bargaining – except for in very unusual situations.

Secondly, the proposal was probably not compatible with anti-discrimination legislation, since all newly arrived and youths who have not finished their upper secondary education would have to settle with 70 percent of normal wages, regardless of whether they could have actually been hired on a normal contract.

However, in early November the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and LO agreed in principle on something the or-

ganisations call *etableringsanställning* (establishing-employment), which is similar in several ways to the centre-right parties' *inträdesjobb*. One major difference, however, is that the employee would be paid the equivalent of the normal collectively agreed minimum wage after tax, but the employer would pay only 8,000 kronor (€809) while the rest would be covered by the state.

The new employment form would be available for newly arrived who have been granted residence permit in Sweden in the past 36 months, young people under 25 who have been unemployed for at least six months and people over 25 who have been unemployed for more than a year. During the establishing-employment, which can last up to two years, the employees have the right to study Swedish during working hours without having their salaries docked. After two years, the employment should be turned into a rolling contract. A commission will be established to make sure the employment form is not misused.

To make the agreement binding, it must be accepted by the organisations' affiliates. Another precondition, as mentioned, is that the state agrees to pay part of the salary and that employers are exempt from paying pay-roll tax for those in establishing-employment. The government has already indicated it is ready to contribute, but some details still remain to be sorted out.



Katrín Jakobsdóttir tipped as Iceland's new Prime Minister

Iceland's Left-Green Movement (VG) won Iceland's parliamentary elections in late October. Party leader Katrín Jakobsdóttir will most probably become Prime Minister in a coalition government. Katrín would be the country's second female head of government after Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir.

NEWS

17.11.2017

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: JOHANNES JANSSON/NORDEN.ORG

Iceland's parliamentary elections were historic in several ways. Never before have so many political parties secured seats in the Allting, the country's parliament – eight in total. Three parties won the election; the Left-Green Movement, the Centre Party (Miðflokkurinn) which was established ahead of the election by Iceland's former Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, and the new People's Party.

Icelandic governments are usually made up of two-party coalitions, but this time no political parties secured a strong enough mandate to form a two-party government. Katrín Jakobsdóttir, leader of the left-wing Left-Green Movement, has therefore been discussing forming a coalition with the country's largest party, the centre-right Independence Party and the centrist Progressive Party.

Cooperation across political traditions

Professor Guðmundur Hálfðánarson at the University of Iceland is surprised the negotiations have been so short.

“These two parties, the Independence Party and the Left-Green Movement, are political opposites. They have not worked together in government since just after World War II, so the politics is perhaps changing,” he says.

“But the two parties have certain things in common. Both are against EU membership, for instance,” continues Guðmundur. He also believes they will want similar policies on agriculture and fisheries.

Bjarni Benediktsson, leader of the country's largest political party the Independence Party, was heading the former government coalition when one of the three partners quit in protest after the Prime Minister's father had signed a letter recommending a friend convicted of child sexual offences have his 'honour restored'.

Professor Guðmundur Hálfðánarson believes this is the reason why Bjarni Benediktsson will probably settle with the job as the country's Minister of Finance.

Iceland's parliament has 63 seats. The election was a disappointment for women in politics, since there are now 24 female MPs, opposed to 30 before the election. But Katrín Jakobsdóttir looks likely to become the country's Prime Minister. She has previously been the country's Minister of Education. Katrín has been her party's leader since 2013.



Nordic Council Helsinki session: Promising deeper labour market cooperation

The 69th session of the Nordic Council in Helsinki had a celebratory air as Finland was marking its centenary as an independent nation. Labour market issues formed a common thread throughout the session.

NEWS

03.11.2017

TEXT: MARCUS FLOMAN, PHOTO: MAGNUS FRÖDERBERG/NORDEN.ORG

As always when the Nordic Council meets, someone asks what the Nordic cooperation is good for. This year the Nordic Council came prepared and could present a fresh survey on day one of the session detailing what Nordic citizens think about Nordic cooperation.

It turned out that as many as 90 percent of the respondents felt cooperation between the Nordic countries to be important or very important. Security cooperation is considered to

be the most important issue, probably partly as a result of the current state of the world. On an individual level, nearly half of the respondents felt the greatest benefit of Nordic cooperation was that citizens could work, study and live anywhere in the Nordic region.

A promise of deeper labour market cooperation

Many of the debates during the Nordic Council's sessions centred on newly launched political initiatives. Nordic MPs

highlighted issues like increased Nordic cooperation in the fight against burnout in the workplace and a Nordic equal pay certificate, like the one adopted by Iceland.

It is also common for the Nordic Council of Ministers to meet during the Nordic Council's sessions, for instance in the form of a Nordic prime ministerial summit. Political issues were discussed on a government minister level in Helsinki too. One example is the Nordic programme for cooperation on working life issues, which has been prepared for some years now; in Helsinki the Nordic parliamentarians got the chance to present their final comments to the government ministers.

Newly arrived workers a challenge

Swedish Social Democrat Pyy Niemi said the Social Democrat group supports the programme for cooperation. He reminded the participants of the many challenges facing Nordic labour markets when it comes to hiring newly arrived workers.

“Many who come here find work very quickly; others end up very far from the labour market. So we need to look particularly closely at these issues,” said Niemi.



Anniken Hauglie. Foto: Johannes Jansson/norden.org

Norway's Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Anniken Hauglie, presented the report in the Finnish parliament's newly renovated chamber.

“The programme was very well received in plenum. The background work has been solid, making it easy to take the document forwards,” said Hauglie.

Work on the programme for cooperation will be honed during a final meeting of the Council of Ministers in Oslo in mid-November.

Good balance

In the past year the programme for cooperation on working life issues has been anchored among the social partners in the Nordic countries.

“I feel that through the programme we have found a good balance between the different partners' interests. This has also been confirmed in the way that the document was welcomed by the Nordic parliamentarians here in the parliament in Helsinki.”

As usual in political contexts, the programme which has now been adopted is a political compromise. One of the central documents that formed the basis for the programme for cooperation was the Danish Social Democrat Poul Nielson's report 'Working life in the Nordic region – Challenges and proposals' from last year. One of Nielson's most controversial proposals was to introduce mandatory adult education in the Nordic countries.

That was not something conservative parties, amongst others, could accept. The Social Democrats agreed to ditch the demand for mandatory adult education, yet they are happy that life-long learning plays a central role in the programme for cooperation – which they consider to be one of the goals with Poul Nielson's report.

“Increasing knowledge levels is one of the most important aims for the Social Democrats in Finland, and also in other Nordic countries,” say Ville Skinnari from the Social Democratic Party of Finland, SDP.

The really big issue facing future Nordic and European labour markets is how to handle the gap in competencies which we can already see developing.

“This is a gap between the workers who have skills and those who lack the skills that are needed. The labour market's needs are continuously changing.”

Which issues are particularly important when it comes to making it easier for foreigners to get access to the labour market?

Training of foreign labour falls short

“The big debate arose during the 2015 refugee crisis. That situation made it clear for most countries that there are numerous faults with labour market policies and with the integration of refugees.”

Hauglie holds up Norway's challenges as an example.

“We have fallen short when it comes to language training, and the training of refugees has not been good enough. It has been difficult to integrate refugees into the labour market in many areas. This is because many lack the right competencies and language skills. We have to make sure our new citizens are given a fair chance to find work.”

Anniken Hauglie underlines that the Nordic labour market is going through comprehensive changes right now, and one of them is digitalisation. Both during the Nordic Council session in Helsinki and in the general social debate, politicians have been warning against parallel societies developing in

the Nordic countries, and against the emergence of A and B teams in the labour market.

Sweden takes on the mantle

In the next four years the theories outlined in the Nordic programme for cooperation on working life issues will be put into action. What will be the main challenges?

“I believe the greatest challenge is to make sure all workers have the competencies that the new labour market needs. Far too many employees lack the kinds of skill which are needed in the new labour market. Too many workers lack competencies and many have the wrong ones.”

In this context, Hauglie brings in the oft repeated term life-long learning.

“It is very important that employees can follow the rapidly digital development.”

From January 2018, Sweden takes on the mantle as President of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven presented the Swedish plans for the coming year during the Helsinki session.

Sweden says it will host a range of Nordic conferences, including one on how digitalisation and automation effects the labour market, and one on the challenges faced by foreign-born women trying to access the Nordic labour market.

Continuing education gets huge push from Danish government and social partners

The Danish government and the social partners have agreed to spend nearly 2.5 billion Danish kroner (€335m) on continuing education for more workers. The agreement has broad political backing, but one labour market expert wonders whether it goes far enough.

NEWS

02.11.2017

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Nearly 2.5 billion kroner is the sum which the Danish government and the social partners have agreed to spend on making adult and continuing education more attractive both for employers and employees. Many of the latter do not seek continuing education.

One in three Danish workers do not find it necessary to take continuing education, yet it is crucial that Danes keep learning throughout their working lives, say both the Danish government and the country's major employer and trade unions. That is why they have joined forces in a so-called tripartite agreement containing a range of measures aimed at making it easier for employees to adapt to new working tasks.

Help to change track

One central element in the agreement is a so-called re-training fund, aimed at giving skilled and un-skilled workers the change to take adult and continuing education based on their own initiative. The Minister of Education Merete Riisager from the Liberal Alliance party has said the re-training fund is "a timely measure as the labour market is rapidly changing, and it will give individual workers more flexible opportunities to seek continuing education based on their own wishes and needs."



The tripartite agreement also eases access to training in reading, writing, numeracy, IT and English, and increases funds to improve the quality of the labour market training programme AMU, run by the Ministry of Education with the aim of improving skills among skilled and un-skilled workers. It will also become easier to find information about opportunities for continuing education, joining courses and seeking compensation for adult and continuing education.

The President of LO-Denmark, Lizette Risgaard, has called it "a really good agreement for wage-earners", which accelerates their opportunities for taking adult and continuing education. She has been particularly positive to the 400 million kroner (€53.7m) set aside for skilled and un-skilled workers who need new competencies or a complete change of track,

and the fact that there will be more help for the many workers who lack basic numeracy, writing and reading skills.

Needs to be more than voluntary

Employers expect the agreement to lead to more people prioritising continuing education. Jacob Holbraad, Director General at the Confederation of Danish Employees, has said the agreement will lead to a more attractive and flexible continuing education system which has tools to secure the right competencies in the labour market at a time when there is a lack of skilled hands and heads.

The government can expect broad political backing for the agreement. Both the Social Democrats and the Danish People's Party have said they are ready to support elements which will need legislative change.

A large part of the Danish labour market does not make use of existing adult and continuing education, finding it irrelevant, according to a recent study. 37 percent of employees in Danish workplaces do not feel they need continuing education at all, and another 11 percent think they need it only to a small degree.

The tripartite agreement is valid for the next four years. It is the third tripartite agreement in less than two years. The two previous ones focused on integration and apprenticeships for young people.



Yet the agreement alone is not enough, believes labour market researcher and professor Henning Jørgensen from the University of Aalborg. He told the Ritzau news agency that the parties had promised a major reform while only delivering small changes. He doubts the agreement will have any major effect. He thinks it is unfortunate that it is a voluntary agreement, and that it does not award the businesses that prioritise continuing education or penalise those that do not. He would also like to see some demands being put on municipalities, as these are responsible for the majority of employment measures.

The Nordic Labour Journal – also on Facebook

You can now access news and debates about the Nordic labour market on Facebook. The Nordic Labour Journal highlights trends and policies, and also stories from working life

NEWS

01.11.2017

Social media represent an increasingly important part of our news stream. You now find the majority of traditionally edited media there. The Nordic Labour Journal is also subject to the quality-demands of an editorial publication. We are members of the Norwegian press organisation *Fagpressen* and have correspondent in all of the Nordic countries and in the autonomous areas of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland Islands. You can read stories like the one about the Faroes in a Nordic perspective or about the debate over the islands' relationship with the EU. This and much more on **the Nordic Labour Journal's Facebook pages**.

On Facebook you can follow politicians and political parties who publish their own content, including politicians from other Nordic countries who catch your interest. You find news and information from national and international trade unions and employers' organisations – they are all there. And now the Nordic Labour Journal is also easily accessible with coverage of the labour market in all of the Nordic countries, in **Scandinavian languages** and in English at the Nordic Labour Journal; on **Facebook** or at **nordiclabourjournal.org**.

We often publish stories before our subscribers receive our free newsletters in their inbox. You can also become a subscriber. You can choose whether you want to read the Scandinavian version or become a friend of the English Nordic Labour Journal.

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