

News

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Editorial

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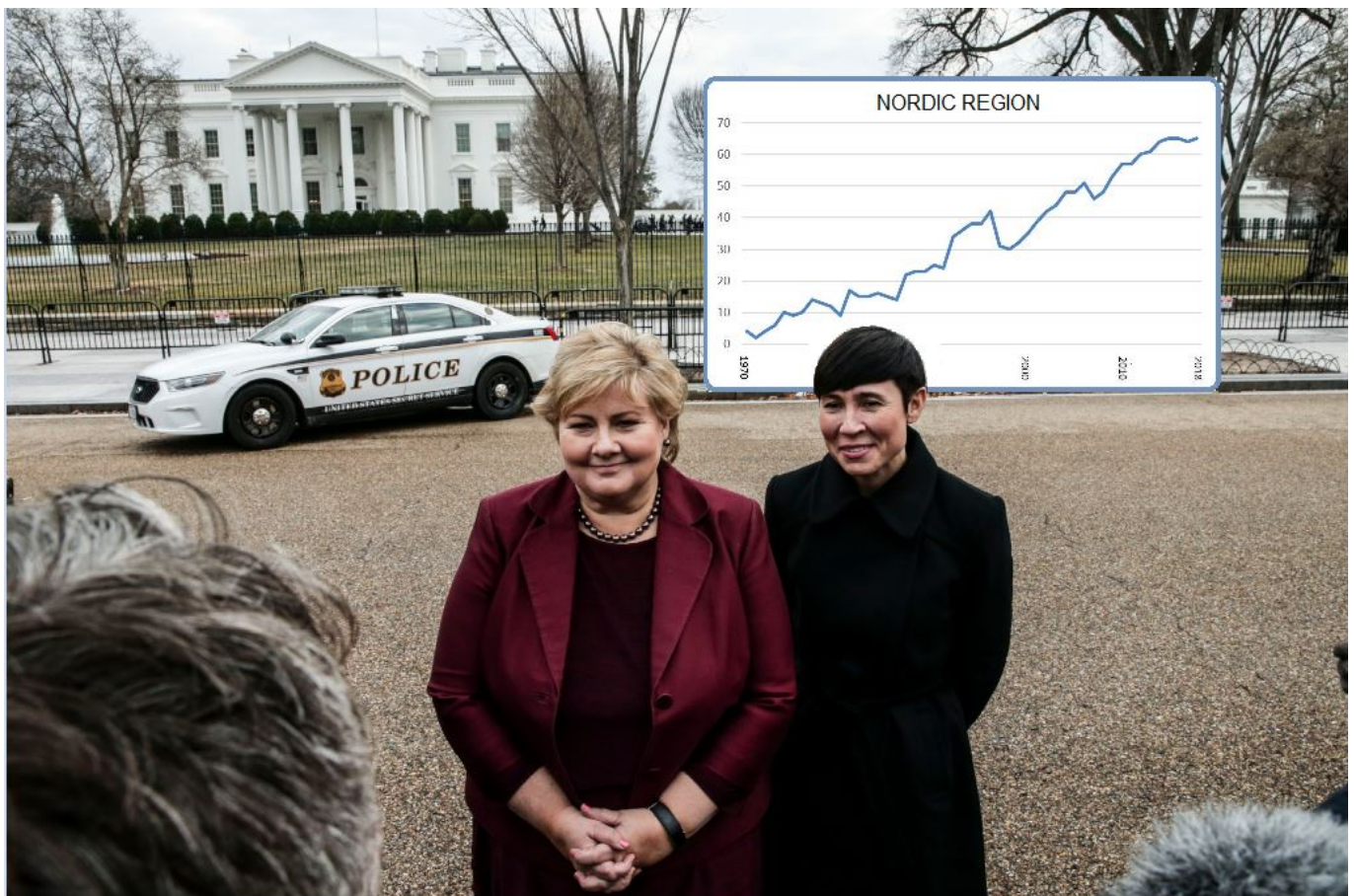
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Mar 08, 2018

Theme: New measures in the fight for gender equality in the Nordics



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Nordic gender equality 2018 – from #metoo to new structures

#metoo has thrown the spotlight on sexual harassment and indecent behaviour towards women, and marks a new chapter when it comes to discrimination. But loud voices, engagement and structural measures are all needed to achieve gender equality. The Nordic Labour Journal's gender equality barometer shows that the Nordic countries are developing in somewhat different directions, yet action is being taken to target inequalities.

EDITORIAL

07.03.2018

BY BERIT KVAM

The NLJ's gender equality barometer looks at the proportion of men and women in 24 positions of power in the Nordic countries. This year's barometer shows Norway still in the lead, while Finland has seen a negative development. OECD statistics show that Finland also lags behind the rest of the Nordics in other areas: The gender pay gap is wider and well above the OECD average, female unemployment is higher and the employment rate is several percentage points lower than in the rest of the Nordic region.

Finland is also the country with the fewest nursery places – only half of two year olds have nursery places compared to 90 percent in other Nordic countries. In the story "Finnish home care support increases inequality" the action group Mothers in Business call for the abolition of the home care support system, which allows parents to stay at home with their children beyond the normal parental leave period: "It is a women's trap".

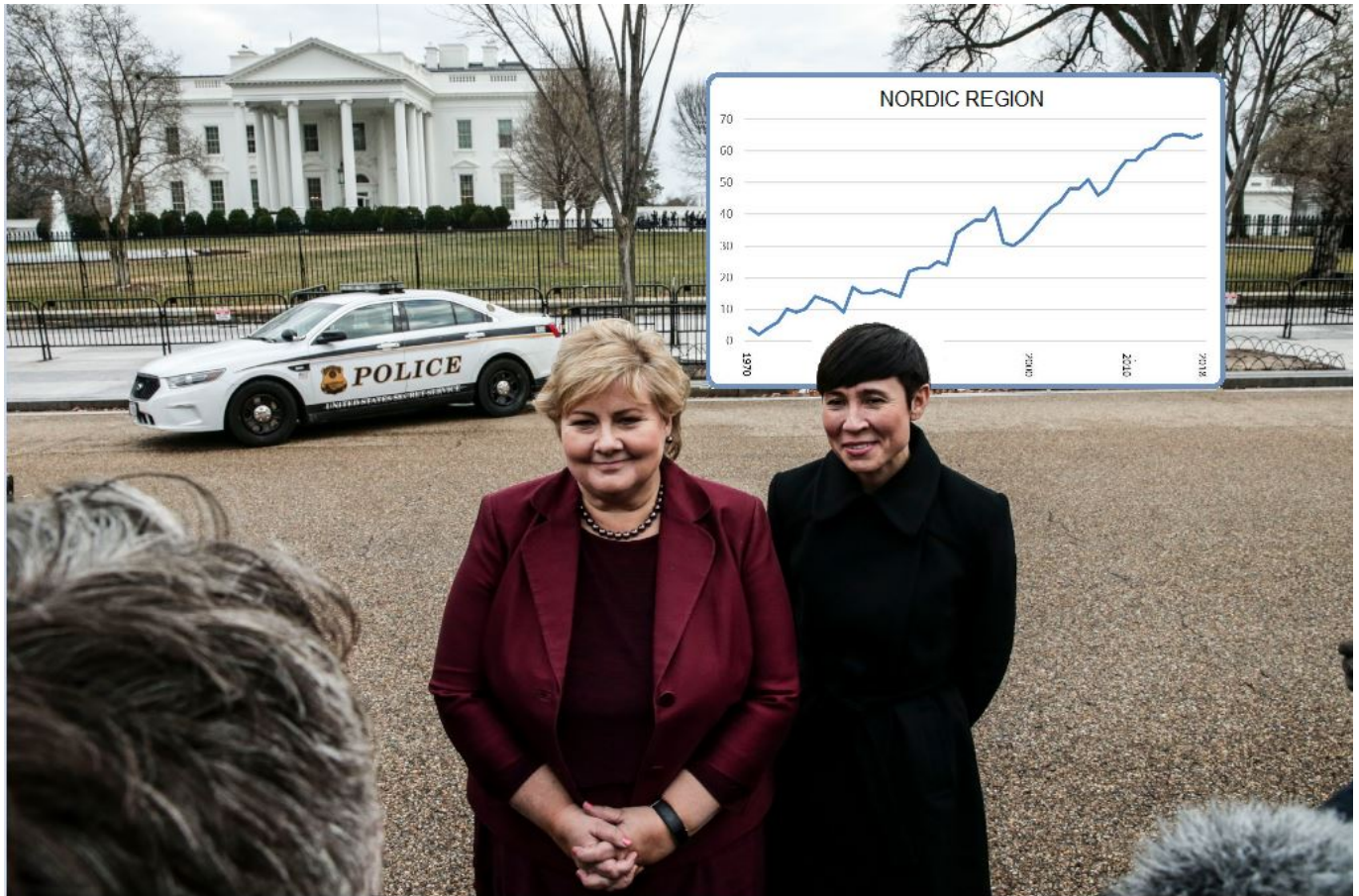
Denmark and Sweden go in the opposite direction, and pay extra to get women into the labour market. Region Gotland has a double goal with the extra cash; to increase salaries in female-dominated professions and to fill labour shortages. In the story "Earmarked equal pay pool to reduce gender pay gap", parts of the trade union movement and the Danish parliament propose to introduce a special pot of money to increase wages in female-dominated professions. Yet more is needed to close the gender pay gap, believes head of research Lisbeth Pedersen. She encourages Nordic countries to come together and focus on equal pay.

The gender divided labour market is a problem on many levels, and contributes to maintaining inequality. Unequal recruitment is a challenge which the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, is trying to do something

about, by inspiring girls to chose sciences. "Ada" is one of several recruitment projects aimed at girls at NTNU, and the rest of the Nordic region is following suit. The Aalto University in Finland, KTH in Stockholm, Chalmers in Gothenburg, the Luleå University of Technology, the Technical University of Denmark and Aarhus University have all visited NTNU to learn about the recruitment of girls.

A range of efforts aim to change structures that maintain inequality and discrimination. This year, Iceland is introducing a legally binding equal pay standard which by 2021 will cover all companies employing more than 25 people. This has led to so much international interest that Icelandic authorities have set up a dedicated website to provide information about the law.

"I believe that doing more for gender equality is one of the tools I can use to improve the quality of my own institution," says Curt Rice. He is Rector at Norway's new university OsloMet, a gender equality champion and the chair of the Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research 2018-2021. He has been an adviser to the Nobel committees on how to increase the number of female laureates: Give all the prizes to just women one year, he proposes. That would create enormous engagement. There is an awakening taking place. #metoo has opened our eyes to gender inequality anew, and shows the need for structural change, just like the Nordic trade union conference on the topic points to.



Women tighten grip on power in Norway - bottom place for Finland

When Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg met the world's most powerful man, alongside her was also Norway's first ever female Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ine Eriksen Søreide. Norway still leads NLJ's gender equality barometer by a good margin, while Finland has fewer women in positions of power than any Nordic country has had for 19 years.

THEME

07.03.2018

TEXT AND GRAPHICS: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: THOMAS NILSSON, VG

2017 was the year #metoo swept across the world, and especially in the Nordic region. But what are the political consequences? The Nordic Labour Journal's annual gender equality barometer, which looks at whether women or men hold 24 different positions of power in each country, shows small but at times historic changes.



Every year we dish out 200 points, 40 in each country. The 24 positions of power have different numbers of points, from one point for an ordinary government minister, rising to five for the prime minister. When women achieve 100 points across the Nordic region, or 20 in one of the countries, we consider gender equality to have been achieved in this, albeit limited, field.

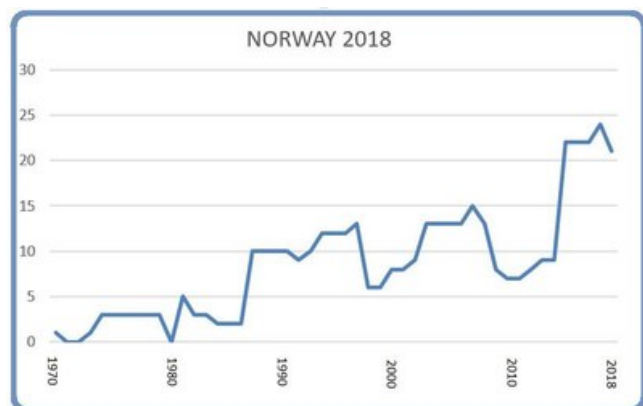
We do our measurement on International Women’s Day, 8 March. Last year Nordic women secured 64 points. This year, thanks to Iceland’s new government led by Katrin Jakobsdóttir, they score one more and the final result is 65. This falls short of the 2015 record of 67 points, but is still the second highest score so far.

With Erna Solberg and Katrin Jakobsdóttir, the Nordics have two of Europe’s six female prime ministers. The four other countries with female leaders are Germany, Great Britain, Romania and Serbia.

Women have most power in Norway

The only country so far to get more than 20 points in the gender equality barometer is Norway. It breaks that limit again this year, but falls three points down to 21.

The reason is that the Norwegian LO has had a male leader since 2017, Hans-Christian Gabrielsen. He replaced Gerd Kristiansen. In our barometer, which focuses on the labour market and the areas the Nordic Council of Ministers cooperates on, the LO leader gets four points.



On the other hand, Norway did get its first ever female foreign minister last year – Ine Eriksen Søreide. She was appointed on 20 October, and the post gets two points. As she also left her position as defence minister to a man, this means just one extra point.

Other changes to the Norwegian government do not change the number of points awarded to the country. Never before have women held so much power as in the current government. Women hold three of the top posts: Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

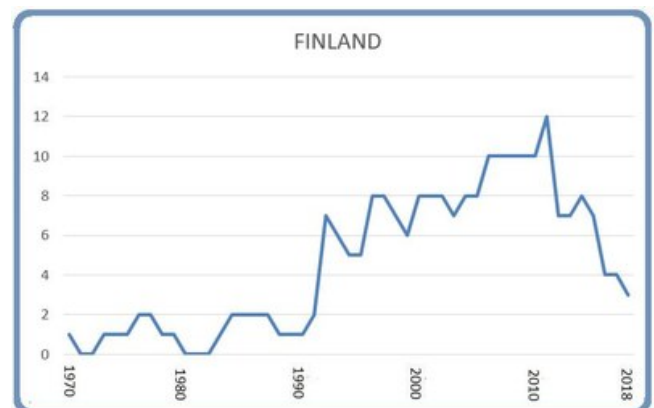
On 17 January this year, the Liberal Party (Venstre) became a new coalition partner, which means there are now three female party leaders in the government: Erna Solberg, Conservatives, Siv Jensen, Progress Party and Trine Skei Grande, the Liberal Party. It is a similar situation to that in Denmark between October 2011 to February 2014, when Helle Thorning Schmidt headed a coalition together with the Social Democratic Party, The Radical Liberal Party and the Socialist People’s Party – all of which had female leaders. Yet in the Danish government, both the finance ministry and foreign ministry were headed by men.

Norway is also the country where #metoo has had the largest political consequences. Trond Giske, who shared the deputy leadership of the Labour Party with Hadia Tajik, was accused of having harassed a number of young women. As a result, he stepped down from his post in January, and also left his position as financial spokesperson for the parliamentary Labour Party

The Conservatives, Progress Party and Liberal Party were also hit by #metoo revelations.

Finland with just three points

Finland is at the opposite end of the scale from Norway. Political life there has seen few changes. President Sauli Niinistö was re-elected on 28 January last year for another six year term, securing 62.7 percent of votes.



Prime Minister Juha Sipilä’s government celebrated 1,000 days in power on 21 February. Six of its 17 members are women, including Minister of Local Government and Public

Reforms Anu Vehviläinen, who is the country’s longest serving government minister with a total of 2,526 days of service, since she has also been a member of other governments.

But the only female ministers among the 13 posts that we measure, include the Minister of Education Sanni Grahn-Lassonen, Minister of Social Affairs and Health Pirkko Mattila and Minister of Transport and Communications Anne Berner. This translates into three points. Finland does not get more points because there are no female leaders in the posts we measure within the labour market, nor in symbolically important posts elsewhere.

Last year Sanni Grahn-Lassonen secured an extra point, since she at the time was both the Minister for Education and for Culture. But on 5 May 2017 she lost her culture portfolio. The last time a Nordic country got this low level of points was 19 years ago.

Close to a Swedish government crisis



Sweden faced a government crisis in July 2017, when it emerged the Minister for Infrastructure Anna Johansson had contracted out the running of sensitive internal computer systems to countries like Serbia.

Johansson was forced to resign and was replaced by Tomas Enerot. As a result, Sweden loses a point in the gender equality barometer and ends up with 14 points in total.

Otherwise there have not been any changes to the gender balance, even though there are some new faces in some of the positions of power.

The Chairman of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, Leif Östling, stepped down in November 2017 in the wake of his comments on taxation policies. A new chair will be elected in May 2018. Fredrik Peterson holds the position until then. A new national police commissioner, Anders Thonberg, has also been appointed.

Stable in Denmark

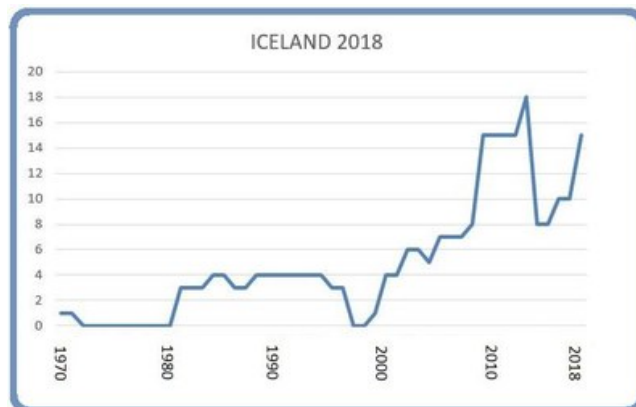


Things have remained stable in Denmark. Lars Løkke Rasmussen’s government now comprises 40 percent women – nine out of 22 government ministers are female. But the weightiest positions are still filled by men, and in our barometer the Danish government scores no more than the Finnish, only three points.

Lizette Risgaard, LO President, and Bente Sorgenfrey, President of the Salaried Employees’ and Civil Servants’ Confederation (FTF) push Denmark up to 12 points, the same as last year. Denmark also has the Nordic region’s only female head of state in Queen Margrethe.

Change of power in Iceland

As mentioned above, Iceland has seen the greatest increase, from nine to 14 points. Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdóttir’s coalition comprises her own party, the Left-Green Movement, the Independence Party and the Progressive Party.



At the start of the year, Iceland introduced a new gender equality law. All companies with more than 25 employees must now prove that wages are fairly divided between the sexes.

#metoo has coloured the Icelandic debate too, with campaigns from actors and priests. 300 female politicians signed

a petition in November 2017 and spoke out about various levels of sexual harassment.

Read the entire gender equality barometer (in Swedish) here:

How should trade unions handle #metoo?

The #metoo movement's many appalling stories show that parallel to rules and regulations there has been culture of silence which has made sexual assaults and harassment possible. This is a challenge for trade unions on all levels, concluded Nordic trade union representatives at a meeting in Stockholm in February.

THEME

07.03.2018

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“In the 70s we fought for legislation and rules which should bring more gender equality and protection against sexual harassment, but we didn't change the culture. #metoo shows that there still is a culture of silence and that we have failed to reach the root causes of the problem,” said Sharan Burrow, Secretary General of the International Trade Union Confederation ITUC on a link from Brussels.

The lunch seminar ‘#metoo – Nordic trade union tools in a global perspective’ was hosted by the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) in February, and attracted a lot of interest. The seminar was quickly fully subscribed, and many had to make do with following the livestream. The organisers were the Council of Nordic Trade Unions NFS, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees and ‘Union to Union’ – a non-profit organisation made up by the three central trade unions LO, TCO and Saco. It runs trade union development projects around the world. Now the question was – what can trade unions do to prevent the sexual harassment and assaults which #metoo has highlighted in all its brutality?

Different levels in different countries

The #metoo campaign has manifested itself differently in the different Nordic countries. In Sweden, women from 65 different trades have signed up to the #metoo campaign using different hashtags, including the trade unions' #inteförhandlingsbart (non-negotiable). In Finland, however, #metoo has not had the same impact, says Ann Selin from the Service Union United PAM, who is also President of Uni Global. She explains that this is partly down to cultural reasons.

“There is a Finnish saying; silence is golden. This creates a climate in which women do not dare to tell anyone about harassment. Finland is also a small nation and people are afraid of talking about such issues because it could have a direct impact on their chances of getting a job,” said Ann Selin.

She also pointed out the importance of safe employment. People on permanent contracts are less exposed than all the women who have temporary or precarious work. In other words: the less secure the contract, the greater the risk of sexual harassed in the workplace.

There have been many #metoo campaigns in Norway too. In the wake of the movement, many women have dared to come forward with their stories and to report harassment and abuse. Some have landed like a bombshell, not least claims within political parties leading to the resignation of the Labour Party's deputy leader.

“#metoo has sent shockwaves into the Norwegian labour market. Trade unions have dealt with these issues for a long time, but thanks to #metoo things have shifted up a gear. We have to use that to our advantage,” says Peggy Hessen Følsvik, Vice President at Norwegian LO.

”That's enough”

TCO President Eva Nordmark described her feelings about the #metoo movement as a mix of distress and hope.

“I have felt anger and sorrow over the stories that have been told, but also hope. #metoo also tells the world ‘that's enough’. There is a strength there, and it must be cultivated,” she said.

Eva Nordmark believes it is important to take responsibility and to be self-critical. Could anything have been done differently? She also wants the trade union movement to look at itself. What is OK and what is not? What is the negotiating climate like? Is there enough acceptance? Or is there a sexist jargon?

“This conversation must be had on a daily basis, and we must all take responsibility for speaking out when we feel something is not OK. The only way to do this is to bring these issues down to a workplace level. LO, TO and Saco represent

3.5 million members. If everyone addresses the issue and speak up every time they hear a sexist joke or witness sexual harassment, imagine the power we have to change Swedish working life,” said Eva Nordmark.

All of the trade union representatives believe #metoo and the many stories in its wake have given a lot of ammunition for addressing the issue of sexual harassment. No employer can now dismiss the issue with ‘That’s not happening here’. But in order to create real change, there is a need for grassroots work among trade unions.

Anyone who believe they have been a victim of assault must be made to feel safe reporting it, and must also know who to tell. The local trade union representative must also know what needs to be done. Trade unions themselves could also end up in a situation where both alleged victim and alleged perpetrator are members. Knowledge and routines are needed in order to address this, pointed out Magnus Hedberg, head of the Saco affiliated Jusek trade union.

“We need to equip our members and trade union representatives with the right tools to increase awareness.”



"Finnish home care support increases inequality"

Fewer Finnish children go to nursery than elsewhere in the Nordic region. One reason is the home care support, paid to parents who chose to stay at home beyond the normal parental leave period. The organisation Mothers in Business wants to scrap the benefit altogether, calling it a trap for women.

THEME

07.03.2018

TEXT: MARCUS FLOMAN, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

Finnish children start nursery much later than elsewhere in the Nordic region. Half of Finnish two year olds attend nursery, while in Denmark, Norway and Sweden the figure is nearly 90 percent, according to 2017 figures from the Finnish think tank Agenda. Families with children under three who do not attend nursery can be granted child care leave, collecting a small benefit from the Social Insurance Institution.

Nine in ten mothers care for children at home

At the baby café in the meeting space Lilla Luckan in central Helsinki, there is a familiar view: A group of mothers and their babies.

The baby café is open to all parents, but just like it was decades ago at similar meeting points, you rarely spot fathers here.

Maria is starting her child care leave with her daughter this week.

"We could have made a different choice, but in the end we went for the traditional one. We did like many others, and I as the mother stayed at home with the child. We both agreed and I really wanted to stay at home with the child."

How important was the family's economy for the decision?

"From an economic point of view, this is not the best solution. I earn more than my husband. But I would rather stay at home, and he would rather be working," says Maria.

So what is child care leave? It is a continuation parental leave which parents of small children in Finland take if they do not want their child to attend nursery. Home care support can be claimed until the child is three. Critics say the contribution is too low, starting at 334 euro and rising to around 650 euro, depending on the family's total income and where they live.

As a comparison, the maternal benefit, which is paid out over four months, represents 90 percent of a person's salary. Critics also say politicians should sit up and notice that 90 percent of child care leave is taken by women in the middle of their careers, arguing the benefit works as a trap for women.

Rosa, who now stays at home with the family's second child, is also on child care leave.

"In our case the father earned more than me, and since he is a business owner it was a better solution for me to stay at home. It would have been economically risky in the long term for my husband to take a break from the company.

"In general, I consider the benefit to be so low that it encourages most people to try to work instead. You cannot live off the child care support."

Rosa highlights an important issue which makes it hard for many families to consider early on whether to put small children into nursery.

"The problem is that there are not enough nursery places, not in Helsinki anyway. The lack of nursery places near where you live is an important reason why you stay at home with the child. So I choose to live a bit frugally for a while, using savings," says Rosa.

Network pushing for total gender equality

The gender pay gap in Finland has often been explained as one woman's euro being worth 80 cent. Recent figures from the Finnish Centre for Pensions show Finnish women's average wage is 76 percent that of men. The 2017 statistic took into account income from both full-time and part-time work plus bonuses and perks.

As a way of fighting gender pay gaps, a network of higher educated women, Mothers in Business (MIB), are campaigning to improve mothers' opportunities to combine parenthood and work.

MIB are pushing hard to get rid of child care leave in Finland. The network has developed a model for parental leave with the key figure of 9 + 9. MIB wants both parents to share parental leave exactly half and half.



Kristiina Paavola and Mirva Niskasaari at the Women in Business organisation

"If Iceland can manage to develop a 3 + 3 + 3 model where the last three months can be chosen by either parent, I believe we can definitely manage a 9 + 9 model," says Kristiina Paavola, one of the network's founders. She is now working on a PhD on labour market issues at the University of Tampere.

"There are many factors that contribute to pay gaps in the Finnish labour market, like structural issues and attitudes. But if we want to change things on a political level through legislation, a reform of parental leave policies is completely necessary," thinks Paavola.

Paavola highlight the MIB's desire to scrap home care support. Since mothers are usually the ones opting to stay at home, this contributes to the weakening of women's career opportunities, she argues.

"In our model, families do not lose out financially if the home care support is scrapped. Over a period of nine months, both parents would be entitled to 90 percent of their wage for the first four and then 70 percent for the final five months. This model could also tempt more fathers to stay at home for longer," says Paavola.

Mothers in Business have used an economic model which they argue would not cost more for society and the social partners than the current model does.

Halted family reform

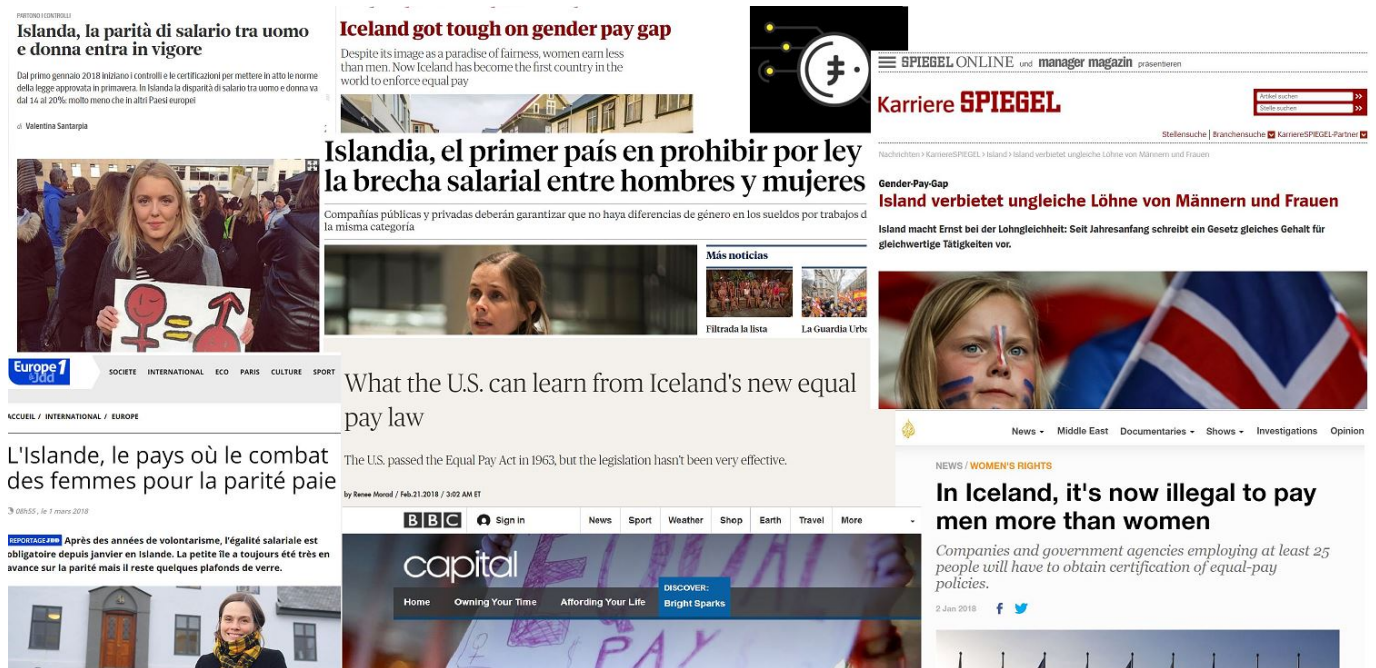
In mid-February 2018 the government put the brakes on a parental leave reform which had been aimed at increasing women's employment levels, while also earmarking more parental leave for fathers.

The Prime Minister's Centre Party has been a leading proponent of home care support. Long traditions with large families and traditional family values are core among the party's strong rural base. Those who want to keep the support also argue for the right of the child to spend time at home with its parents.

The reform fell at the last hurdle, yet soon after it failed several members from the governing National Coalition Party said they would raise the issue again in the coming months.

Mirva Niskasaari, an MIB board member and vice judge in her professional life, says Finland is often considered to be at the forefront of gender equality issues, but that this is not always the case in the real world.

"Pretty much everyone in Finland are proud of the country's gender equality levels, but the way in which parental leave is really divided shows we have a very long way to go before we achieve total gender equality. Today's system, where families can choose who looks after the children, clearly does not create gender equality. That's why we need social control," says Niskasaari.



Enormous interest for Icelandic equal pay standard

Iceland is the first country in the world to make it legally binding for all companies with more than 25 employees to have an equal pay standard. The law says there should be equal pay for equal work for women and men in the same workplace. This has gained international attention.

THEME
07.03.2018
TEXT AND PHOTO: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR

The new equal pay standard law came into force on 1 January 2018. It has created so much interest that the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare has set up a website in English to answer questions about the law, provide information about the equal pay standard and how it is being introduced. The Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland also plans to set up a website soon. Icelandic Standards (IST), the national standards body of Iceland, allows companies to purchase the certification in English.

The Director of the Centre for Gender Equality, Katrín Björg Ríkarðsdóttir, says authorities and media from abroad have been in touch with Icelandic authorities to ask about the law and the Icelandic state's plans for the equal pay standard which should be fully in place by 2021.

Questions include how the standard actually works, which companies must adhere to it, whether the standard means that everyone will know what people are paid etc.

Biggest companies first to join

The timescale looks like this:

- By the end of 2018, all companies employing more than 250 people must have introduced the equal pay standard.
- During 2019, companies employing 150 to 249 people must introduce the standard.
- By 2020, all companies employing 90 to 149 people must introduce the standard.
- Companies employing 25 to 89 people must introduce the standard by the end of 2021 at the latest.

Companies will be assessed every three years.

The equal pay standard has been the great aim of member of parliament Þorsteinn Víglundsson, both during his time as leader for the Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise (SA) and as Iceland's Minister of Social Affairs in 2017.

Þorsteinn points out that an equal pay standard experiment finished in 2016. It was originally meant to be voluntary, but it was later decided to introduce a legally binding system.

“Experience shows us the best results are reached when such a standard is enshrined in law,” says Þorsteinn Víglundsson.

Most of Iceland's labour market is made up by companies employing between 25 and 100 people. Þorsteinn does not think it would be possible to achieve the same results if smaller companies were not legally bound by the equal pay standard.

“I understand the labour market's criticism that the equal pay standard can feel inconvenient. But it is also expensive for the state when women are paid less than men,” he says.

One result is that women who are always paid less than men because of the gender pay gap, end up with lower pensions,

“Society as a whole is completely opposed to gender pay gaps. That is why we have to use any tools available to us to eradicate wage differences between the sexes, and that is why the equal pay standard has been made obligatory,” says Þorsteinn Víglundsson.



Gender equality money to draw people to professions with labour shortages

Region Gotland has decided to set aside extra money for this year's wage review to fill the pay gap and to help professions facing labour shortages. The hope is that the right money can get existing workers to stay and tempt new ones to come and work on the island.

NEWS

07.03.2018

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: JOHANNES JANSSON/NORDEN.ORG

Region Gotland has put aside 22 million kronor (€2.15m) for 2018 aimed at professions struggling with recruitment. The money will also be spent on bridging pay gaps. What is unique is that the region links the gender equality drive to professions with labour shortages in schools and the health and care sector – where you find the major female-dominated professions. These have fallen behind in terms of salary levels in later years, and the pay gap has had an effect on both recruitment and people's willingness to stay in their jobs.



“If you keep wages down for large groups over many years, things go wrong. Even if the job is exciting, there is a risk that people tire and quit if wage gaps become too wide compared to the rest of the labour market. A large pay gap makes it harder to recruit and keep hold of people within our professions, which are also largely female-dominated,” says Lotta Israelsson, HR strategist for Region Gotland.

Annual wage reviews

It became clear during the annual wage review, which all companies must carry out according to the Swedish Equal Opportunities Act, that some female-dominated professions were lagging behind on pay. Employers use the annual wage review to look at pay gaps between men and women in the same profession, but they also compare female-dominated professions with similar male-dominated ones.

There are several explanations to the unfair wage differences. One problem is the fact that female-dominated professions employ far more people than many of the male-dominated professions they are compared to. As a result, it takes longer to catch up on wage increases. Another explanation is public sector cuts.

“All administrations work with competence maintenance all year round. This can affect gender equality when it comes to recruiting people to professions suffering from labour shortages. Imagine you have 30 engineers and 300 nurses, and there is a labour shortage in both professions. One is female-dominated and the other is male-dominated, plus you are dealing with different salary levels. You end up with an uneven distribution. It does look like more money is put into recruiting engineers than nurses,” says Lotta Israelsson.

Extra money without competition

Like many other municipalities, Gotland is struggling to recruit enough people to the health and care sectors and to education. There is also a need for more social workers and teachers. By this summer, for instance, 500 new people are needed in Gotland’s care sector.

Being an island in the middle of the Baltic Sea has its advantages and disadvantages when it comes to recruitment. The island with its medieval city of Visby is a popular holiday destination and has seen a population growth in recent years. Nearly 59,000 people live in Gotland today. At the same time, the mainland is far away, and housing is often expensive for those who want to move to the island.

Region Gotland employs 6,500 people and is by far the largest employer on the island. It deals with everything which normally is taken care of by the municipality, the county council and the county administrative board. That means equal pay measures can be targeted at professions which suffer from the greatest labour shortages, avoiding a competition between the health care administrations and municipal care, as is the case in many other parts of the country.

“We are lucky, we can coordinate and create a universal wage structure rather than outbid each other internally,” says Lotta Israelsson.

Wage formation becomes a way of fixing unfair wage gaps, and the extra 22 million kronor also fall outside of the ordinary salary budget. It has been decided how to divide the money after HR heads from different authorities have assessed recruitment needs and where women’s salaries are lagging behind. This year teachers and staff in the health and care sector are given special priority.

“But we must not stop there. Other large female-dominated groups also lack staff, for instance nurses and social workers,” says Lotta Israelsson.

Wages not the only draw

The salary review and mapping of labour shortages shows another 30 million kroner would be needed to eradicate pay gaps and fix labour shortages this year. But the extra money is only the beginning of a longer term project, says Lotta Israelsson. Attracting the right competencies and getting people to stay in their jobs is a long term effort which must be carried out on many levels. Equal pay is one way. Working with leadership and organisations is another.

“We have to ask ourselves; what will tomorrow’s workplaces look like? What will future employers be like? Now personnel issues are in focus. Organisations that understand leadership and organisation will have greater success,” says Lotta Israelsson.



Norwegian technical studies recruitment a model for Nordic universities

A considerable proportion of girls choose not to study sciences and technology. The Norwegian University of Science and Technology NTNU in Trondheim has chosen to hold several fairs to recruit girls. The rest of the Nordics will follow, the “girl agents” say.

NEWS

07.03.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN

“A recruitment fair helps us see opportunities we did not know about before, and we are inspired. I am not quite sure what I want to study. I have become more interested in sciences now, because I like mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry. This makes us motivated and more keen to go for it,” says secondary school student Maja Stenøien (15).

She is participating at the ‘Jentekonferansen 2018’ (the girls’ conference) at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology NTNU, which provides information and motivation for young people about to choose what to study.

“This is very topical as we are about to choose topics at secondary school, and later we must choose university courses. I think I will be choosing more sciences going forward,” says Oda Groth Brodtkorb (15).

The friends agree that the role models presented at Jentekonferansen 2018 have inspired them both.



Oda Groth Brodtkorb, Isabelle Ringnes and Maja Stenøien

A need for role models

At Jentekonferansen 2018, young women talk about their good experiences from working life and from university, passing on their motivation and skills to the 350 girls from schools in and around Trondheim who listen in the auditorium.

One of the role models is Isabelle Ringnes, who heads the TENK network. They aim to inspire women to study technology and find jobs in the sector.

“It is very important to use Jentekonferansen 2018 to showcase the scope of opportunities which technology presents. A technical education is not for everyone. But we will all be using more technology in one way or other. Young women who choose technology will be part of creating things which will influence many generations to come.

“Especially when it comes to artificial intelligence, which I believe will become a bit like electricity used to be. AI will soon open up for an amazing numbers of services and products. Women need to help shape this development,” says Ringnes.

Camilla Haaheim Larsen is one of the other role models. She is studying computer engineering, and pointed out that you do not have to worry about being a girl studying topics dominated by men.

“I started studying this myself after an event for girls. People are young when they choose what to study. It can be hard to get enough information. That’s why I believe conferences like this inspire, and push more girls into choosing science and technology,” says Larsen.

She has also been talking about her experiences in front of the girls in the auditorium, alongside Kari Vatne Eide. She is head of construction and a quality control engineer at the Norwegian Public Roads Administration. Student of engineering Kristin Petterson talked about her experiences from her machining course.



Jentekonferansen 2018 was held at three other universities on the same day as the NTNU event.

Other Nordic countries are copying Norway

Line Berg heads ‘Ada’, one of several similar NTNU recruitment projects aimed at girls. Other Nordic universities have copied ‘Ada’. The Aalto University in Finland, KTH in Stockholm, Chalmers in Gothenburg, the Luleå University of Technology, the Technical University of Denmark and Aarhus University have all visited NTNU to learn about the recruitment of girls.

“The visitors have been looking at our technology camp for girls, and have been learning about our recruitment practices.”

The exchanges have been followed up with meetings. Several of the universities have arranged similar events. The number of girls have risen at two of the universities in the wake of such events. These measures are needed if you want to increase the number of female students.

Earmarked equal pay pool to reduce gender pay gap

Danish trade unions and political parties have proposed to earmark a separate pool of money to increase pay in traditional female occupations. One expert calls it a necessary first step, but warns more is needed to get rid of gender divisions in the labour market altogether.

THEME

07.03.2018

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

For decades, wages in female-dominated occupations have been considerably lower than in male-dominated ones. But this is coming to an end, say a range of Danish trade unions and political parties. They have joined forces to push for real change, proposing an earmarked pool of money to increase wages in low-salary jobs, which typically employ many women.

For the first time, trade unions have introduced an equal pay pool as one of their demand for yet to be concluded collective agreement negotiations for municipal and regional employees. They want parts of the wage framework to be earmarked an equal pay pool for low-wage areas.

More is needed

The demand for an equal pay pool has been presented by four trade unions whose members work in female-dominated occupations: BUPL (The union of pedagogues in Denmark), Socialpædagogerne (social pedagogues), FOA (The Danish Union of Public Employees) and Sundhedskartellet (The Health Confederation).

Other trade unions representing workers in the public sector have also decided to join in, including the 51 trade unions in the Danish Association of Local Government Employees Organisations.

It is still not clear whether the pool will become part of the final collective agreement, and it is also not clear whether such a pool would be enough to close the pay gap. It is an important first step, but more is needed, argues the leaders of BUPL, Socialpædagogerne, FOA and Sundhedskartellet. They have appealed to the political parties in the Danish parliament to also work towards an equal pay pool.

“We are taking the first, important step from the employees’ side. But if our daughters are ever to experience real wage equality in the labour market, we also need politicians to take

responsibility by taking action to break the trend,” the four union leaders have said.

So far, two political parties have heeded that call. In February 2018, the Red-Green Alliance together with The Alternative moved for a resolution on an earmarked pool for equal pay with the aim of securing higher wages in traditionally female-dominated occupations, where pay still remains lower than in comparable male-dominated occupations.



Against the Danish model

One of Denmark's leading gender equality and equal pay researchers, Lisbeth Pedersen, calls it an unusual situation. She is head of research at VIVE – The Danish Center for Social Science Research.

“Asking parliament to take action in this way goes against the Danish model, where the social partners usually negotiate and reach agreements by themselves. So this is met with opposition both from employers and some trade unions. On the other hand, the state is the employer for public employees, and we have seen political intervention before,” says Lisbeth Pedersen.

If an equal pay pool becomes reality, its effect will depend on how the social partners will make use of it, she points out.

“In that case, there is no doubt that the social partners will be the ones deciding how the resources in an equal pay pool are to be divided, and its effect will depend on how things are executed on a local level.”

Difficult to change

Wage equality between Danish men and women is rooted in a system for public employees which was introduced in 1969. It set a lower wage level for women's jobs than for men's jobs, because women's wages were considered to be a complementary income to the man's income. This is no longer the case,

but the wage structure remains because of the wage negotiation tradition to award all sectors the same percentage wage increase.

As a result, explains Lisbeth Pedersen, female-dominated occupations remain lower down on the wage ladder. She believes an equal pay pool is a necessary part of a bigger solution, but predicts that it will be difficult to execute:

“The wage gaps will only disappear if some groups get more than others during wage negotiations. This is unusual, and depends on everyone agreeing it is a good idea.”

It will also take patience, underlines Lisbeth Pedersen. An earmarked equal pay pool must be in place for several years before results start to show. A one-off pool is not enough.

A need for Nordic dialogue

The most important reason behind the gender pay gap in Denmark, is that women are more likely to work in the public sector, where pay is lower than in the private sector. That is why it is important to make the public and private sectors equally attractive for men and women, says Lisbeth Pedersen.

She also recommends more openness around wages.

“Creating openness around wage levels would also promote equal pay. Many people have no idea that pay gaps even exist in their workplace, and if this became known it would also be discussed,” she says.

She encourages all the Nordic countries to work together to focus on equal pay.

“Most Nordic countries are better than Denmark at looking into and finding solutions to pay inequality. All Nordic countries can learn from each other's methods and will benefit from having a dialogue and from challenging each other,” says Lisbeth Pedersen.

Swedish social partners warn against EU directive on employment conditions

Is the EU about to take over member states' prerogative to regulate employment and working conditions? Yes, this is what may happen if the Commission's proposal for a directive 'for more transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union' is passed, warn both trade unions and employers in Sweden.

NEWS

01.03.2018

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

A 1991 EU directive says employers must provide employees with written information about the essential employment and working conditions, no later than two months after they were hired. The directive says nothing about the content of those terms – only that the employer must provide information about them, whatever they might be.

For European employers, who usually consider employment conditions to be something which is regulated by member states and not on an EU level, this is a relatively harmless directive.

Three days before Christmas Eve last year, however, the European Commission presented a proposal for a directive 'on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union', aimed at replacing the 1991 directive. This has led to an outcry from employers. Not only that – in Sweden the trade union confederations LO, TCO and Saco are joining forces with the employers.

The employers' organisations and the trade unions agree that a directive like the one proposed by the Commission would deal a deadly blow to the tradition of regulating employment and working conditions through collective agreements. It would also be detrimental to the social partners' autonomy in an area where they now operate freely.

In the long term, they see the proposal as a first step towards the EU gradually taking over member states' right of self-determination when it comes to regulating employment and working conditions. The proposed directive is only one of the first initiatives in the Commission's strategy to realise the so-called European Pillar of Social Rights, which in itself does not have any legally binding rules.

Strengthening the obligation to inform...

The reason the old directive no longer works, according to the Commission, is partly because its rules do not have to be applied to workers on short-term or temporary contracts, and partly because member states themselves decide who they consider to be employees – which again determines whether or not they are covered by the directive.

Meanwhile, a quarter of a century later, the labour market has moved on, and short-term jobs plus completely new, 'atypical' forms of employment (e.g. zero hours contracts, seasonal work and platform economy jobs) have become more common. As a result, the directive no longer protects those who might need it the most.

The Commission's proposed solution comes in three parts. Firstly, the possibility to exclude workers on short-term contracts from the protection offered by the directive will be limited, and it will no longer be up to the member states themselves to define who constitutes an employee.

Secondly, employers must provide employees with more detailed information than they do now, and the information must be provided by the day they start working.

...and introducing substantive rights

Thirdly – and this is where the crucial change comes in – the new directive will also contain a set of substantive minimum rights which will cover all employees within the EU, regardless of their type of employment. In other words, the directive will no longer simply say employees have the right to be informed about their employment conditions – it will also regulate what these conditions are.

- Probationary periods cannot be longer than six months.

- So-called exclusivity clauses that prevent employees from working for other employers will as a rule not be allowed.
- Employees with irregular working hours must be informed about their schedule in plenty time.
- Employees who have been with the same employer for at least six months will have the right to apply to be moved to a different, more predictable and secure form of employment (if available).
- If the employer is obliged to provide certain training needed for the employee to carry out his or her job, the training should be provided free of cost for the employee.

However Member states will be able to let the social partners enter into collective agreements establishing other employment conditions, as long as they respect 'the overall protection of workers'.

What is the problem?

These are the seemingly modest proposals against which both employers and trade unions in Sweden are forming a united front. Both sides agree the old directive needs to be updated to reflect the reality of today's labour market. At the same time they oppose the idea that member states no longer will be able to define who is an employee, and they also oppose the introduction of substantive rights into the directive.

The definition of employee, which is key for whether an individual is at all covered by a member state's labour law, has been developed through case law in Sweden, and as such is continuously adapted to reflect developments in the labour market. If a new definition was introduced on an EU level, not only do you risk unwanted consequences for labour law – it could also influence legal areas where member states have exclusive competence to regulate, for instance when it comes to social security and tax legislation, the social partners argue.

As for the proposed substantive employment and working conditions, these relate to issues which are covered in collective agreements in the Swedish labour market. This allows the partners to adapt the rules to trade specific conditions and to individual companies. With the relatively detailed rules proposed by the Commission, in future the EU would decide which conditions would apply, and set limits to the social partners' freedom to adapt collective agreements to suit local conditions.

Because the collective agreements must take into account 'the overall protection of workers', the Court of Justice of the European Union would be granted the right to overrule collective agreements and decide, for instance, whether a collective agreement's scheduling rules give employees at least as much protection as the directive stipulates.

In line with the partners' shared view, all political parties in the Swedish parliament have agreed that the government

should resist any major changes to the Swedish model when negotiating the directive with other member states. It should try to limit changes to the part relating to information.

In any case, the definition of an employee should still be left to each member state's own law. If the directive does in the end contain provisions on substantive working conditions, the opportunity to enter into collective agreements laying down other rules should be made absolute, preventing the EU Court from trying whether the agreement's clauses fulfil the level of protection stipulated in the directive.

Split trade unions

Swedish trade unions are facing a dilemma since their comrades in the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) would very much like to see the Commission's proposal become reality. ETUC would like to see the directive contain even more substantive rights, for instance rules on minimum wages.

ETUC's position mirrors the fact that trade unions and collective agreements do not at all enjoy the same strong position in the majority of member states as they do in Sweden and the rest of the Nordic region. These trade unions therefore need the EU's help to secure decent minimum conditions.

The Nordic countries' labour market systems do share many characteristics, yet attitudes to the directive might vary even between them. The Danish government has, at the time of writing this, not yet given its position on the proposal, but has underlined that it values the tradition where the social partners regulate employment and working conditions through collective agreements.

Finland, however, is mainly positive to the Commission's proposal, according to a letter from the government to parliament. The views it has put forward so far have centred on the administrative burden which the proposed rules might impose on companies.