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# Theme: Nordic emergency preparedness



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## **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Björn Lindahl

## **EMAIL**

[nljeditor@gmail.com](mailto:nljeditor@gmail.com)

## **WEB**

[www.nordiclabourjournal.org](http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org)

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# Nordic preparedness put to the test

Rarely has the scout motto been more apt than right now. When the leader says “Be prepared!” the scouts answer “Always prepared!”

EDITORIAL

26.09.2023

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

But are we really? Have we and the authorities prepared for all eventualities? Nearly 600 days after Russia invaded Ukraine, emergency shelters are being reviewed and Nordic governments are setting aside money to renovate them.

It could have been worse: In 2010, nearly all emergency rooms in Sweden were shut down, says Anders Johannesson at the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency MSB.

As a start, 220 million Swedish kronor (€18.64m) has been earmarked for emergency shelters and the expansion of the rescue services in Sweden. But how much money is needed to make sure there are enough shelters for everyone?

After a wet and stormy summer, and thousands of people evacuated in Norway during extreme weather “Hans” between 7 and 9 August, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise NHO wants to see more work being done on preparedness. The insurance industry is working full tilt and construction workers are fixing damaged bridges and roads. Damages have been estimated to be nearly two billion Norwegian kroner (€15.6m).

Luckily no lives were lost and those who needed evacuating got to safety. When the roads are blocked, helicopters are being put to work. But there are limits to both the number of helicopters and pilots available – especially those who can carry out search and rescue jobs.

Europe’s largest school for the training of helicopter pilots is in Sandefjord in Norway. According to the school’s business manager, Anette Kruhaug Haldorsen, the authorities need to improve conditions for those who want to pass their pilot’s license. Today, students must pay for the training themselves, and it costs more than one million kroner. This limits the number of applicants.

According to her, there is a large recruitment backlog. And it takes many years for new pilots to gather the necessary experience and further training needed to carry out search and rescue tasks.

There is an acute shortage of bus drivers too. Sweden’s bus operators believe another 8,100 bus drivers are needed to staff existing public transport routes and longer bus routes.

The Covid-19 pandemic led to many bus drivers retiring, while the average age of the remaining ones is high. The buses play an important role when for instance railway services are hit by stoppages.

In certain areas, new technology like drones and mini-submarines have increased the capacity for surveillance as well as search and rescue. We report from the Norwegian Coast Guard vessel KV Heimdal. What used to be time-consuming controls to see whether a vessel uses diesel and not the far more polluting heavy oil fuel, can now be done by flying drones through a vessel’s exhaust.

Researchers say we must expect more wet and wild weather in the future, especially if we miss the climate goals.

Carbon capture and storage, CCS, is a crucial tool to meet climate targets on all levels: Globally with the Paris Agreement, closer to home with the EU targets and it is completely in step with Denmark’s 2030 goals, writes the Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities in a new report. 38 billion Danish kroner (€5.93bn) has been set aside for three CCS projects.

These are measures that could bring many new and green jobs. Interestingly, it is agricultural Denmark that also sees the opportunity to store enormous amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>. It is possible to use CO<sub>2</sub> in food production.

What people consider to be existential issues varies depending on their point of view. In Finland, trade unions are warning that the new centre-right four-party coalition government wants to make changes to labour legislation, including introducing fines both for unions and individual members if they carry out sympathy action during a strike when these are not considered “reasonable in light of their objectives”.

Denmark's largest trade union confederation, FH, has a new leader in Morten Skov Christiansen, which marks the end of a turbulent period. The former leader, Lizette Risgaard, stepped down at the end of April after having been accused of improper behaviour.

We also have a portrait of Info Norden which turns 25 this year. The organisation provides answers to citizens who move to or work in a different Nordic country.

Finally, there is a new Nordic report with four proposals for how to make it easier for cross-border workers to work from home.





## Sweden's bus driver shortage puts breaks on society

Good bus connections are crucial for many commuters. But no buses can run without bus drivers. Now, Sweden's transport sector organisation warns a lack of drivers could have serious socio-economic consequences.

THEME

26.09.2023

TEXT: FAYME ALM

Swedish bus companies took a serious hit during the Covid-19 pandemic as the number of passengers plummeted. The companies also received less state support than in other Nordic countries.

"In Sweden, we carried on driving while other countries closed down," says Anna Grönlund, deputy managing director at the Swedish Bus and Coach Federation.

"All of the Nordic countries gave support to their public transport operators, but it was not enough to cover lost ticket revenues. After the pandemic, we have seen a 10 per cent drop in passengers across the Nordics," she says.



*Anna Grönlund is the deputy managing director at the Swedish Bus and Coach Federation.*

“We also lost many of our drivers during the pandemic, as bus companies had to lay off people – especially in coach transport services as the authorities asked people not to travel together. Many of the bus drivers were over 60 and took the opportunity to retire.”

### **Cutting routes**

Fewer bus drivers means fewer departures and a cut in the number of bus routes. Access to public transport is important for where people choose to live, work and study. Weaker transport links also make it harder for local companies to hire staff.

The Nordic Labour Journal has taken a closer look at the impact the bus crisis has on public transportation in Skåne county, whose 1.4 million citizens make it the most densely populated region in Sweden after Stockholm.

The city of Lund, with its large university, a hospital and many other major businesses, has many commuters using public transport. Changes to timetables a few weeks ago created a heated media debate and six bus driver quit their jobs.

### **Crisis meeting**

The drivers quit because they were unhappy with stress levels and working hours and they believed it would be impossible to stick to the new timetable. Passengers were unhappy too, and the city council called a crisis meeting.

They wanted to talk to Skånetrafiken, the main public transport provider in Sweden's southernmost region. Its mission is “to offer sustainable travel options to everyone who lives, works, and travels in Skåne,”. The city council also wanted to talk to bus operator Keolis, which, following a procurement process, has signed an agreement with Skånetrafiken to operate the city bus service in Lund.



*Keolis is owned by SNCF (France's national state-owned railway company) with a 70 per cent stake in the company which runs bus routes in eight countries. These are some of their Stockholm buses. Photo: Keolis*

The meeting resulted in re-adjusted bus schedules. These will come into effect in October, writes Skånetrafiken on their

website. The reactions to the original timetable changes were clearly justified. According to the newspaper Sydsvenskan, Keoli's quality report for Skånetrafiken showed that the city buses' punctuality fell from more than 90 per cent to between 60 and 70 per cent.

### **8,100 new bus drivers needed**

A report from the Swedish Confederation of Transport Enterprises gives an overview of the current state of the Swedish bus sector. It concludes that 8,100 new bus drivers will be needed over the next two years.

The Nobina group is a public transport operator that also provides bus driver training. It employs 13,000 people across Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In Sweden, Nobina employs around 8,000 bus drivers.

“The shortage of bus drivers is a national problem, and the number of training spaces is too low. This is not something that individual companies can solve on their own. It requires collaboration, and the authorities must ensure there is enough training capacity, says David Erixon, head of communications for Nobina Sweden.

“Public transport has grown and will continue to grow as we aim to reach the climate goals. That is why this is so important,” he says.

Nobina expects the authorities to provide a relevant set of rules for bus driver training and that training spaces offered through the employment service are filled without unnecessary red tape.

Municipalities must also be given the necessary resources to offer adult education to train more bus drivers, explains David Erixon, and points to the measures that Nobina have implemented in order to deal with the shortfall.

“We have good examples in municipalities where we work together with *Yrkesvux* [vocational adult education at upper secondary level]. We collaborate on advertising, meet people who are interested and increase knowledge about the industry. We have also been able to offer a job guarantee for all those who complete the training. This has led to more applicants and more training programs, which has led to real jobs.”





*In terms of kilometres travelled the private car is still by far the preferred mode of transport, accounting for nearly 80 per cent of kilometres travelled per person. Busses account for nearly 8 per cent. Source: The Swedish Bus and Coach Federation*

The starting salary for full-time bus drivers is 26,780 Swedish kronor (€ 2,252) a month, according to the collective agreement. On top of that comes compensation for inconvenient working hours, i.e. evenings, nights and week-ends.

"It is not hard to start earning more than 30,000 kronor a month," says David Erixon.

### Divided shifts

Divided shifts have also been up for debate – when a non-working period is inserted in the middle of a shift which in turn creates a longer working day. David Erixon says arguments have become very binary and that Nobina follows the collective agreement while striving to make shifts work for employees.

"While much of the debate centres on divided shifts, and while this is an important issue, it is worth remembering that on an average day, 270 out of Nobina's around 3,000 shifts are divided. The reason is really that public transport is there for when people want to travel – often in the morning or in the afternoon.

"In the middle of the day, the need is not so great and that is when divided shifts might be used since both we and our trade union partners want to create full-time positions. Meanwhile, we are working actively with schedule reviewers to create the best possible schedules which drivers then can choose from. They can figure out what suits their life situation best."

### Trade union hoping for new negotiations

The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union argues that long working days and stress are the main factors why driving a bus has become an unattractive choice of occupation.

"We believe, and our members tell us, that the working hours are the reason so few people want to become bus drivers. The hours can be between 13 and 13.5 hours for divided shifts, and if we look at this in percentages we have few younger drivers because they struggle to combine private life with divided shifts," says Mario Gavran from the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union.



*Mario Gavran from the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal). Photo: Kommunal*

He has seen that working hours in the bus sector have been an issue for a long time and that it is something that keeps coming back.

"It is possible to make changes to the collective agreement in order to change framework hours, making the bus driver occupation more attractive. If you have made cuts to your organisation that means you can't make things work, then something else is up with the entire system," he says. He hopes the current negotiations will improve things.

"Our hope is that the employers will be more receptive to issues concerning working hours. Otherwise, we might end up seeing more of what has just happened in Lund," says Mario Gavran.

### A cross-Nordic challenge

Changing framework hours or not. When the Nordic Labour Journal talks to Anna Grönlund at the Swedish Bus and Coach Federation, we learn of further possible solutions to the bus driver shortages. Grönlund recently visited Iceland to participate in a meeting of Nordic bus operator organisations.



*Nordic bus meeting in Iceland: Jon Stordrange, NHO Transport Norway; Michael M Nielsen, Danish Passenger Transport; Agust Elvar Bjarnason, the Icelandic Travel Industry Association SAF; Anna Grönlund, the Swedish Bus and Coach Federation; Gunnar Valur Sveinsson, SAF and Eskil Johnsrud Saeterlien, NHO Transport Norway.*

“The bus driver shortage is the greatest challenge to public transport right now, and the situation is the same for our Nordic neighbours – actually in the whole of the EU. We risk seeing public transport ceasing up,” she says.

#### **New EU directive could be important**

The EU Commission has presented a proposal to the new driving license directive. The Nordic bus operator organisations are critical to a couple of points.

“We want to harmonise the age limits for bus drivers with those in the freight transport industry, which is 18. And since Finland, Norway and Sweden have a lot of rural transport routes with large distances, we also want to abolish the 50 kilometre limit for younger drivers so that the operators’ drivers can work on all the routes. If not, it will be difficult to hire younger drivers and to create meaningful services,” says Anna Grönlund.

This is something that the Swedish Bus and Coach Federation points to in their consultation response to the new driving license directive that will be decided on in December.

“We see work and commuting patterns that have changed somewhat as people increasingly return to their jobs, so we need to scale up public transport to meet society's needs. If our proposal is accepted, we will have the opportunity to recruit young people on the same terms as other industries. Then we can build a foundation for public transport for the future.”

#### **Regional responsibility**

Responsibility for public transport lies with Sweden's 21 regions. The regional public transport authorities are responsible for public transport in their respective regions.

“Just like there is no common responsibility for having enough nurses in all the regions, there is also no common responsibility for bus drivers,” says Anna Grönlund.





# Norwegian helicopter school warns pilot shortage threatens preparedness

Helicopters come to the rescue when extreme weather stops cars and trains. But who will pilot the helicopters in the future? Now several helicopter pilot trainers are warning of poor recruitment figures.

THEME

26.09.2023

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN, PHOTO: EUROPEAN HELICOPTER CENTER

When extreme weather “Hans” hit Norway in August, roads and railways were closed by mudslides and flooding. Cars, buses and trains were stuck on the ground, but in the air, helicopters moved freely. A lot of private helicopters were used to carry people and equipment.

This time there were enough pilots to fly the helicopters, but it is far from certain that this will be the case in the future, according to Anette Kruhaug Haldorsen, business manager at the European Helicopter Center (EHC) in Norway.



*Business manager Anette Kruhaug Haldorsen and head of training Peter Blom at European Helicopter Center would like to see more students. Photo: Line Scheistrøen*

She is worried on behalf of the trade, but also on behalf of Norway as a nation.

“We worry there will be a shortage of pilots who can fly the helicopters that are so important for civil preparedness,” says Kruhaug Haldorsen.

### **Voluntary social responsibility**

EHC has been training helicopter pilots for 30 years at Torp in Sandefjord, and more than 800 pilots have graduated from here to work in civil aviation.

EHC is the largest school in Europe to offer civil helicopter pilot training. The armed forces have their own pilot programme. Each year EHC trains 25 students, and often around 10 of them come from other Nordic and European countries. When the foreign students graduate, they return home to work.



EHC is a private school and receives no state support. The school has struggled economically over the past two years. Kruhaug Haldorsen believes that running a helicopter school in Norway at best can be seen as taking social responsibility on a voluntary basis.

### **More pilots needed**

There are 266 private helicopters in Norway and 57 operate in the oil and gas industry on the Norwegian continental shelf. 250 pilots work in the North Sea alone, contributing to an annual turnover of around four billion Norwegian kroner (€350m). Norway has a bigger private helicopter fleet than Sweden.

According to Haldorsen, there is a big backlog in recruitment. Moreover, it takes several years for new pilots to take further training and gain enough flight hours in order to work in sectors like search and rescue or offshore.

“It is worrying when we now have a situation where we cannot guarantee that we will manage to train as many pilots as Norway will need in the coming years,” says Haldorsen.

### **1 million kroner shortfall**

EHC has the capacity to train more pupils a year than they do now. Young boys and girls are keen to become helicopter pilots. So what is the problem? Money, according to the school leadership.

The training is expensive. Students have to pay at least one million kroner during one and a half to two years of education. They can borrow around half of the cost from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund.



*The sector also needs more people who want to fix helicopters. The lack of technical personnel is serious. Photo: Line Scheistrøen*

The rest must come from elsewhere, and this can be difficult for many. Several players are now working to put in place a more comprehensive loan solution for the students.

### **“It’s urgent!”**

The leader of the Norwegian Pilots’ Union, Carl Gilbert Rego, shares Haldorsen’s worry. He works on a civil search and rescue helicopter in Hammerfest.

“Right now, it is difficult to find qualified pilots. At the same time, private helicopter operators must be prepared to carry out important tasks for civil society more often than before,” says Rego.

“We see an increasing need for emergency action. Extreme weather “Hans” was a good example of this. The conflict in Ukraine has also put preparedness on the agenda.”

The pilots’ union leader believes the first thing that needs fixing is a proper loan system for those who want to attend EHC, to make the training more affordable.

“This needs to happen very soon. It’s urgent,” says Rego.

### **Long-term planning is important**

The Federation of Norwegian Aviation Industries also says it is urgent to improve student loan opportunities for helicopter pilots.

“We see a good student loan solutions as an important step to secure the recruitment to this sector. When the authorities



increased the sum that pilot students could borrow a few years back, the immediate effect was an increase in people applying for private flight schools,” says Erik Lahnstein, CEO of the Federation of Norwegian Aviation Industries.

“It is also important that the sector is ready to offer newly qualified pilots jobs which allow them to gain the necessary operational experience – so that these people in the longer term can contribute to national and civil preparedness. This takes time and that is why long-term planning is important,” says Lahnstein.

The Cockpit Association of Norway has proposed an education programme with guaranteed flight time straight after graduation.

### Global pilot shortage

The Federation of Norwegian Aviation Industries points out that the pilot shortage is a global problem.

“This is not typical to Norway, and we do not have a monopoly on any solution. We want a dialogue with the authorities and believe the government should do something, for instance as part of its follow-up to the Total Preparedness Commission,” says Lahnstein.

The Federation of Norwegian Aviation Industries shares Anette Kruhaug Haldorsen’s worries over social preparedness. It considers private helicopters to be crucial to Norway’s preparedness, as they carry out important tasks like fire fighting, search and rescue, ambulance transport, securing the power grid and jobs during extreme weather events.

“That is why it is so important to secure recruitment. Having enough qualified helicopter pilots is particularly important to our society’s overall preparedness,” says Lahnstein.

### Necessary preparedness training

Airlift AS is a large Northern European provider of domestic helicopter services, based in Førde. CEO Stian Hårklau says they have so far not had any problems recruiting pilots. The biggest challenge is to recruit enough technical ground crew.

The company had no helicopters flying to help out during extreme weather “Hans”. But they were ready to provide helicopters if required to do so by the Norwegian Defence Logistics Organisation (FLO), with whom they have a preparedness agreement.



*A helicopter flies near Kristiansand. During extreme weather “Hans”, Norway’s capacity was strengthened when the Swedish JRCC rescue service took over responsibility for the coastal area Kristiansand – Outer Oslo fjord – Østfold.*

“The challenge is that no money has been set aside to train preparedness. We just trust things will work out when the crisis is upon us,” says Hårklau.

### Preparedness – a given?

He thinks we as a society take too much for granted when it comes to social preparedness.

“In order for preparedness to work you need to train. For that to happen there needs to be a willingness to pay for that training, and we don’t have that today. We are a commercial operator. We cannot train and run preparedness without getting paid for it,” says Hårklau.

He says things are different in other countries. Some of Airlift’s helicopters spent this summer in France, for instance, where they were part of firefighting preparedness on behalf of the EU.

“There is a will among French authorities and in the EU to pay for preparedness, which we do not see here at home,” says Hårklau. The fact that Norwegian companies move preparedness out of the country should make Norwegian authorities and politicians think, he argues.

### Helicopters are important in a crisis

The Nordic Labour Journal has been in touch with the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to get some thoughts on helicopter preparedness and the recruitment of helicopter pilots. They passed us on to the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection, DSB.

“Hans” showed us that there are available helicopters in different parts of society. This time, helicopters that are not part of the rescue services were also used, for instance DSB’s forest fire helicopter.

“In situations like this, having helicopters available can be crucial for the end result. Not all helicopters took part in res-

cue operations during “Hans”, but transport of equipment and personnel is also important in a crisis.”

The question of whether there is sufficient helicopter preparedness in Norway will be discussed during the evaluation of extreme weather “Hans”, says the DSB press officer.

They do not wish to comment on the recruitment issue.





## The fragmented working day of a bus driver

Bus drivers come and go. One who has remained in the job is Stefan Andreasson. He got his bus driver's license 35 years ago and has been driving public transport buses for the same number of years. Now he drives regional buses and a library bus in and around Helsingborg.

THEME

26.09.2023

TEXT AND PHOTO: FAYME ALM

“Working hours are longer now that the operators make full use of the agreement they reach with the responsible authority. I can start driving at 6 am and end my working day at 7 pm with some hours of unpaid rest in the middle,” he tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

Stefan Andreasson got his bus driver's license after 14 days of intensive training – theory in the mornings and driving in the afternoons – without having to pay anything himself. He quickly worked up to earn the top salary and is happy with his monthly paycheck, especially since he has no student debt.

Many years of routine have helped him manage the stresses of the job, but it is the hours that still make public transport driving jobs unattractive, he believes.

### Short lunch breaks

In addition to the fragmented working day, Stefan Andreasson is also unhappy with the far too brief lunch breaks he gets on days with non-stop driving. Unlike in Denmark where bus drivers get between 20 and 40 minutes of paid lunch breaks, his is partly unpaid and the allotted time is brief.

“There are many things I must fit into my lunch break, which is only 32 minutes long from when I leave the bus until I have to set off again. I also have to be back in good time to avoid any delays,” he says.

Another challenge to his working hours is the fact that bus depots are often out of town and there are no connecting buses taking him there early in the morning, late in the evening or at night.

### **The bus route can end anywhere**

“All our routes used to start and end in the same place. Now, the last trip can end anywhere. Those who start out from the bus depot after driving there in their own car, have to get back there in their own time. This makes the working day extra long,” he says. It made sense, he says, to return to the depot when the ticket money had to be delivered, but today the buses are cashless.

“This system is stealing our time and makes the work-life balance harder when we have such long working days,” he says.

### **Thousands of new drivers needed**

When Stefan Andreasson retires about ten years from now, he will join a large group of people who have already stopped driving buses. So far the gaps left behind them have not all been filled. There is a big need for new recruitment.

*Read more about the shortfall of bus drivers:*



## Norway needs better flood defences after extreme weather "Hans"

Norwegian companies believe we must expect more extreme weather. The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise NHO wants more and better preparedness measures. The clean-up after "Hans" means a lot of work for the infrastructure construction industry but less capacity for the construction of new public buildings like schools and care homes.

THEME

26.09.2023

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN

It is nearly two months since extreme weather "Hans" went on the rampage in Norway, after having wreaked havoc in Sweden and Denmark first. For two weeks, mudslides and large amounts of water created serious problems for people and businesses. Rail and road links were shut. The costs to society were enormous.

### **Everything was flooded**

The extreme weather hit the Innlandet and Viken regions particularly hard. When "Hans" arrived at Innlandet, the water level in Norway's largest lake Mjøsa was already high and rising quickly.

At Sveastranda Camping, 140 static caravans were exposed to flooding. Owners were told to evacuate and they came from near and far to collect their caravans – while the roads were open.

After a while, large parts of the camping area were flooded, including service buildings, toilet blocks and several huts.





*The playground was also flooded. Photo: Private*

Nature eventually took charge. On 11 August, the campsite was forced to close. At first, the owners hoped to reopen quickly but then came the message that the site would remain closed for the foreseeable future.

### Travel sector worst hit

The extreme weather "Hans" hit the travel industry particularly hard. In a survey of NHO's members soon after "Hans" had passed, 8 in 10 travel businesses in the Innlandet county said they were expecting to suffer a loss.

Nearly half of all NHO members in the Viken and Innlandet counties said they would suffer financially. The Gudbrandsdalen district was hardest hit, where 71 per cent said they would suffer financially.

### Billion-kroner damage

When the weather had passed and insurance companies had had time to add up claims, the Norwegian Natural Perils Pool said 10,000 damages on buildings, contents and plots had been reported as a result of extreme weather "Hans". The cost was an estimated 1.8 billion Norwegian kroner (€15.6m). The number of damages is expected to rise.

The Norwegian Natural Perils Pool connects the Norwegian insurance sector and the Norwegian state natural damage compensation scheme that pays compensation in cases where people cannot buy regular insurance.

Over the past ten years, compensation for damaged buildings and content after weather and other natural damage has exceeded 30.3 billion kroner (€263.3m). This was before "Hans" hit.



*There has been a large number of damaged roads after "Hans" – both mudslides caused by the extreme weather and flooding. Photo: Norwegian Public Road Administration/Asbjørn Stensrud*

Extreme weather like "Hans" costs private individuals, companies and the Norwegian state far more. The figures above do not include damage to infrastructure like roads and railways, for instance. For many, the extreme weather causes big losses that are not covered by insurance.

### Could something have been done differently?

Mette Lunde Sveen and her husband Ola Petter Sveen have been running Sveastranda Camping near lake Mjøsa for 25 years, giving them many years of experience in facilitating camping in an area that is exposed to some flooding.

The campsite is able to deal with a maximum water level of 5.25 metres, but this summer saw abnormal water levels both before and after "Hans".



*Mette Lunde Sveen and her husband Ola Petter Sveen have had better days as owners of Sveastrand camping than when extreme weather "Hans" hit Norway. Photo: Privat.*

"We constantly work to elevate the camping areas, but we cannot prepare for a flood like the one we had this summer," says Mette Lunde Sveen. They find it odd that the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate did not reduce the water level in Mjøsa before the extreme weather, which had been forecast.

"That might have allowed us to avoid such a catastrophic flood and to reduce the damage," says Lunde Sveen.



### Hoping for a good autumn and winter season

As the water has receded, they have been working to get everything back on track. They still have some clearing up to do. Friday 22 September nevertheless became a joyous day as they were able to reopen.

"It is particularly bad that we had to close during August and September this year because we were expecting a lot of foreign visitors now that the Norwegian krone is so weak," says Mette Lunde Sveen.

It is too soon to say how much money they have lost. It is also not clear yet how much their insurance will cover. They now hope the guests will return.

"Luckily we have many loyal customers, so we still have hope," says Lunde Sveen.

### Working 24/7

When "Hans" hit Norway, many municipalities established crisis committees, and regional preparedness councils met regularly. This was also the case in Innlandet county where people involved in preparedness, both public, private and volunteers, met to talk about what needed to be done by whom and who had the right resources to do which jobs.

Faced with so much water, the infrastructure construction industry was particularly busy.



*"Hans" created a lot of work for the infrastructure construction sector. Photo: Norwegian Public Road Administration.*

"The first days and nights, everybody worked – whether you were a small or big actor. People worked all hours, but felt it was OK because they felt they were contributing and doing an important job," says managing director Rangdi W. Krogstad at the construction association Entreprenørforeningen Bygg og Anlegg Innlandet (EBAI). She says this shows how important the construction industry is for civil protection.

### Cooperation

When the Total Preparedness Commission published its report in June, it recommended closer cooperation between the

public and private sectors for better handling of crises like war, but also for extreme weather like "Hans".

The Commission's mandate was to strengthen weaknesses in Norway's preparedness and to see how resources could be put to the best possible use. The report is now out for consultation.

"Cooperation and collaboration was important to get through the crisis in the best possible way. In light of the proposals from the Commission, the way things were done represented a good example of how to put into practice the way in which we should work together in similar situations in the future," says Linn Alicia Slora Kristiansen, senior advisor at NHO Innlandet.

### A boom for the infrastructure industry

There is a significant need for cleanup following the extreme weather's destruction. This will provide work for both big and small infrastructure construction industry players in Innlandet, believes Rangdi W. Krogstad at EBAI.

She hopes preventative measures will be prioritised more than before, once the larger jobs like building new roads and bridges begin.

"We know that sooner or later there will be another flood. We have to build roads and bridges in a way that makes us less vulnerable and able to withstand a new flood," she says.

NHO's member survey right after the "Hans" destruction showed that 55 per cent of businesses in Viken and Innlandet expect more frequent natural damage in the future as a result of extreme weather.

"We need to secure access and be better prepared nationally and locally for floods and extreme weather. Society can save billions of kroner if we are better prepared," said Anniken Hauglie, deputy managing director for NHO as she presented the survey.

### A challenge for the building industry

While the infrastructure industry gets busy with more projects, Rangdi W. Krogstad at EBAI thinks "Hans" is bad news for the building construction industry. The sector is already struggling, with nearly all expansion programmes having been put on hold due to high prices, rising interest rates and war in Europe. There are hardly any projects to be had and companies have been forced to let people go.

"The public sector has to spend billions of kroner on the cleanup after "Hans". I doubt this is the right time to start constructing new public buildings like schools and care homes. In other words, we will have a pause in construction which will hit the building construction industry hard," Krogstad says.



## Sweden's emergency shelters "back in fashion"

After a long period of obscurity, Sweden's emergency shelters are back in the spotlight as the government proposes to spend over 18 million euro in next year's budget on an upgrade, while also training the rescue services in an effort to strengthen the civil defence.

THEME

26.09.2023

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: NIKLAS FORSSTRÖM

In the years between the end of the Cold War and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "Hoarse Fredrik" was the clearest reminder that the war could come here too. It is an emergency siren whose proper name is "Important message to the public", and it is tested on the first Monday of each quarter. The nickname has been there from the start, but that is a different story.

On 24 February 2022, the feeling of security suddenly changed. It had already been weakened after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the aggressive Russian tone. The seemingly unthinkable had happened – war in Europe. Since then, the idea of war and preparedness has become increasingly relevant.

It is no longer unusual to see stories with titles like "This is what you need to have at home if the safety situation changes".

Daily conversations might be about the need to have a transistor radio, cash at home, access to food, water and warm sleeping bags. Suddenly the largely forgotten emergency shelters became important. Today they serve as storage, gyms, bike storage and more.



*Carl-Oskar Bohlin, Sweden's Minister for Civil Defence.*

The other day, the Minister for Civil Defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin, invited the media to tour the Katarinaberget emergency shelter and talk about the government's civil defence measures. The shelter is in Södermalm in Stockholm and is the biggest in Sweden with space for 8,000 people.

It has served as a garage for a long time, but now, along with Sweden's other 65,000 emergency shelters, it is being renovated.

"The access to emergency shelters and the ability for emergency services to react in a war situation is central to the protection of the civil population," said the Ministry of Defence in a press release before the 2024 budget proposal.

"Russia's war in Ukraine has often been directed at civil infrastructure and the access to emergency shelters has been very important for the resistance," Carl-Oskar Bohlin told the Svenska Dagbladet newspaper during the press conference.

"The war has changed many things. We see a greater need for information to property owners and also notice a great deal of interest from them," says Anders Johannesson, head of civil protection at the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency MSB.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed people's view of the need for emergency shelters and civil defence.

But even before that, the security situation had escalated, which prompted the previous government to present a proposal called "Strong protection for the civil population in times of heightened preparedness", which the government office is currently working on. Emergency shelters are one of the three areas it addresses, and it also looks at access to other protected areas.

Sweden currently has enough emergency shelters to house around seven million people, and they are mainly situated in the 140 so-called emergency shelter populated areas – populated areas where available shelter is limited.

"In 2010 there was talk of closing down all emergency shelters, but that never happened," explains Anders Johannesson at MSB.

He says there is cross-border knowledge about emergency shelters and he is in touch with his Nordic neighbours. There are, however, different ways of organising and financing the shelters in different countries.

Finland has 54,000 emergency shelters for a population of 5.5 million. Most are private ones in the vicinity of private properties and businesses and should be operational within 72 hours. The property owner is responsible for keeping a shelter and there is no state support.

Norway has around 25,000 emergency shelters with space for 2.5 million people, out of a population of 5.5 million. Most of them are private and no new shelters have been built since 1998.

Checks have unveiled faults in upkeep and the knowledge of how to maintain emergency shelters has dwindled among civil defence personnel and the relevant construction companies and suppliers.

Sweden has not constructed new shelters since 2002. Before that year, the state-funded construction and maintenance. Many have been neglected, but new financial allocations are meant to refurbish shelters and train rescue services.

If the proposals in the report "Strong protection for the civil population in times of heightened preparedness" are implemented, there will also be a gradual expansion of the number of emergency shelters. The report argues for the MSB to retain responsibility for the shelters, but that the job should be shared between several actors.

Exactly how this will be organised and how much money will be allocated in the longer term remains unknown before the proposal ends in legislation passed by parliament.

"We are in a waiting pattern," says Anders Johannesson. MSB has, however, been allowed to hire five new employees with expertise in areas like emergency shelter control and construction engineering. As all emergency shelters must be assessed, there is a potential labour market both for those who renovate and those who carry out controls.

How do I know where to go in an acute crisis? And what do I bring?

Where to go seems simple. I write my address into MSBs emergency shelter map and am told right away. Within a radius of 500 meters, there are 23 shelters to choose from. The shelters are basic.

There should be dry toilets, water containers, supports, concrete elements and water. I need to bring my own food, cloth-

ing, transistor radios and anything else I need. But what about the dog? Can it come?

No. Pets are not allowed in emergency shelters. There has been strong criticism of this including in an article written by researchers from the Swedish Defense University, who argue that pets should be included in total defence planning. Most dogs and their owners that can be seen every day, walking, playing and resting together would probably agree.





# Drones and mini-subs strengthen Norway's Coast Guard's preparedness

The Norwegian Coast Guard has started using mini-submarines and drones to improve preparedness during critical situations.

THEME

26.09.2023

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN

The Coast Guard's slogan is "Always present, every day, all year, along the entire coast" of Norway. Its search and rescue (SAR) area of responsibility stretches from the North Pole to an area west of Denmark and to the northeast of Kirkenes near the border with Finland and Russia.

## Thermal imaging camera

The Coast Guard's ships now have drones with infrared cameras. This makes it easier to get an overview of search and rescue areas.

"The drones make getting an overview a far more efficient process. It is particularly beneficial that the drones allow us to get an overview of far larger areas far quicker than before. A rescue operation can be life or death," says commanding officer Erlend Vågenes.



*Erlend Vågenes, Kim-Daniel Nilsen and Marius Ulvin Erlandsen are in charge onboard the KV Heimdal.*

We are onboard the KV Heimdal. The ship is one of five that make up the "Inner Coast Guard". The Norwegian Coast Guard has vast resources at its disposal. Ten of its 15 vessels operate under the "Outer Coast Guard" and patrol the seas. Four of these have their own helicopters.

Kim-Daniel Nilsen is the deputy commanding officer on KV Heimdahl. He explains more about how the drones are being used.

“The drones can be flown through a ship’s exhaust fumes. This allows us to measure and control whether the sulfur level in the exhaust is correct. All vessels must run on diesel when we are near land. It is better refined and emits less sulfur than heavy fuel oil. Heavy fuel oil is cheaper and only allowed to be used at sea,” says Nilsen.

Five of the Coast Guard’s ships have had this equipment for about six months, so the experience and knowledge is getting better.

### **Finding deceased people**

Around 60 people drown each year in Norway. It is not always easy to find the deceased. This is also one of several reasons why the Coast Guard have invested in ROVs – remotely operated vehicles. These are small submarines that are controlled through a cable from a Coast Guard vessel.

“The search for deceased people is now more efficient. When we can find them, it is good for families and friends to get a grave they can visit,” explains Vågenes.



*Erlend Vågenes and Kim-Daniel Nilsen from the Norwegian Coast Guard test and train for better preparedness in critical situations.*

The Coast Guard are also involved in what they call resource control. They are monitoring fisheries.

“Today, everything is calm, but we inspect professional and private fishers. Rather than dragging fishing equipment like traps and nets onboard, we send the ROV down and use its camera to see if the equipment has the right dimensions and is legal. That way we disturb the fishing far less than what used to be the case when we had to haul it up.

ROVs are also used in critical situations to keep an eye on underwater activity.

### **Good for the police**

KV Heimdal patrols the sea between the Nordmøre region and up to the north of Trøndelag county.

Some of the other tasks they perform together with the police include alcohol testing of boat owners, the use of safety vests, boating certificate checks and more. The Coast Guard also work alongside the Norwegian Customs Service, the Norwegian Coastal Administration and the Norwegian Maritime Authority.

Section leader Åge Andersen with the Trøndelag police confirms that they benefit from good cooperation with the people onboard KV Heimdal.

“We collaborate with our partners, and the fact that they now have even better equipment to do even more and better work is a positive thing. It is advantageous for all, including the public when it becomes easier to solve tasks,” says Andersen.



Selfie of the Info Norden crew on their visit to Greenland

## Info Norden: 25 years of facilitating Nordic movement

For the past 25 years, Info Norden has been answering questions and learning things from people who want to move between Nordic countries in order to live, work, study or start a business. Info Norden is now seen as an important part of the Nordic Vision 2030 – to be the most sustainable and integrated region in the world.

### NEWS

26.09.2023

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: QUPANUK OLSEN

A lot of people want to move between the Nordic countries, and the number looks to be growing. In 2022, 5,370 people contacted Info Norden, the information service of the Nordic Council of Ministers, to ask for information. That is 7 per cent more than in 2021. Last year, Info Norden's website was viewed 2.7 million times and had 1.9 million visitors.

“The number of inquiries has risen enormously and the types of questions we receive are getting increasingly complex. Info Norden can now be accessed in English too, which means we get more questions from people outside of the Nordic countries,” says Anna Sophie Liebst, the project leader for Info Norden's Stockholm office.



**En gratistjeneste for deg som har spørsmål om det nordiske byråkratiet:**

## **"Hallå Norden"**

gir svar til alle som reiser eller flytter mellom de nordiske land og som har satt seg fast i det nordiske byråkratiet. På telefon (ikke mobil), faks eller e-post kan du gratis bli loset på rett vei.

**Vanlige problemer er for eksempel knyttet til:**

- studielån eller eksamensgyldighet
- sykepenger eller pensjon
- ansettelser eller tolkehjelp
- toll eller avgifter

**Så enkelt er det:**

Ring 00 800 1111 8888, faks det samme nummeret eller bruk e-post: [hallo@norden.se](mailto:hallo@norden.se)  
Fortell om ditt problem, og du får svar i løpet av 48 timer.



**Nordisk Ministerråd**

### **It started with a service phone**

The first Nordic information service opened in July 1998, to help Nordic citizens make use of the Nordic freedom of movement by providing answers to questions about things like taxation, pensions, education and family politics. The Öresund Bridge had not yet opened for traffic and the mobile phone was first and foremost a telephone and not a smartphone.

Consequently, the new service was a service telephone called "Hello Norden". The service has grown over the years, and today, Info Norden has offices in all of the Nordic capitals. They provide information about all of the Nordic countries and also about the autonomous areas – the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

The information is primarily published online, in Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish and English. Those

interested can read about the latest developments, find out which are the relevant authorities and also ask questions about various issues.

Anna Sophie Liebst has been working for Info Norden and its predecessor Hello Norden since 2004. During nearly two decades she has seen what concerns those who want to move between the Nordics the most, and which obstacles they have met and are still facing.

She has been moving between Nordic countries herself. Anna Sophie Liebst was born and raised in Denmark, studied at the University of Oslo and has been living in Stockholm for many years. One of the main things she has learned over the years is the importance of dual citizenship. This became possible in Norway in 2020, in Denmark in 2015, and in Finland and Iceland in 2003. Dual citizenship has been legal in Sweden since 2001.



"It used not to be so important to have dual citizenship, but after the pandemic, we have seen that this is an increasingly important issue. During the pandemic, the only way for me to travel to Denmark was using my dual citizenship, for instance," she says.

### **New and old questions**

Before we meet, Anna Sophie Liebst has been thinking through which are the most common questions in Info Norden's inbox.

"Perhaps the most common question of all is when and how to apply for a pension in one or several Nordic countries. We refer to the respective countries' pension authorities, but we also know that many of those who have been working in another Nordic country than their own, never get in touch



and risk losing their accumulated pension,” says Anna Sophie Liebst.

Another common question is why you are not allowed a Swedish Bank-ID (an electronic identification system) when you are a Nordic citizen who works, studies or owns property in Sweden. Sweden differs from the other Nordic countries when it comes to Bank-ID, explains Anna Sophie Liebst, and this has to do with the banks, not the state.

This throws spanners in the works for those who live in one country and want to bank in another. Or for those who perhaps want to help elderly parents pay their bills, even if they live across the border. The Bank-ID problem is also not very visible.

“Someone who cannot become a customer of a bank is an invisible problem of course,” says Anna Sophie Liebst.

Another common question is whether someone with a permit to stay in one Nordic country can also enjoy the Nordic freedom of movement. This is no inherent right and depends on national rules which must be checked before you move. Other typical questions include whether you can move with your cat or dog and whether you can apply for a student loan in a different country than your home country.

Many wonder how state support and tax systems will work for people who want to work in a different Nordic country, and what rules apply when it comes to work permits, registration, ID, and the necessary requirements and conditions for companies that want to send workers to another Nordic country for shorter periods of time.

A lot of people also wonder what they need to know before buying a holiday home in Norway or Sweden, and whether other Nordic citizens are allowed to buy holiday homes or other property in Denmark at all. Those who want to work in the health sector wonder what are the requirements in different Nordic countries and whether they need special authorisation.

### **Digital nomads**

These days, Info Norden also receives many questions about remote work. How does it work, for instance, performing your job in Sweden when you are employed in Norway? There are no general rules for this, and different countries have reached different levels of agreement on such issues, explains Anna Sophie Liebst.

“We also see that more young people are now interested in working anywhere in the world. They are digital nomads, but the Nordic countries are not in the forefront when it comes to meeting their needs – for instance when it comes to how remote working links to social security,” says Anna Sophie Liebst.

Another trend observed in the information flow generated at Info Norden is an increase in questions about inheritance and wills across borders. This is another area where people experience challenges surrounding Bank-ID. An increasing number of people now want to spend some or the whole of their upper secondary education in a different Nordic country.

Women who have children with Norwegian or Swedish men might contact Info Norden to ask what support is available for children whose father lives in a different Nordic country. Other parents who live in separate Nordic countries wonder about rules surrounding child benefit and maintenance. Many also want to know about job opportunities in Svalbard and Greenland.

“We cover issues from cradle to grave, and the questions we are asked are becoming increasingly complicated. But difficult questions are fun,” says Anna Sophie Liebst.

### **Impatient for smooth freedom of movement**

Many of those who contact her have great expectations of a smooth freedom of movement between Nordic countries and ask: “Why does it not work?” and “What are the Nordics and Nordic politicians doing?”.

Anna Sophie Liebst briefs national ministries and the Nordic Border Barriers Council’s representatives about the obstacles citizens face. The Border Barrier Council is part of the Nordic cooperation and collaborates with actors working to address border obstacles for both individuals and businesses in the Nordic region.

Anna Sophie Liebst considers the vision that the Nordic Region shall be the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. It was agreed on in 2019, but in 2020, Nordic borders were shut and it turned out that Denmark, Finland and Norway defined regions and border regions in completely different ways with accompanying differing regulations.

“It is the Nordic region that should become the most integrated, it is not to become the region with the world’s most integrated separate regions. That is why the same rules and opportunities should apply to all no matter where in the Nordics they live,” she says.

Anna Sophie Liebst says three things are needed for the vision to become reality. One is a digital identity – a Nordic electronic ID that works across all of the countries granting access to public information in other Nordic countries outside of people’s home countries. The other is a common labour market, including for people with residency permits.

“The world’s most integrated region cannot limit the citizens’ freedom of movement for work. We work in the Nordics, no matter where we live.”

She also wants it to become easier to work remotely across the Nordics.

“The Nordics should be a Mecca for people who want to work remotely and for digital nomads. It should be easy to work remotely, easy to understand the rules and to do the right thing as a Northern citizen in the Nordics, for Northern citizens in the world and for global citizens in the Nordics. And are our regulations and welfare states linked to the future which has already arrived?” asks Anna Sophie Liebst.



## Billion-euro CO<sub>2</sub> capture plan could herald new Danish jobs

Denmark expects new jobs and growth in the wake of the government's plan for the capture and underground storage of Danish and foreign CO<sub>2</sub> in Denmark. Danish businesses have suggested using some of the captured CO<sub>2</sub> in new, climate-friendly production processes which could lead to more and better jobs.

NEWS

26.09.2023

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The Danish government has presented a new billion-euro proposal called "Achieving carbon capture and storage", aimed at developing a Danish industry for carbon capture and storage – also known as CCS. This should put Denmark in pole position internationally when it comes to the green transition and it will create new jobs, believes Denmark's Minister for Business Morten Bødskov.

*"By gathering the resources and creating a clear framework for carbon capture and storage, we prepare the way for a strong Danish industry that will not only reduce our carbon footprint but also create growth and jobs. We aim to explore*

*our competencies and innovation to be at the forefront of the green transition."*



*Morten Bødskov, Denmark's Minister for Business. Photo: regeringen.dk*

That is what Morten Bødskov said on 21 August 2023 as he presented the Danish government's new CO2 plans alongside the Minister for Climate, Energy and Utilities Lars Aagaard, the Minister for Transport Thomas Danielsen, and trade representatives.

### **Large-scale CCS**

The proposal, which will now be debated in parliament, outlines how Denmark from 2029 will capture the same amount of CO2 as the entire Danish output – known as full capture. The proposal also says Denmark will be one of the world's major players in terms of underground storage of CO2.

So far, the Danish government has allocated 38 billion kroner (€5.93bn) for CCS, and Denmark has just awarded the three first licenses for large-scale CO2 underground storage in the country. The first international CO2 storage agreement in Denmark has also been reached.

Until now, Denmark has been lagging behind Norway. Storage of CO2 under the Danish part of the North Sea did not begin until March 2023. A framework for CCS will be in place from 2028. Norway has been running large-scale CCS linked to natural gas production since 1996, where CO2 from North Sea gas is filtrated and reinjected into the bedrock.

Norway's Sleipner gas field was the first large-scale ocean-based CCS project in the world. So far, it has stored some 22 million tonnes of CO2 according to the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland GEUS, an independent research and advisory institution within the Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities.

### **Reusing CO2 also creates green jobs**

GEUS believes Denmark is in a good position to become a big player in CCS because Denmark's bedrock is well-suited for CO2 storage. GEUS has calculated that there is space for the equivalent of 500 to 1,000 years of CO2 emissions from Denmark – in other words, a gigantic CO2 depot deep down underground with space for CO2 captured from both Danish and foreign emissions.

"This could be good business for Denmark. A rapid development of the CCS market would mean both major investments and many green jobs in Denmark," wrote the Danish government in its proposal.

Danish businesses welcome the CCS proposal too. The Danish Chamber of Commerce, the business and employers' association representing 18,000 members, also believes this will lead to new types of jobs in Denmark.

"We fully support the government's plan to spend money on the capture and storage of CO2 in order to reduce the global temperature rise, and Denmark can offer new CCS solutions

that will both contribute to a greener world and new export opportunities for Denmark," says Ulrich Bang, deputy director for climate, energy, and environment at the Chamber of Commerce.

But he points out that the government must not be satisfied with simply making Denmark a waste depot for CO2. Some of it should be reused in new and innovative, climate-friendly technologies rather than simply being stored.



*Ulrich Bang, deputy director for climate, energy, and environment at the Danish Chamber of Commerce. Photo: Danish Chamber of Commerce*

This could benefit Danish businesses on a completely different scale than CO2 storage, argues the Chamber of Commerce.

"There are jobs linked to CO2 underground storage, but we could create more value by using the captured CO2 in so-called biosolutions, for instance bioplastics and protein for the food industry. These are things that Danish companies are already well advanced in," says Ulrich Bang.

The biocompany Algicel is one example. Together with Novozymes, they are testing whether the use of CO2 through photosynthesis in algae can produce bioplastics, dietary supplements, and protein for food production.

### **CO2 you can eat**

Using captured CO2 to produce proteins for human consumption is also the goal of a consortium formed in the summer of 2023, which includes the American Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Novo Nordisk Foundation.

The consortium brings together knowledge and expertise from Novozymes A/S and Topsoe A/S – two leading companies in biotechnology and chemical engineering – the Washington University in St. Louis, USA, and the Novo Nordisk Foundation CO2 Research Center (CORC) at Aarhus University. The two funds provide a total of 200 billion kroner (€26.8bn) in investments. Mads Krogsgaard Thomsen, the Novo Nordisk Fonden CEO, said this at the launch of the consortium:



“By utilising CO2 for food production without involving agricultural land use, this ambitious consortium addresses two of our biggest global challenges: supplying nutritious food to a growing world population and mitigation of climate change. This has the potential to be the first step towards a novel bioeconomy providing a more sustainable, safe and stable food production, reducing the strain on nature’s resources.”

Ulrich Bang believes the production of foodstuffs and other biosolutions using captured CO2 will demand a new type of workers who are paid more and who will have a better work environment than people in agriculture have today.

The Danish Chamber of Commerce is encouraging the government to supplement the multi-billion kroner CCS drive with for instance one billion kroner for developing the reuse of the captured CO2, and earmark some of it for research and for developing a roadmap for the reuse of CO2.



## Finland's new government wants major changes to labour law

A new centre-right government started governing in Finland on 20 June after winning April's elections, and there is now talk of an historic paradigm change. Petteri Orpo's four party coalition wants to make major changes in the labour market.

### NEWS

26.09.2023

TEXT AND PHOTO: BENGT ÖSTLING

Trade unions warn against lasting damage both to many Finns' economy and to the organised labour negotiation system.

The Nordic model is being talked about more and more often by Finnish politicians. The new government's programme mentions Nordic models and customs several times, especially in relation to the labour market, social politics, economy, defence and immigration politics.



*Anna-Maja Henriksson, Minister of Education and leader of the Swedish People's Party of Finland, presenting the new government's programme.*

### **Many critics**

The opposition has protested against continued high borrowing, numerous economic austerity measures and a lack of interest in climate issues.

Trade unions have criticised the government's programme for being imbalanced. While it will become easier to sack workers, the government wants to cut unemployment benefits.

Antti Palola, head of the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK), wonders whether the tripartite dialogue is nothing but a charade. Normally, the government programme only outlines the goals, and then the parties negotiate how to reach them. But this government's programme already details which measures and end results it wants to see.

### **Motivating people to work in a safe welfare society**

The Finnish government's starting point is to protect the welfare society, but it argues that future generations should not be burdened with Finland's debt. It wants to turn the debt situation around in a way that is fair to all generations. The government believes it will take several parliamentary terms to achieve this.

It aims to use different structural measures to increase employment numbers by 100,000. This should result in more than two billion euro extra in the state coffers.

The government says there are different ways of eliminating what in Finland is known as "incentive traps" – where it no longer makes financial sense to accept employment because the social safety net provides a sufficiently good income. That is why it wants to lower certain taxes and phase out various benefits.

The aim is to halve the number of people who are dependent on basic income support (seven per cent of the population). By doing this, the government says it can save 100 billion euro. This money can be used to improve conditions for families with children and students.

### **Looking at industrial peace**

The government wants to steer the labour market in a more flexible direction. It wants to support employment levels, economic growth, competitiveness and productivity.



*Prime Minister Petteri Orpo has found inspiration in Sweden for several of the reforms he wants to introduce to the labour market. Here he greets his Swedish counterpart Ulf Kristersson in Iceland in June this year. Photo: Anna Sjöholm.*

The reforms are being prepared through tripartite cooperation with input from the business sector and trade unions. Two working groups at the Ministry of Employment are already looking at issues concerning industrial peace and local agreements.

### **Limiting sympathy action**

The government aims to amend legislation so that sympathetic actions during labour disputes are subject to a proportionality assessment and must be reported. The government program restricts "legal sympathetic actions" to those considered reasonable in light of their objectives and whose effects only affect the disputing parties.

In relation to this, the government program refers to Nordic legislation and precedence. This has been met with criticism. Professor Niklas Bruun has told the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper that Nordic precedence is not as straightforward as the government claims. It is the courts that have established precedent in the Nordic countries, not the legislation, he points out.

In Norway, strike action lasting a few days is considered acceptable, but two weeks is seen as too long. A week-long harbour blockade in Sweden was seen as legal political industrial action, while another strike lasting a full month was considered to be beyond acceptable political industrial action. Trade unions have also taken this into account.

### **200 euro in strike fines**

From now on, both workers and their trade unions can be forced to pay fines for launching illegal industrial action. It has been pointed out that 200 euro is a significant fine for a lone provider in a low-paid job who wants to defend their rights.

The trade unions would have to pay considerably more for strike actions that are deemed to be illegal.

The reform has been criticised as an attack on the right to industrial action, the negotiation systems and the entire trade union movement.

The government sees local agreements as an important tool to develop companies and improve their competitiveness. Trade unions believe there is a risk that employers will dictate conditions which will lead to an erosion of rights and wages.

Trade unions accept local agreements through collective agreements. The parties in the workplace must be in an equal bargaining position where negotiations are genuine.

### **“Un-Nordic”**

The President of the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions, Jarkko Eloranta, believes the government's definitions are wrong.



*Jarkko Eloranta, photo: Bengt Östling*

“In the Nordic model, the social partners negotiate – in good spirit – and there is a high union membership level. You have codetermination and governments stay out of labour market negotiations.”

But this government does the exact opposite, argues Jarkko Eloranta. It prioritises employers' aims and ideas. The political right sees a momentum for major changes that are irreversible.

### **Swedish example**

The Minister of Employment Arto Satonen from the National Coalition Party has several times rejected critics who say these are major changes. He calls them small adjustments to labour market policies. And most of the reforms are already on the books in Sweden, he says.



*Arto Satonen, Finland's new Minister of Employment, has invited the social partners to discuss the Finnish model .Photo: Laura Heikkinen*

Arto Satonen's first foreign trip as Minister of Employment took him to Sweden to see his counterpart, Johan Pehrson. The ministers were said to have discussed labour market reforms and ways of attracting international experts.

During his visit, Satonen also met Irene Wennemo, Director General of the Swedish National Mediation Office.

### **Export-driven model**

One of the key points in the Finnish government's programme is to use an export-driven labour market model to increase competitiveness.

The government also plans to change the law covering mediation in labour disputes. The National Conciliator Office or a conciliation board should not be able to issue a mediation proposal that exceeds the general guideline for wage adjustments. So the Swedish example of using export sector wages as the basis for wage agreements will be adopted instead.

### **A concerned Nordic region**

Jarkko Eloranta says other countries have expressed concern over what is happening in Finland.

“Finland has been seen as a country with a strong labour market and good relations between employers and employees. Now, things are looking very different. This is also somewhat surprising for the Nordic region and other European countries and trade unions,” says Jarkko Eloranta.

Both from a Nordic and European perspective there are concerns over attempts to limit the right to industrial action and to restrict the influence of trade unions. There is a sense that the Nordic model might not be facing threats from the EU, but from the inside.

### **Trade union movement wakes up**

Trade unions mobilised and strengthened their organisation at the start of September. They are already prepared for activities that may involve strikes, even a general strike.

The Service Union United PAM, the Finnish Transport Workers' Union AKT, the Trade Union for the Public and



Welfare Sectors JHL, the Industrial Union and the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions SAK have decided to take joint action.

It will start on Tuesday 26 September and last for three weeks initially. This could involve marches and demonstrations.

The tone has hardened. Eloranta refers to the new Finnish government as a "reverse Robin Hood government," which takes from the poor and gives to the rich.



# How to make Nordic cross-border work easier

A new report commissioned by the Nordic Freedom of Movement Council presents four new proposals for how to make it easier to work from home, also for cross-border commuters.

NEWS

26.09.2023

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: LISA WIKSTRAND/NORDEN.ORG

The issue became urgent during the coronavirus pandemic when people whose jobs were located in another Nordic country risked running into tax problems if they followed the recommendation to work from home.

The report – Working across the Nordics – was produced by consultancy firms KPMG and Resonans Nordic. They point out that if the Nordic region is to reach its vision of becoming the most integrated region in the world by 2030, there has to be some changes to tax policy and to how regulations are administered.

The pandemic led to lasting labour market changes. Remote working is something far more people now want to do, employees and employers alike. It is a global trend.

A KPMG survey shows that nearly 90 per cent of 530 companies across 52 countries have already introduced remote working as an option, or are considering doing so. So there is a risk, according to this survey, that companies will fail to attract the best talent if there are obstacles to remote working.

Existing agreements between Nordic countries mainly state that you pay tax in the country where you live. But this is about more than taxation.

People also face potential uncertainties like higher taxes and extra red tape when it comes to contributing to or withdrawing pension funds. An employer might find themselves forced to register and relate to taxation rules, deadlines and wage administration in several countries.

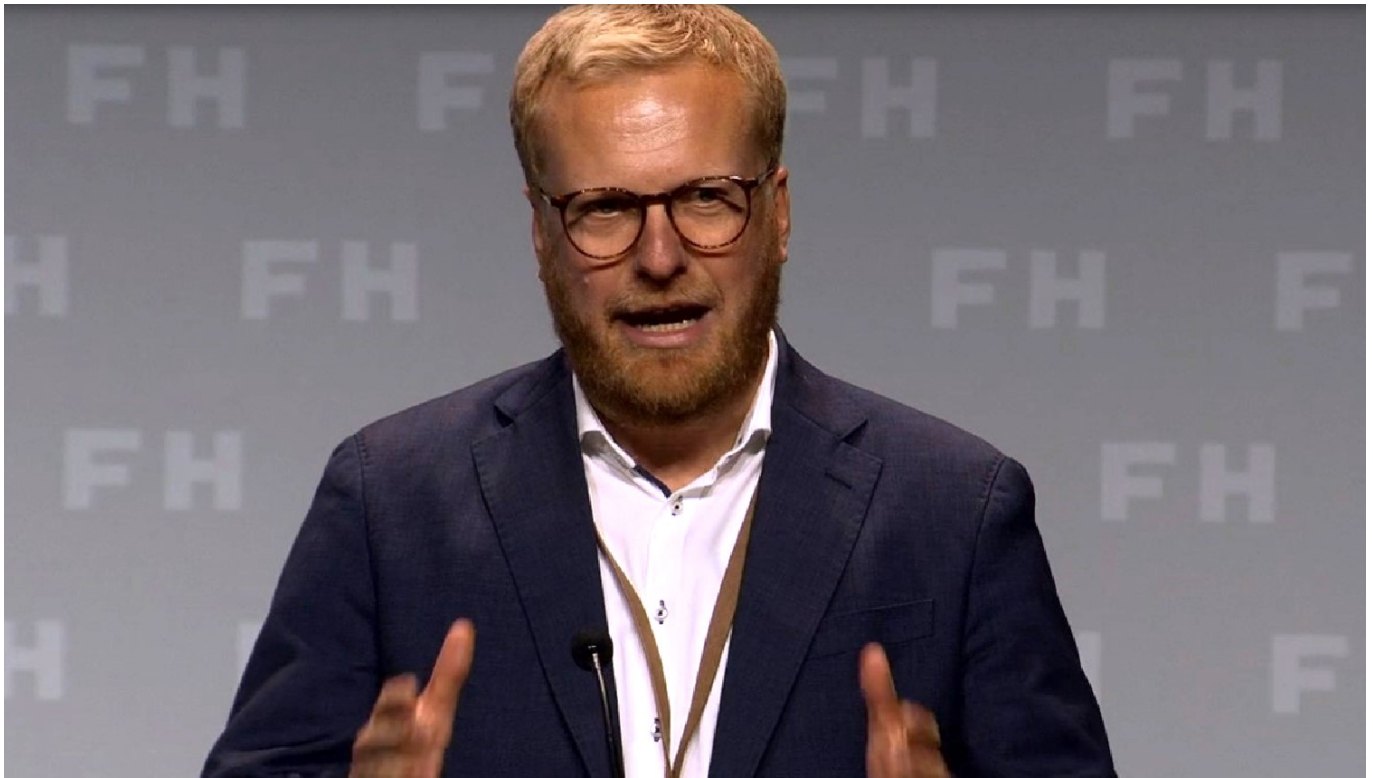
The report suggests that in some cases, the taxation rules should be reversed so that the decisive factor is not where you live but where the employer is located.

The report's authors present four proposals:

- The Nordic countries should have common conditions for when working in the country of residence, including from a home office, is to be considered as a so-called permanent establishment.
- In future, advance tax should only be reported and collected in the employer's country, so that the employer will no longer have to administer the legislation of several countries for the same salary income.
- Salary income should be taxed in the country of employment and, for example, working from home in the country of residence shall be equal to working in the country where the employer is located. This presupposes that the proposal in the first points becomes a reality.
- Pension fees for pensions established in another Nordic country should be mutually recognised as deductible and ongoing returns should only be taxed in accordance with the legislation of the country where the pension plan is established.

A functioning cross-border labour market is profitable. Estimates from the Öresund region, for instance, show that a fully integrated labour market can generate an annual socio-economic gain of up to 2.9 billion Danish kroner (€388m) for Sweden and Denmark combined.

“Our countries have much to gain from a friction-free common labour market. It could solve problems like skills shortages in one country and unemployment in another. In other words, a functioning labour market is a strong catalyst for our countries' economies,” says Siv Friðleifsdóttir, the chair of the Freedom of Movement Council in 2023.



## Morten Skov Christiansen new head of the Danish Trade Union Confederation

A new President of the Danish Trade Union Confederation FH has been unanimously voted in by members.

NEWS

26.09.2023

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The Danish labour movement took an important step towards restoring calm and order during an extraordinary general meeting of the Danish Trade Union Confederation, FH, on September 7, 2023. FH member organisations unanimously voted through a replacement for Lizette Risgaard, who last year stepped down from the Presidency after a legal investigation found her guilty of several inappropriate incidents.

Morten Skov Christiansen was the only candidate and was promptly elected the new President. He has so far been one of to deputy leaders at FH and has been caretaker President since Lizette Risgaard stepped down on 30 April 2023.

### **Apologised to the victims**

The way in which Morten Skov Christiansen has dealt with FH's big challenges has been widely welcomed in the labour movement. In the spring of 2023, media reports emerged with allegations that Lizette Risgaard had inappropriately touched several co-workers. FH chose to launch a legal investigation which concluded in August that the allegations were true. Lizette Risgaard had behaved inappropriately on several occasions.

"I am extremely sorry that the victims have been subjected to this. There must be no doubt that one episode is one too many," said Morten Skov Christiansen when FH presented the external legal review's conclusions.



Morten Skov Christiansen is an electromechanical engineer by trade and has a long career in the trade union movement. Many describe him as a President who can build bridges between the FH's member unions – which represent both private and public employees who do not always share the same priorities.

### **Stopping dwindling membership**

One of the new President's challenges will be to help maintain a strong trade union movement as many unions are struggling to hold on to their members. Young workers do not automatically join a trade union when starting work.

Commenting on the FH's role in the coming years, Morten Skov Christiansen has said that nobody will improve employees' conditions if they do not do it themselves.

“That is why it is so important that we strengthen our professional community. The solution to a good life rests with us, our community and our collective strength. Talk about this in the workplace. Grab your colleague. Get them onboard. There is strength in numbers. And we do need strength. The daily challenges are queueing up.”