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Island invites the ILO to the land of volcanos and glaciers

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Nordic power positions: a modest increase in gender equality

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Lisbeth Dalgaard Svanholm aims to gather big and small employers

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## Theme: The two sides of equality



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# Gender or general equality – what is more important?

On the 8th of March, the entire world focuses women's rights. The NLJ's gender equality barometer mirrors a small part of the gender balance in the Nordic region; whether there is a man or a woman in 24 positions of power. This year saw a modest increase in the number of women, but the trend is nevertheless clear. Gender equality is on the rise, even though things are moving slowly.

EDITORIAL

06.03.2019

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, ACTING EDITOR

Gender equality is not only about women's rights. Men, too, have started to demand the right to things like spending some time at home with their children. Denmark is the only Nordic country that has not earmarked parts of parental leave to the father. When authorities do not make that decision, women end up taking nearly all of the parental leave. Now, new EU rules might force Denmark to change its legislation.

The wage gap between men and women is falling in Sweden. But LO warns that there is also a growing gap between women in blue collar and white collar jobs. Where should the priorities lie? A gender equal society does not mean it has achieved general equality, although a non-equal society usually hits women the hardest.

Many issues come to a head at an earlier stage in the Nordics than elsewhere, because the five countries are quick to bring about change. This in turn is helped by a high level of trust, between people and between voters and politicians.

Yet some groups of people fall outside of the welfare state in the Nordic region too, when it comes to health, education and work. The basic belief is that the state has a responsibility for these groups, although families, voluntary organisations and faith groupings also play important parts.

Researchers in Finland have had the opportunity to find out what happens if citizens are given access to a basic income, without having to work or study. 2,000 long-term unemployed people were given 560 euro a month for two years, tax free, rather than unemployment benefits or a daily allowance.

The basic income was also given to those in the group who took up work, or who got other benefits on top. The hope was

to make it easier to find a job for those who participated in the experiment, since they no longer had to spend time on sorting out red tape.

The resulting impact on unemployment rates was very modest, but those receiving the basic income experienced a better quality of life than people in the control group. They also did not have to worry about fighting a benefit system which has become difficult to navigate.

The International Labour Organisation asked the Nordics for help to prepare for its centenary celebrations later this year, because of the countries' willingness to innovate. Four Nordic conferences about the future of work have been organised. The last one is being held in Reykjavik on the 4th and 5th of April, and will focus on the rapid changes in the labour markets. The conference will also look at how to increase gender and general equality in an increasingly globalised world.

The host will be Iceland's Minister of Social Affairs and Children, Ásmundur Einar Daðason, and Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir will also address the conference. She is the only prime minister in the world, as far as we know, who has taken on gender equality as part of her ministerial portfolio. Here, the Icelanders have been innovative. They were the first to divide parental leave into three equal parts, the first to introduce a gender equality certification for salaries and they got through a deep crisis while avoiding negative impacts on children or widening social gaps.

That is why the ILO's Director-General has chosen to travel to Reykjavik before the organisation celebrates its centenary in Geneva on the 19th of June.



## Nordic power positions: a modest increase in gender equality

The past year has seen two new governments emerge in the Nordics, and several changes among the top brass in labour market. But there were only modest changes to the gender balance. Women get one point more and end up with 66 points in the NLJ's gender equality barometer, where 100 points means equal power distribution between the genders in the Nordic countries. But Iceland overtakes Norway.

THEME

06.03.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Iceland got its first ever LO leader in Drífa Snædal. The way we measure, this is an important position and the main reason why Iceland overtakes Norway. The country gets 19 points, compared to Norway's 17.

Denmark got its first female chairman of the Confederation of Employers, Lisbeth Dalgaard Svanholm. Two female

heads of employers' organisations stepped down last year – Carola Lemne in Sweden, and Kristin Skogen Lund in Norway. In both countries, the ministers of labour survived the government reshuffles.

Our gender equality barometer details how many men and how many women sit in 24 different positions of power in



each Nordic country. Half of these positions are in politics, while the rest are in the labour market and what we consider to be symbolically important positions. We give out 200 points, 40 to each country. The 24 positions of power give different scores, from one point for an ordinary government minister to five points for prime ministers. When women achieve 100 points across the Nordic region, or 20 points in one of the countries, we consider gender equality to be achieved in this, albeit limited, area.



The points are calculated on the International Women's Day, the 8th of March. Last year women in the Nordics got 65 points. This year they reach 66 points. That is one point less than in 2015. The graph for the whole of the Nordic region points to a slow, steady increase in the number of women in top positions.

### Finland bottom – again

There is a big difference in the number of points between countries. Finland scored top a few years ago, but has lately found itself at the bottom. Juha Sipilä's government has 17 ministers. Six are women, but only three are in positions that we count. None of the main employee or employer organisations have female leaders, and there are no women in the five symbolically important posts either.



There are parliamentary elections in Finland on 14 April. Regardless of the result, the Minister of Transport and Commu-

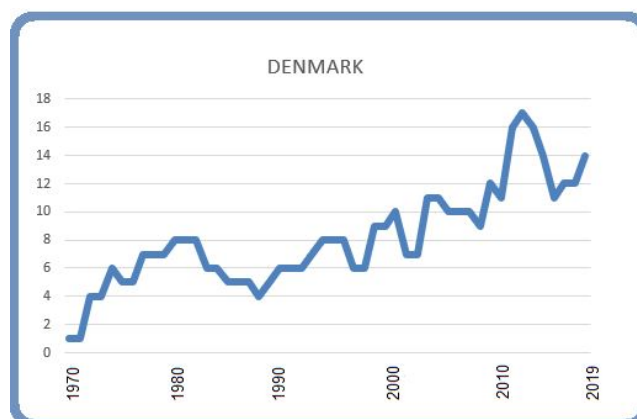
nications Anne Berner has said she will keep her word and retire after four years. She has already said yes to a post on the board of Swedish bank SEB. She has also served as Minister for Nordic Cooperation.

The Finnish elections will lead to major change. The True Finns' results will be followed with great interest. In June 2017 the party's parliamentary group split, with 22 of the MPs founding a new party, Blue Reform. All of the former True Finns' government ministers joined the breakaway group, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs Timo Soini and the Minister of Labour Jari Lindström.

In the latest opinion poll from Taloustutkimus, published by Yle on the 10th of January, the True Finns scored 10.2 percent while Blue Reform only secured 1 percent. The Social Democratic Party was the largest with 21.2 percent of votes. Party leader Antti Rinne contracted pneumonia during a holiday in Spain, and was off sick until the 1st of March. Deputy leader Sanna Marin had been responsible for the election campaign in his absence.

### Danish elections

Denmark will also be holding parliamentary elections. The exact date is only known by Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen. He will pick the day, but elections must be held by the 17th of June, which is four years since the last election. The date must be announced no later than three weeks before election day. The government has seen relatively few changes, and nine of its 22 ministers are women. Only three of them are in positions which are part of our barometer.



Denmark saw big changes at the start of the year, when the two largest employee organisations – LO and FTF – merged and created the Danish Trade Union Confederation, FH. Former LO President Lizette Risgaard is the leader, and FTF President Bente Sorgenfrey is her deputy. We let both of them keep their points.

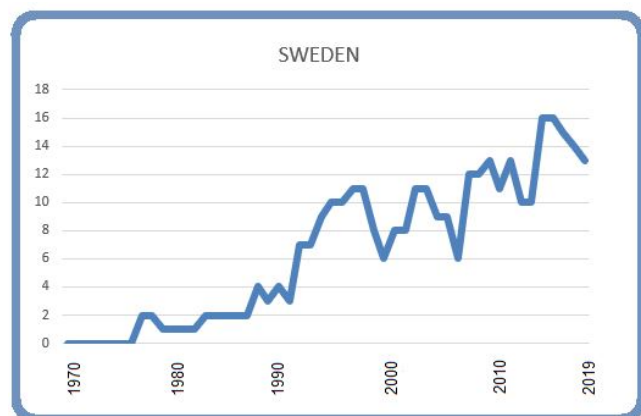
There have been changes on the employer's side too. In 2018, Lisbeth Dagaard Svanholm became the first female President of the Confederation of Danish Employers, DA. She is the confederation's 19th President since its creation in 1896, with

the slogan “A sleeping man will never win”. The fact that she is the first woman in that post got very little attention in Danish media. The NLJ presents her here:

Thanks to her, Denmark climbs to 14 points.

### A renegotiated government in Sweden

That is one point more than Sweden, after its new government coalition emerged on the 21st of January after record-long negotiations. The two women in ministerial posts that get the most points – after the Prime Minister – remain. Magdalena Andersson carries on as Minister for Finance, and Margot Wallström is still Minister for Foreign Affairs. Ylva Johansson also remains as Minister for Labour.



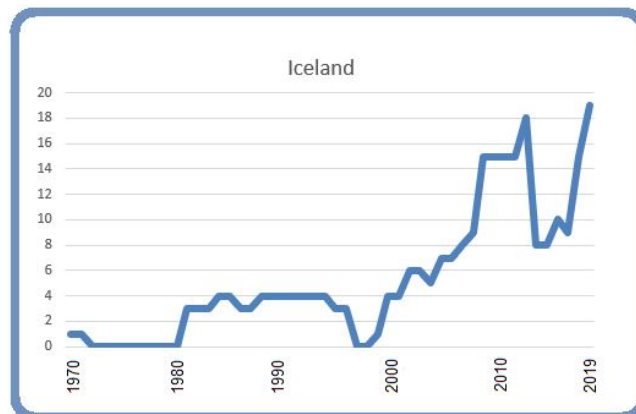
Anna Ekström became Minister for Education and gains a point. Her former title was Minister for Upper Secondary School and Adult Education and Training.

Isabelle Lövin goes from being the Minister for International Development to Minister of the Environment and Energy. She is also the Deputy Prime Minister in Stefan Löfven's government.

On the 8th of March 2018, Carola Lemne announced she would step down as Director General for the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. Jarl-Olof Jacke took over on the 8th of October that year.

### Iceland tops the gender equality barometer

In Iceland, Drifa Snædal became President of Alþýðusamband Íslands, ÁSI, Iceland's LO. BSRB, The Federation of State and Municipal Employees, is also led by a woman. Sonja Ýr Þorbergsdóttir was elected on the 19th of October 2018. The Icelandic Confederation of University Graduates, BHM, has been led by a woman since 2015 – Þórunn Sveinbjarnardóttir.

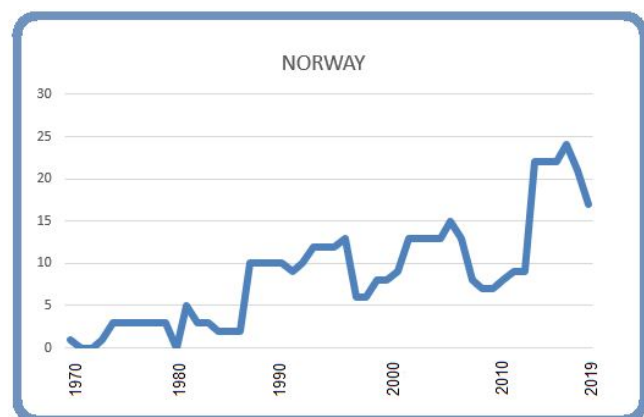


There have been changes on the employers' side too, bringing in a new generation of leaders. This spring's wage negotiations are expected to be difficult, and the risk of a major conflict is considered to be large.

Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir heads a government spanning the far left to the conservative party. Earlier this year, gender equality issues also became part of her portfolio. A major international #metoo conference will be held in Reykjavik in September.

In Norway, #metoo continues to have an impact on politics. The deputy Labour Party leader, Trond Giske, was forced to resign after several young women accused him of inappropriate behaviour. In late February, supporters in his Trondheim base wanted to vote him back into the party leadership, but a nine seconds long video of him dancing with a young woman in a bar was enough for him not to regain the trust of the party – even though the woman in the video said she had taken the initiative.

Norway too saw lengthy government negotiations as the Christian Democrats joined the centre-right coalition on the 22nd of January this year. That decision split the party, and led to Olaug Vervik Bollestad taking over as party leader. She also became the Minister of Agriculture and Food. As a result, Erna Solberg's government now comprises four female party leaders. Solberg herself leads the Conservative Party, while the Minister of Finance Siv Jensen heads the Progress Party and the Minister of Culture Trine Skei Grande heads the Liberal Party.



With the departure Kristin Skogen Lund as Director General of the Norwegian Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, Norway loses one point and is down to 17.

A small caveat: there are still two days until the 8th of March, so changes might still occur.



## I wanted to spend time at home with my daughter

When Malte Conrad became a father three years ago, he wanted to take as much paid parental leave as possible. This summer he will be the father of twins, and wants to do it all again.

THEME

06.03.2019

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: TOMAS BERTELSEN

Malte Conrad (32) is a sociologist working for the police force. He has the right to three months' parental leave on full pay, which he is very happy about.

"For me it was extremely important to be able to spend those months alone at home with my daughter. I was the one in charge of the comfort blanket, meals and sleep, while my girlfriend went to work and had to adapt to Herta's and my regime."

They were good days which seemed to pass much quicker than he had anticipated.

"I never thought about taking more than three months, which gave me full pay. We didn't really feel we could afford

more, and I was perhaps also a bit nervous about starting to miss work. But half way through the leave, I really felt like having more time," he says.





He and partner Agnete are expecting twins in the summer, and have decided that Malte will take parental leave again. They will do it in the same way as last time – with three months full pay as soon as Agnete’s maternal leave ends. There will also be one extra month’s holiday at the end of the leave. Because he works in the public sector, he could choose to extend his leave on a daily allowance rate, but has no plans to do so.

“My employer would support me taking longer leave, but I am not sure if we could afford just a daily allowance rate. I might also start to miss work after four months of focussing on the children. It is very valuable, but a bit boring to spend all your time with a child aged eight to eleven months.”

He sometimes met up with a couple of other fathers while on parental leave, but admits he envies the socialising that women enjoy during their maternity leave via their mothers’ groups and together with other women on leave.



Malte Conrad is happy about the fact that the EU is focusing on securing fathers’ rights to take time off to spend with their children. But he is not sure about what to make of the new EU rules.

“I support parental leave earmarked men, but I think it might be better to be able to extend the period of leave rather than taking the two months away from the total leave,” he says.



## Danish opposition to EU rules on daddy leave

Danish men who would like more paternal leave get support from new EU rules. But there is broad opposition in the Danish parliament to what is being seen as the EU meddling in Danish family affairs.

THEME

06.03.2019

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Parental leave is very unevenly distributed between the genders in many EU countries, including in Denmark. Danish women take far more parental leave than men, despite the fact that many Danish men would like to spend more time at home with their small children.

Danish men take far less time off after birth than Danish women, who take 90 %. Danish men also take less parental leave than men in other Nordic countries, despite the fact that many Danish men actually do want to spend more time at home with their small children than they do today. In principle at least.

### **Widespread discrimination**

According to a 2016 report from the Danish Institute for Human Rights, more than one in five Danish men take less than the statutory leave they are due when becoming fathers – even if they would have liked to take more. The report linked this to family economy, and the fact that the child's mother often wants to take as much of the shared leave as possible.



It also showed that pregnancy and maternity leave increases the risk for discrimination in the workplace. Danish parents are protected by law against workplace discrimination in relation to pregnancy and parental leave, yet discrimination is a widespread phenomenon in Danish workplaces. Nearly half of Danish women and a quarter of Danish men have experienced discrimination at work around the time they become parents, according to the report from the Institute for Human Rights.

### **Sharing the leave more equally**

In light of all this, the Institute for Human Rights has recommended to the social partners and the government to pursue a more equal division of parental leave between men and women. This should reduce the discrimination of women.

There is both direct and economic discrimination. When mothers-to-be tell their employer they are about to have a baby, just under one in five experience a worsening of their working conditions. One in nine women face negative reactions from their boss when announcing the coming family expansion. One in seven women do not return to the same employer after their leave, and among those who do, 12 % are asked to do different tasks even if they do not want to.

Some are given less responsibility or are degraded. The study also showed that men and women's average pay go in opposite directions after the birth of a child; women's pay falls, and this economic inequality lasts for the rest of their lives.

The inequality in pay, mixed with women having more leave and less time to work when they become mothers, means they end up paying less into their pensions than men while they are in the labour market. As a result, the women have less to live off when they retire.

### **A hot potato**

Nevertheless, parental leave earmarked the man remains a hot political potato. The former Social Democrat-led government earmarked parental leave for fathers as part of its government programme, and this remains a key strategy for the political left in Denmark.



Yet that point of the government's programme was never implemented. It was not possible to secure backing for a model that would take away leave from women to give to men, and it was impossible to find a model that did not have that effect.

The EU has now secured earmarked parental leave for men. But Danish politicians are not applauding this fact. There is cross-party agreement that this is an issue which the EU should not get involved in. Family policy is considered to be a national issue.

So the EU did not have Denmark's support when it decided that all member states must, within three years, earmark two months of parental leave for men. If these two months are not taken, they will be lost.

# Basic income made Finns happier

Finland's basic income experience came to an end 2018. The 2,000 unemployed people who received a basic income for two years instead of other benefits did not work more in the end, but they grew happier.

THEME

06.03.2019

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The experiment's budget is 20 million euro. The final assessment will not be ready until 2020, because so far register data exists only for the first of the two years the experiment lasted. Another major survey will also be carried out.

When the Finnish Minister of Finance Petteri Orpo decided not to extend the experiment with one more year, many foreign media described it as a failure. But when results were presented during a Helsinki seminar on the 8th of February, both Finland's Minister of Social Affairs and Health Pirkko Mattila and Olli Kangas, the head of research at the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, were proud:

"The experiment has caught the world's attention, and has been positive for Finland's image. It has provided us with unique information which we can use in the coming social and healthcare reform," said Pirkko Mattila.

"The project was not carried out in the way we originally had presented it. Due to various factors such as finance, time and both EU and Finnish legislation, the project was both smaller and watered down when it got off the ground. Despite this fact, it is exceptional and the best research project on basic income which has ever been carried out," said Olli Kangas.

He was worried about how the project would be interpreted, but pointed out that the results did not mean the research project had failed. The aim was not to get unemployed people to work more, but to see what would happen if they got a basic income instead of unemployment benefits with their accompanying demands.

Basic income supporters argue such a reform would be liberating. It would give people the opportunity to be creative, empower them and reduce their economic uncertainty. Participants would also avoid wasting time on bureaucracy, filling in forms and looking for jobs in a labour market where unemployment was 7.6 %. Instead, they would be able to create their own businesses.

"The official paperwork hell is crazy, and you get even more stressed by not knowing whether you will get your money. And I also don't have to take part in the job centre's obligatory courses anymore, where they treat people like idiots," Liisa Ronkainen, one of the experiment participants, told Finnish broadcaster Yle.

Families with children, however, did have the opportunity to apply for unemployment benefits rather than the basic income, since this was higher. So some within the group chose to fill in forms after all.

When they were interviewed at the end of 2018, the participants were positive to the introduction of a basic income. 57.2 % of the test group agreed it would reduce bureaucracy involved when accepting a job offer. The control group's number was 37.3 %. The nearly 20 percentage point difference is the biggest in the survey.

The test group was more positive in their answers to all questions regarding their self-perceived assessment of health, their financial security and their own ability to influence their own situation.

## Those answering somewhat or strongly agree to questions about their life situation:

	Test	Control
Good health	55.4 %	46.2 %
Good financial wellbeing	42.2 %	30.3 %
High confidence in their own future	58.2 %	46.2 %
Good opportunity to influence their own situation	28.9 %	22.6 %



Participation was obligatory, which makes the Finnish experiment different from former experiments, which have all been voluntary. The basic income project has faced a lot of criticism, however. In a survey by Lännen Media, seven out of the ten largest trade unions were negative to the idea of a universal basic income. Their main argument was the risk of a passivating effect.

“You cannot start dishing out money without anything being expected in return from people who potter around at home. It is unhealthy for the country’s economy and for the individual. Work is what the Finnish welfare society is built on,” Olli Luukkainen, the President of the Trade Union of Education in Finland, OAJ, told the survey.

### **No employment effect**

Critics of a basic income also highlight the fact that the experiment did not lead to higher employment numbers. The test group only worked half a day more than the control group.

But as Ohto Kanninen, one of the project’s researchers, pointed out at the seminar:

“Perhaps two years is not enough time if you want to measure any effect, or perhaps the test group only escaped a limited amount of bureaucracy. Thanks to the Finnish registries we are able to follow the test group beyond the end of the experiment.

“The lack of a difference between the two groups is actually interesting, and it does not mean the experiment failed. The test group had a stronger incentive to accept jobs, since they did not risk losing any of their basic income,” he pointed out.



## Swedish women in blue-collar jobs lose out

The gender wage gap continues to narrow in Sweden. But take a closer look at the numbers, and you see that not everyone is part of the positive development. Ahead of the 8th of March, LO again warns that women in blue-collar jobs are lagging behind.

THEME

06.03.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUNHILD WALLIN

“Women in white-collar jobs have seen more progress than others, and much work remains to be done in order to close the wage gap between men and women. The ones lagging behind are mostly women in blue-collar jobs, and single mothers plus women of foreign heritage are getting the worst economic deal,” says Ulrika Vedin, research officer at The Swedish Trade Union Confederation LO.

She is nevertheless happy about the overall statistics that show a narrowing gender wage gap.

“We see that the Nordic model works well, with labour market, family and general welfare policies working in unison. We must not forget that. Even though we do have a pay gap, it is not so bad here as in many other countries,” says Ulrika Vedin.

For the past six years, LO has been presenting “The Swedish Gender Equality Barometer” ahead of the 8th of March. Last year the theme was time, power and money, and the barometer looked back at developments during the past 20 years. This year the investigation delves deeper and focuses on eco-

conomic equality, based on working and employment conditions.

Because the report was not yet published at the time of our interview, Ulrika Vedin was careful to not go into too much detail about its contents. There does not seem to have been any major changes in the past year when it comes to working women's wages lagging behind men's.

### **A growing wage gap**

In last year's equality barometer, LO looked back over the past 20 years to assess how wages, working conditions and family life had developed since the mid-1990s. One result stood out – economic inequality has grown in Sweden. Women in both blue-collar and white-collar jobs have narrowed the pay gap between them and men, but the female white-collar workers have also pulled away from the female blue-collar workers when it comes to pay. This is due to an increasing pay gap between blue-collar and white-collar workers.

Yet Ulrika Vedin does not agree that this means that trade unions for white-collar workers do a better job at representing their members. The labour market has developed in a direction that benefits higher skilled workers, and jobs growth is taking place within occupations that need university-level education.

“Women in blue-collar jobs never benefit from the market, and their jobs are not as highly valued as those of white-collar workers higher up on the ladder. Class does come into it when occupations are valued, so there is no coincidence that the pay gap is widening. In care and service occupations, the labour force represents part of the production cost, so there is naturally an interest in keeping wages low,” says Ulrika Vedin.

When LO calculates the pay gap, they start by finding out the real monthly pay. This means the actual hours worked are taken into the equation, since many women work part-time – often against their wishes. Calculating the real monthly pay, LO takes the full-time monthly salary with no bonuses, and divide it with the actual number of hours worked. The real average monthly salary for blue-collar women was 20 960 kronor (€1,990) in 2016. The average monthly pay for a full-time job was 26 200 kronor (€2,490).

“We want to show how much the work actually pays. When you are of working age, your take-home pay is the most important thing for your independence and living conditions, so we want to show how part-time work influences people's economies,” says Ulrika Vedin.

### **Complex links**

She says it is important to think two thoughts simultaneously, when thinking about, talking about and creating strategies for gender equality. A living wage is a prerequisite for being able to maintain the freedom to choose the life you want for

yourself and your children. It means having the right to full-time work and secure terms of employment. A living wage is important also beyond your working years – it affects your pension and therefore your old age.

But for women in blue-collar jobs, things are mainly going the wrong way. Over the past 20 years the number of precarious contracts – and not least so-called zero hours contracts – have increased more for women in blue-collar jobs than for other groups of workers in society. Many women in blue-collar jobs work part-time out of no choice of their own, which impacts on pay, unpaid domestic work and their influence over their own work.

There is a faint silver lining – the agreement between the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL), and the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal) known as “the full-time journey”. This is aimed at getting more people in the care sector into full-time employment.

“This is an important part,” says Ulrika Vedin.

She also wants to highlight other measures that are necessary for improving the conditions for women in blue-collar jobs. Family policies need an overhaul, and the LO annual congress also agreed to recommend an individualisation of parental leave – i.e. it should be divided equally between men and women.

Child care is another important issue. Today this is available in the daytime, which helps white-collar workers who for the most part work during the day. It is harder to make use of the services for women in blue-collar occupations who work evenings and weekends.

“And we know that women take the main responsibility for the children whether they are blue or white-collar workers. That is the way it is around the world.

Retraining is also important, she points out. LO's female-dominated occupations should not become a dumping ground when retraining in other sectors fail.

“This is very important for LO's female-dominated jobs, because you risk ending up with parts of the workforce being sluiced into these occupations, putting pressure on flexibility and lower minimum wages.”

### **Gender equality and equality belong together**

When reflecting over what the growing pay gap means, she likes to look at the correlation between wages and working conditions and the division of care and household work. Equality and gender equality belong together. If you have no equality in society, gender equality tends to suffer as well. Those who make less money, have a worse starting point when it comes to negotiations at home about who should be doing what.

“Economic resources flowing from work are crucial for achieving gender equality, but I feel the conditions for women in blue-collar jobs are being forgotten, despite the fact that gender equality is an aim for society as a whole.”

Ulrika Vedin talks about trade union feminism, the need to see and recognise the structures that influence gender equality rather than turning gender equality into an stand-alone issue.

“This is about classic trade union issues, the basic structures for work and family. As an individual you are too weak to influence structures, so you need the help of the collective,” she says.





## Island invites the ILO to the land of volcanos and glaciers

On the 4th and 5th of April, Iceland will be hosting the final out of four Nordic conferences ahead of the ILO's centenary celebrations. The Future of Work conferences represent a very important forum not only for Iceland, but for the entire Nordic region, says Iceland's Minister for Social Affairs and Children Ásmundur Einar Daðason.

### NEWS

06.03.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR

Major changes to the labour market and gender equality will be two important themes during the last Future of Work conference, organised by the Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs and Children in Reykjavik in early April.

The ministry is optimistic about the conference. 200 participants have already signed up, and the ministry is hoping the total number will be close to 300. The Nordic Council of Min-

isters for Labour will convene the day before the conference. ILO's Director-General Guy Ryder will participate in both the ministers' meeting and the conference.

"We will look at how the Nordic countries have organised their working lives and labour markets. The Nordic region can become a model for other countries," says Ásmundur Einar Daðason.

### Major changes afoot

The Future of Work conferences have been held over the past four years, and always in the country which has held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The first was held in Helsinki four years ago, where global changes to the labour market was on the agenda. Three years ago in Oslo, the sharing economy was the theme, and the third conference in Stockholm last year looked at the technological development and necessary changes to education and training.

Conference number four in Reykjavik will sum up what has been discussed during the previous conferences. But since it is also the ILO's centenary, there will be a special presentation based on the ILO's Global Commission's report on the future of work. Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Löfven has been one of the commission's two commissioners.

The ILO has asked the Nordic countries for ideas and proposals on how to improve working conditions and gender equality, and also how to maintain skills to avoid jobs being taken over by robots and artificial intelligence. The Nordic region has focused on the protection of workers' rights and a tripartite cooperation in the labour market. This will be discussed and expanded on. Working environments are important, believes Ásmundur Einar. He also believes gender equality in the labour market should be a high priority.

### We are not fleeing from the future

Iceland recently presented an equal pay standard, which is about to be introduced to all public and private companies with more than 250 employees. The Nordics have also been at the forefront when it comes to parental leave and other labour market reforms. Gender equality, parental leave and the labour market have all been linked. It is important to make sure everyone can be part of the labour market.

"I believe these three areas allow the Nordic region to inspire other countries," says Ásmundur Einar Daðason.

He says that the future of work is being discussed across the Nordic region right now. Iceland is no exception. The population is growing fast and the way people look at the labour market is changing. Climate change also plays a very big part. The minister is looking forward to learning more about the report on the Nordic model produced by a large number of researchers, coordinated by the Norwegian research foundation Fafo.

Iceland is very hopeful it can build on the results from the conference. The Nordic region has always had a well-developed labour market. If the Nordics are to maintain their leadership position as Nordic welfare states, the countries must continue to develop their labour markets. This will also be a topic for debate during the conference, along with how the Nordic region can take bigger and powerful steps into the future.

"When you look at how fast things are moving, the Nordic region can only keep its leadership position by continuing their labour market cooperation. We are not fleeing the future," says Ásmundur Einar.

### Everything is linked

Young people, sustainable tourism and the seas are all priorities during Iceland's 2019 Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic region prioritises gender equality and digitalisation, linking everything to the UN's sustainable development goals.

Ásmundur Einar points out that everything is linked. He believes young people's futures are part of the UN's priorities. Iceland focuses on the seas, because the resources there and the environment are important for Iceland and the whole of the Nordic region. Every time Iceland has held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the country has tried to take into account their neighbours Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

"Climate change could have enormous consequences for the Nordic region, and this is also linked to sustainable development. Living conditions change, fish stocks disappear, new fish species arrive. This is part of sustainable development and climate change's effects on the seas, even though these areas do not fall directly under this government ministry," he points out.

### Equal pay standard in German

Iceland recently passed an equal pay standard law. At the start of 2019, 66 public and private companies began introducing the standard. This number will rise to 200 by the end of the year. In the coming years, public and private companies with fewer employees will introduce the standard too, until all companies with at least 25 employees will adhere to it. The equal pay standard and Icelandic laws and regulations have already been translated into German. Germany, Austria and New Zealand have already shown an interest in introducing the standard.

"You always see unexpected results when you introduce something groundbreaking like the equal pay standard. I believe other countries will be giving this serious consideration, once Iceland has fully introduced the standard," says Ásmundur Einar.

### Flexibility and perseverance

Iceland has put the financial crisis behind it, but it is only a few years ago that the country went through hard times. Ásmundur Einar believes Icelanders' flexibility and perseverance helped the country manage to bounce back as fast as it did. There are advantages and disadvantages to being a small society, he thinks.

"We Icelanders react and adapt quickly when faced with changes in our local environment. Our fisheries industry has been used to working hard when catches are good. The same

goes for the rest of the labour market. Tourism has experienced enormous growth. It is now Iceland's biggest export," he says.

"But you mustn't have too much flexibility. We also need stability. That is the key to the future. Families who lost their homes and jobs have been through tough times. Not everyone have managed to catch up again."

Iceland is now looking at setting up a national fund modelled on the Norwegian oil fund. It would be a buffer for the next time Iceland runs into economic difficulties. The idea is to have access to extra funds during times of crisis. The money would be taken from state revenues from for instance the energy company Landsvirkjun, the country's main energy provider.

### **The land of volcanos and glaciers**

"We want a fund which can be used during hard times, because we live in the land of volcanos and glaciers. Nobody knows when the next rough patch will be, so it is important to mend the roof while the sun is shining. Icelandic families do the same. They have lowered their shoulders. That is important and positive," he says.

The Welfare Watch was set up in 2009 in order to protect children from the financial crisis. Other countries have shown an interest in this, but as far as the Minister for Social Affairs and Children knows, no other country has taken the idea any further. The Welfare Watch recently presented a report showing there are still children in Iceland who live below the poverty line, and that their living standards have not improved in line with that of other people in Icelandic society.





## Lisbeth Dalgaard Svanholm aims to gather big and small employers

While the Danish trade union movement has got a new main organisation, their counterparts, DA, have got a new female leader who aims to bring together some very different member companies.

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TEXT MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: DA

Danish trade unions have created the Danish Trade Union Confederation, FH, in order to gain more influence. Meanwhile the Danish Confederation of Employers, DA, has also made changes at the top. In December 2018 they replaced their leader. The new President is a woman, a grocer and she is focused on gender equality.

DA represents 14 private sector employer's organisations and speaks for more than 24 000 companies within industry,

trade, transport, service and construction. The new DA President, Lisbeth Dalgaard Svanholm, therefore speaks for many and very diverse organisations, and it is her job to secure they get the best possible chance to influence things.

Her greatest task is perhaps therefore to be found within the organisation itself. DA's members are very different and there is internal rivalry: there is the giant Confederation of Danish Industry (DI), the Danish Chamber of Commerce and



the Danish Construction Association – as well as a range of smaller and very small member organisations. The new President must therefore seek broad compromises that all the members can agree on, predicts the newsletter Mandag Morgen.

When taking the job, the President herself said her main job would be to secure companies good framework conditions and the necessary labour – including from abroad.

Before she became DA President, she headed the grocery trade organisation De Samvirkende Købmænd, DSK. At the time, she said she wanted to focus on gender equality, and that she felt the social partners shared a responsibility for getting female middle managers into the top leadership of companies. She also advised women to marry men who feel the family is a joint project, and that the woman should also be able to pursue her career. And she warned that maternity leave must not become something that put breaks on the women's careers.

She has herself taken over her father's supermarket in the city of Hørsholm north of Copenhagen, which she now owns and runs. She is 59 and married with two children.