

**Theme**

Hyllie – the district that symbolises the Nordic labour market

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Fresh report: Nordic citizens can work anywhere in the region. So why don't they?

**Editorial**

The Nordic labour market turns 70 – but is it being fully explored?

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Swedish minister: Still room for improvement to the common Nordic labour market

Jun 20, 2024

## Theme: The common Nordic labour market at 70



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## **Contents**

The Nordic labour market turns 70 – but is it being fully explored? .....	3
Hyllie – the district that symbolises the Nordic labour market .....	5
Swedish minister: Still room for improvement to the common Nordic labour market.....	11
Fresh report: Nordic citizens can work anywhere in the region. So why don't they? .....	13
National rules dominate the common Nordic labour market .....	17
What does the common Nordic labour market mean to you? .....	21
Danielle - from Party Swede to seamstress.....	25
The story of the common Nordic labour market ..	28
“It had to be the Nordics” – why a Danish priest chose Norway .....	31

# The Nordic labour market turns 70 – but is it being fully explored?

Being able to work in a neighbouring Nordic country without applying for a work or residency permit is a given for Nordic citizens. But why do we no longer do it?

EDITORIAL

20.06.2024

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Researchers at Nordregio have examined the state of the common Nordic labour market. What has surprised them the most is that so few Nordic citizens move or commute to a different Nordic country these days.

Just 1.6 per cent of the Nordic population were born in a different country to the one they are currently living in. Compare that to the EU, where 3.9 per cent were born in a different European country.

The fact that passport-free travel exists and there is no need for work or residency permits makes it harder to understand why this is the case. Earlier, there were major waves of migration within the Nordic region.

As Finland's Minister of Employment Arto Satonen pointed out on the first day of the anniversary conference in Malmö's Hyllie district, 700,000 people living in Sweden have Finnish ancestry.

Perhaps the countries have become too similar, perhaps it is trickier to get a bank account and a place to live these days, or perhaps other countries are more tempting?

"The decision to move to another country is always an individual one," pointed out Jon Stråth, from EURES, the European Employment Services Network.

"It is one teacher who is moving, not teachers as a professional group."

When you talk to those who have actually made the move, it becomes clear that there are many things behind the choices people make. Ten years ago, the Nordic Labour Journal published a special edition covering the 60th anniversary of the common labour market. We spoke to Nordic citizens who had moved during the six decades that had passed since the signing of the deal.

Now, we have added to that by interviewing some of those who have moved in the latest decades. What really happened to the "Party Swedes" who worked in Norway in the 2000s? What makes a Danish priest move to Lillehammer in Norway? And do those who commute between Denmark and Sweden today feel it works for them?

It is obvious that political decisions have real consequences. But things do not always move fast. Johan Strang, Professor of Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki, said that during the Nordic Council's first meeting in 1953, three issues were on the agenda:

- Finland's empty chair (the country did not join until 1955)
- A proposal to build a bridge across Øresund
- Establishing a common labour market

It took 47 years before the bridge across Øresund was ready, but the common Nordic labour market was established already on 1 July 1954.

Before the Øresund Bridge was opened on 1 July 2000, only 800 people commuted across Øresund. In 2023, the traffic beat all previous records with nearly 100,000 passenger trips every day.

On 10 June this year, Denmark and Sweden signed a new tax agreement for those who live on one side and work on the other – physically or digitally.

This agreement, hopes Sweden's Minister for Employment Johan Pehrson, will lead to even more people taking advantage of a bigger labour market, and that it can become an inspiration to other parts of the Nordics.

One of those who work a lot on Nordic issues is Fredrik Karlström, a former government minister in Åland. He would like to see something new and big that would be meaningful to many people.

“This could be electronic ID, which is absolutely necessary, or something simpler like a reform of the companies act. It is not that difficult politically but means a lot to the labour market and companies that want to expand. It could make it easier for people who want to set up and run businesses in a harmonised market.”

Several of the conference speakers pointed out that the Nordic labour market also includes other people beyond Nordic citizens. It is also important to grant those who arrive from countries outside of the EU/EEA the same opportunities to commute to a different Nordic country. The Nordic countries ought to market the region together in order to attract the necessary talent – and make sure they like it here when they arrive.





# Hyllie – the district that symbolises the Nordic labour market

A private initiative became the beginning of a dynamic district halfway between Malmö Central and Copenhagen Airport. The Eurovision Song Contest was recently staged here and in June, participants this week gathered to celebrate 70 years of the common Nordic labour market.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO: THOMAS BERTELSEN

- Nobody thought things would turn out the way it did when we began, says the entrepreneur who was first on the ball and refused to let it go.
- To be able to attract headquarters to the district is a fantastic strength, says Malmö's director of business.
- Hyllie and Malmö have some of the diversity found in New York, says the economist specialising in entrepreneurship and economic growth.
- A sudden domino effect says the Mayor of the City of Malmö when discussing Hyllie's growth.

## Potential for growth

The conditions were optimal for a new district in this southern part of Malmö, thought Percy Nilsson, first a carpenter, then a builder, and a long-time entrepreneur.



*Percy Nilsson has a view of the Øresund Bridge from his office in Hyllie.*

He is referring to the physical proximity to the bridgehead, with plenty of abandoned farmland around what would become Sweden's first and last station for the trains crossing the Øresund. However, it required perseverance on his part before the shovel could be put into the muddy ground.

“For a long while, nothing happened.”

The Nordic Labour Journal is visiting Percy Nilsson at his office in Hyllie. Through one of the windows, we can see the Øresund Bridge – the construction that has been crucial to the integration between Denmark and Sweden and for making the Øresund region the largest labour market in the Nordics.



*Malmö Arena was at the very core of the new district. Photo: Tomas Bertelsen.*

His office is on the top floor of the same building that houses Malmö Arena. Other offices here house insurance companies, a midwifery clinic and a property company and more. The shared lobby is lively. Many people are on their way to or from some of the businesses.

### **Belief in an obvious success**

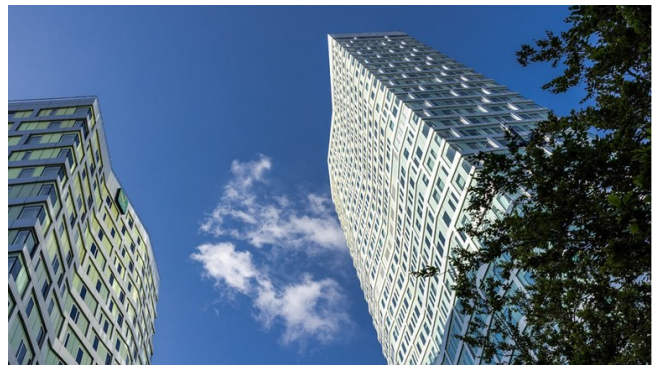
Percy Nilsson presented a general plan for the development of Hyllie to Malmö Municipality as far back as 1997, using

physical models of an arena, shopping centre, a bath house, exhibition hall, housing, offices and more. This was how a new district near the bridgehead could look.

“I had had this idea for some years and knew the decision to build the Øresund Bridge had been made and that funding was in place for the City Tunnel. There was no doubt that this would be a success,” says the entrepreneur who never stopped believing in his proposal.

He got his inspiration from the USA. When establishing new districts, arenas and shopping centres were also built in order to get the infrastructure up and running, he explains.

“If you build a bridge between two sides, the areas around the bridgeheads will grow. Copenhagen would get Ørestad so my idea was that Malmö would get Hyllie. And to get people to come here you needed something gigantic,” says Percy Nilsson.



*It was only after the Øresund Bridge had been built and it became possible to take a train from Copenhagen Airport to Hyllie in 14 minutes that Malmö Municipality showed interest in Percy Nilsson's plans.*

Despite repeated meetings with presentations and models, his proposal – according to him – was not met with enthusiasm from the municipal representatives.

Not until 2001 – the year after the opening of the Øresund Bridge with its motorway and railway – did Malmö Municipality decide to make Hyllie a focus area. Five years later, Percy Nilsson purchased land in Hyllie from the municipality.





*"Some of New York's diversity" says the national economist Pontus Braunerhjelm about Hyllie and Malmö. The Emporia shopping centre is on the right. Photo: Tomas Bertelsen.*

### From muddy fields to modern district

"We spent three years negotiating before we were in business. The municipality did not want an arena or a shopping centre of the scale that I believed was necessary. After repeatedly presenting studies and plans I managed to push the project through," he says.

"In the beginning, nobody believed in this and I was forced to sign an agreement with fines worth millions if I did not complete the arena construction."

Percy Nilsson subdivided the land he had bought and sold a proportion to a Norwegian retail giant that built the popular Emporia which opened in 2012, spanning 93,000 square metres with stores across three levels. It is particularly popular with the Danes.



*Emporia shopping centre in Hyllie. Photo: Björn Lindahl*

"In order to build a big arena, I demanded there had to be a large shopping centre. I invested everything I made from selling the land to Emporia in the arena," says Percy Nilsson.

The multi arena opened in 2008. It is used for a range of different sports, culture and entertainment events like ice hockey matches, concerts, and show jumping – on a national and international level.

"The ceiling can support 260 tonnes of technical equipment that can move in different directions to control the lighting effects. This weight capacity exceeds that of any other arena in Sweden," says Percy Nilsson.

This technical sophistication is likely one of the reasons why the Eurovision Song Contest was once again held at Malmö Arena. The first time was in 2013. The second time was in May, when the event reached 163 million viewers, according to the EBU.

"Hyllie means a lot for Malmö and Emporia makes money from Danish shoppers, who in turn save money because of our weak currency."

### Headquarters create ripples

Emporia is far from the only magnet for Hyllie. Many businesses have chosen to set up shop here.

"One reason is that property companies have built modern and functional offices, Micael Nord, Malmö's director of business, tells the Nordic Labour Journal.



"We have also seen that businesses increasingly choose to set up their headquarters in Hyllie, partly because of the proximity to Copenhagen and its airport, the largest in the Nordics and one of the largest in Northern Europe," he says, and points to the synergy effects from hosting headquarters.

"They attract other parts of the business community and can create clusters as well as establish other services in the region," he says.

The business expansion in Malmö is visible within banking, finance and insurance, the director of business explains.

"The expertise in these industries is present in Malmö, and it's easy to commute to Hyllie both by public transport and other means," he says.

### Local cooperation

Local businesses also see development opportunities in the district. Here, the businesses have come together in Hyllie City cooperation, and write on their website:

"Many companies choose to establish themselves here, precisely for the enormous expansion possibilities and the opportunity to build a large network of an international nature."

Micael Nord is very happy that Hyllie businesses organise to develop both their own companies and the district.

"Collaborative actors demonstrating that we can achieve this together is good for the municipality, and the fact that the business community here has created its own vision shows a forward-looking ambition," he says.



*The Eurovision Song Contest was staged in Malmö Arena for a second time in 2024. Photo: Alma Bengtsson, EBU.*

The events that the Malmömässan (the Malmö Fair) continuously hosts [including labour market-related ones - Ed.] and the large events at Malmö Arena are significant in a larger context, not just for Hyllie, points out Micael Nord.

“They are engines for the entire business community in the city and are incredibly important for all of Sweden. Just take the recent Eurovision Song Contest. For such a mega-event, the combination of Malmö Arena and Malmömässan is outstanding from both a Swedish and Northern European perspective,” he says.

### **Diversity strengthens entrepreneurship**

Pontus Braunerhjelm, talking to the Nordic Labour Journal, offers a personal reflection on Malmö's and thereby Hyllie's opportunities.

He is a professor of economics with a focus on entrepreneurship and economic growth and was part of the Growth Commission that Malmö's municipal council appointed in 2021 to "develop an analytical and scientific basis with proposals and recommendations to improve the conditions for inclusive and sustainable growth in Malmö in the medium and long term."

### **Research on innovation**

“Research has shown that societies characterised by diversity often have a higher capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. Many nationalities are represented in Malmö municipality, and some of the residents come from cultures where starting businesses is common.



*Even the culture – here represented by Charlotte Gyllenhammar's fountain "Mother and Child", which opened in the summer of 2014 – has a feel of big city grandiosity. The child blows bubbles under the water in a different fountain a few hundred metres away. Photo: Tomas Bertelsen.*

“There is a similarity with New York in that the average age is low in both places. Of course, this can also bring some problems; the outcome is influenced by policy design. However, it is a good foundation,” says Pontus Braunerhjelm.

Generally, he says, a capital region can be attractive and bring in both capital and talent, while nearby communities become interesting due to lower land prices, making it easier for businesses to set up shop because costs are lower.

“The Öresund region is an extremely interesting region with a population of 4.5 million. Malmö and Hyllie are part of this, with their specific characteristics such as the proximity to Copenhagen Airport and opportunities for specialisation, such as the establishment of knowledge-intensive companies, which is particularly interesting since Malmö was previously an industrial city.”

Pontus Braunerhjelm also points to how one single initiative can put in motion a chain of proactive actions.

“The dynamic environment in Hyllie demonstrates what a single initiative can mean in the long run. The Öresund Bridge was the first. Then several others followed,” he says.

One of the many initiatives worth mentioning is the Junior Achievement (UF) fair. This spring, the fair was held for the tenth time, at Emporia in Hyllie. Along the corridors of the shopping centre, booths were set up for three days where 390 UF companies and 1,400 UF entrepreneurs from 50 different colleges in Skåne showcased their businesses and entrepreneurship, alongside various lectures.

Perhaps some of them will establish themselves in Hyllie. The district is not yet fully developed.

### **Good transport, bigger labour market**

“Hyllie is still being built and we think that by 2040, 25,000 people will live here and 15,000 people will be working here,” says Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh.





*Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh. Photo: Malmö Municipality.*

She has been the mayor of Malmö Municipality since 2013. According to statistics from the Hyllie City cooperation, 8,500 people live in Hyllie today, and 11,000 people work here.

"Hyllie came into existence due to several parameters. When the construction of the Öresund Bridge was planned, assessments were made regarding both passenger and freight transport. Malmö Central needed a solution to allow trains to pass through the city, and that's why the City Tunnel was built, which in turn got a station at Hyllie," says Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh.

The infrastructure projects coincided with Malmö being in a phase of population growth, and the municipality wanted to leverage the potential that these projects offered, Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh explains.

"Hyllie got off to a slow start. Percys arena and Emporia came first, but residential construction took time to get started. Once it did, it created a sudden domino effect. If I went out to Hyllie two days in a row, the buildings would have gained a few floors by the second day."

"The results of the investment in a new district are clear," argues Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh.

"The City Tunnel, with excellent train connections directly from Hyllie to Denmark as well as to Gothenburg, Kalmar, and Karlskrona in Sweden, has expanded the labour market in the region."



*Creating a well-functioning neighbourhood also involves housing, ensuring that those growing up in Hyllie have a pleasant environment. Foto: Tomas Bertelsen.*

The tunnel also links the different parts of the municipality together, and there are now eight train stations.

"Malmö has experienced stronger growth, which correlates with our continued high influx of new residents. Last year, more people moved to Malmö than to Stockholm. People are moving here from across Skåne and from all over Sweden," she says.

### **Sustainability and culture**

Optimism for the future shines clearly through when Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh talks about Hyllie. It is a future imbued with sustainability. The Embassy of Sharing, a new neighbourhood nearing completion, is proof of this.

Each of the houses there will focus on one or several of the global sustainable development goals adopted by the world's heads of state and governments in 2017.



*Kulturfyren i Hyllie. Photo: Björn Lindahl*

In one of the seven properties, *Kulturfyren* will open this autumn. It will house three enterprises: the Hyllie Library, Dawit Isaak Library for forbidden culture, and Work in Progress, a meeting place for young creators.

Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh is happy that there is investment also in non-commercial ventures in Hyllie, and she is content with the overall development happening in the district.

She is also satisfied with the flexibility the municipality enjoys when driving forward this development.

She concludes our interview by saying that she is in a position envied by many others who inhabit similar roles.



*From the air it becomes clear just how close Hyllie is to the Öresund Bridge. Photo: hyllie.com*

“Beyond Hyllie’s expansion over the next 20 years, the development in the harbours Nyhamnen and Mellersta Hamnen in central Malmö is picking up pace. For a municipal mayor, it is a dream come true to have so much land so close to build on.”

Finally, we have to ask Percy Nilsson, the man who was first on the ball and refused to let go before the project got going: Did Hyllie turn out as you had envisioned?

"It wasn't a walk in the park, but it turned out well in the end," responds Percy Nilsson.



## Swedish minister: Still room for improvement to the common Nordic labour market

Sweden's Minister for Employment Johan Pehrson has painted a picture of the Nordic region as a beacon in northern Europe, offering hope and opportunities to people. But what does the agreement on the common Nordic labour market really mean beyond what is already regulated by the EU?

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“The agreement on a common Nordic labour market has naturally lost some of its importance because EU legislation now regulates EU countries’ – including the Nordics’ – labour markets.

But the agreement is still relevant even if we do not give it that much thought. It has shaped much of the Nordic cooperation and sense of community and prepared the ground

for our collaborative structures,” Johan Pehrson tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

“The agreement for instance outlines how the Nordic labour market authorities should cooperate to avoid imbalances in our common labour market. It also stipulates that the countries should keep each other informed about developments in the labour market and labour market policy measures. This is



still on the agenda during Nordic meetings both on civil servant and political levels,” says Johan Pehrson.

**Only 0.5 per cent of the Nordic population commute to a different Nordic country, compared to the EU average of 1 per cent. The number of people who move to another Nordic country is also low at 1.6 per cent. The figures come from Nordregio, and the theory is that the Nordic countries have become too similar. Do you agree?**

“There are surely several reasons for those figures, but of course, it made a big difference in the 1950s and 1960s when Sweden could offer both jobs and higher living standards to many people who made use of the opportunity to work in the common Nordic labour market.

“Today, things are different. Living standards are similar across the Nordics and in many cases, there is the same type of demand for certain skills throughout the Nordic region, which means that the number of people commuting or choosing to move to work in another Nordic country is lower now.”

**Others think moving is too tricky. Is there anything in the pipeline that might facilitate commuting/moving within the Nordic region that can be executed in the shorter term?**

“One thing that hopefully will reduce obstacles is the tax agreement signed by Sweden and Denmark on 10 June 2024.

"It includes some revised rules on the extent to which an employed person can work in their country of residence within the employment framework in the other country, while still paying tax only in the country of employment. These rules are also extended to include public sector employees.

"There are also new rules on the allocation of taxing rights for certain types of income for which there are no specific allocation rules in the Nordic tax agreement. Finally, the compensation scheme is also amended so that compensation to the country of residence is also given for the income of public sector employees that is not taxed in that country.

“We must continue to facilitate and reduce existing obstacles, whether they are related to taxes or other issues. I am pleased with the agreement we have just signed with Denmark, but we have certainly faced tricky issues, especially during the pandemic. We must all learn from this and ensure things become as simple as possible. We have come a long way, but we can do more.”





## Fresh report: Nordic citizens can work anywhere in the region. So why don't they?

It would seem we are so comfortable in our home countries that we see few reasons to apply for work in or move to a different Nordic country.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN, PHOTO: TOMAS BERTELSEN, GRAPHICS: NORDREGIO

Nordregio researchers have been asked to investigate how the common Nordic labour market has developed over the past 70 years. They have also asked some questions to try to find out what the future might bring.

This has resulted in the report *The Common Nordic Labour Market 70 Years and Beyond*, presented to the anniversary conference *70 Years of a Common Nordic Labour Market*.

### **Not so integrated after all?**

Nordregio researcher Anna Lungren says the report confirms something the researchers already knew something about from previous surveys – that moving and commuting between the Nordic countries is really not that common.

“We used to think that there was more migration than there actually is,” Anna Lundgren tells the Nordic Labour Market. She is one of several Nordregio researchers who have been working on the report.

In light of the Nordic governments’ vision for the Nordic region to become the world’s most integrated and sustainable region, these numbers is slightly bad news, believes Lundgren.

Some of the numbers show that:

- Fewer than half a million people out of a total population of 27.5 million were born in a different country from where they currently live.

- 1.6 per cent live in a different Nordic country than the one they were born in.
- 0.5 per cent of the Nordic population commute to a different Nordic country. The European average is 1 per cent.

### Three main trends

The Nordregio researchers highlight three main trends when looking back on 70 years of a common Nordic labour market.

Inhabitants from islands and autonomous territories – like Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands – move more often to a different Nordic country than other Nordic citizens.

Proximity is important, both geographical, linguistic and cultural. This is relevant both for migration and commuter patterns – getting a job in a different Nordic country is simply more common if distances are not too large.

One of the central attributes of Nordic migration patterns is re-migration, meaning many Nordic migrants spend a little time in a different Nordic country, for instance finding work while unemployment is high in their home country, getting new work experiences, for family reasons, to study and then move back home again after a few years.

### The border commuters

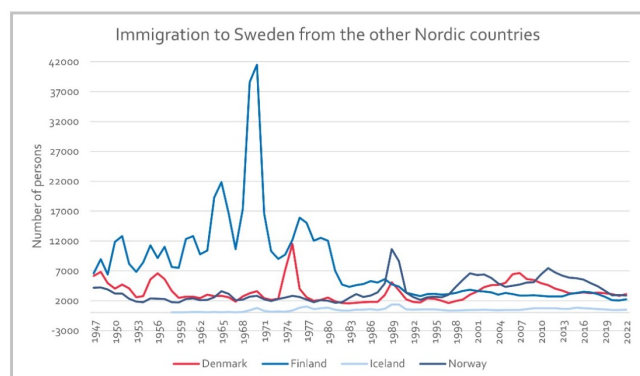
Getting a job in a different Nordic country does not necessarily mean moving to that country. For obvious reasons, this is more common in cross-border areas like the Øresund region (Denmark and Sweden), Innlandet-Värmland (Norway and Sweden) and Tornio-Haparanda (Finland and Sweden).

In some municipalities more than 10 per cent of the workforce commute from a neighbouring country, according to the report.

In later decades, and especially during and after the pandemic, remote and hybrid work has become more important in the Nordic region.

### Development patterns in the Nordic countries:

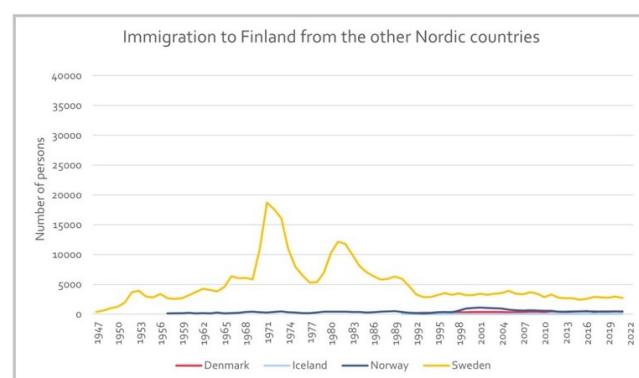
#### Sweden



Historically migration from Finland to Sweden has been the largest. Immigration from Finland reached a top in 1969 and 1970 with around 40,000 people annually. Re-immigration to Finland has been the second-largest migration stream since 1954.

Besides migration from Finland, immigration from Denmark in 1975 stands out. This was probably due to increased unemployment in Denmark following the oil crisis. Danish immigration to Sweden also rose in the mid-2000s after the Øresund Bridge opened.

#### Finland

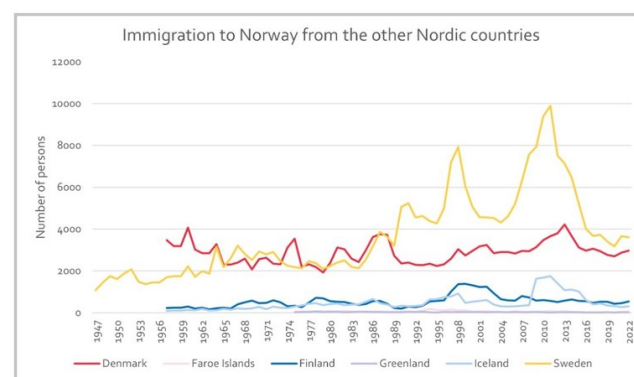


Emigration from Finland to Sweden was quite high even before the 1954 agreement on a common Nordic labour market.

Developments in Finland are in many ways related to what has already been mentioned about Sweden.

Emigration from Finland mirrors immigration since a majority of those who went to Sweden returned to Finland.

#### Norway

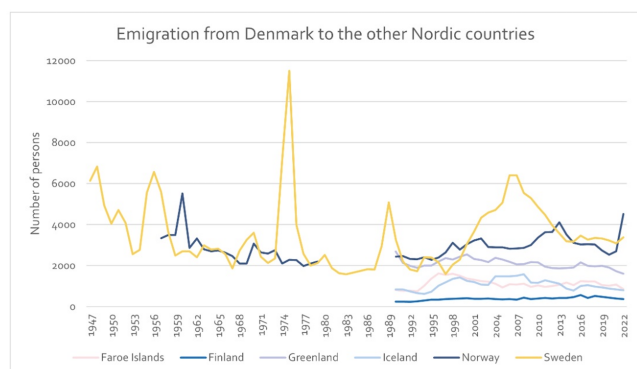


Migration has been fairly stable through the years with certain exceptions, which mainly relate to migration to and from Sweden.

The top came in 1989 when more than 11,000 people migrated to Sweden. The reason was a downturn in the Norwegian economy. Many of the Norwegians soon moved back to Norway.

Swedish immigration and emigration top the statistics, while Danes make up the second largest group.

### Denmark

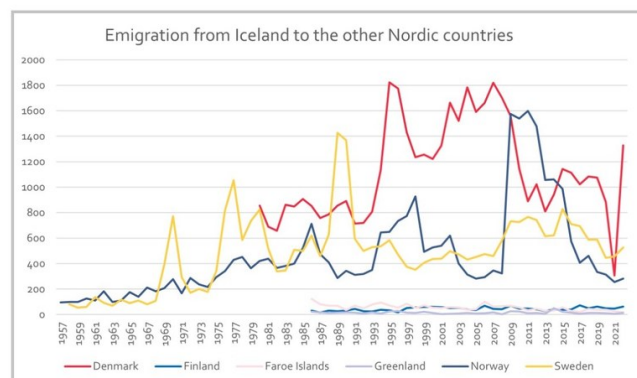


The largest migration stream from Denmark came in 1975, when nearly 12,000 people emigrated to Sweden. This was driven by an economic downturn during the oil crisis.

Norwegians make up the largest group of migrants to and from Denmark.

What is unique for Denmark is the high level of immigration from Greenland and, to a lesser extent, the Faroe Islands.

### Iceland



Iceland's migration pattern is less stable, with migration to Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Migration to Sweden happened in waves in the 60s, 70s and 80s, and reached a top in 1989.

The largest number of immigrants to Iceland come from Denmark. Denmark has also been a popular destination for emigrating Icelanders.

During the financial crisis, many moved from Iceland to Norway.

### Moving when we have to

Migration between the Nordic countries has receded since the 2000s. Some of the reasons given by the researchers include:

- All the Nordic countries' economies are fairly doing well. There are fewer economic incentives than earlier to move to a different Nordic country.
- The world has become smaller. Increased globalisation means we can move (nearly) wherever we want, at least within Europe.
- It is not necessarily uncomplicated to move to a different Nordic country to work and live there. Known obstacles include tax rules, regulations and access to social welfare, electronic ID and recognition of educations.

The migration can be explained in different ways. It could be economic downturns and high unemployment at home, job prospects, higher wages, better working conditions, lower living costs and a better quality of life in a neighbouring Nordic country.

- But the prospects of a better life is about more than work. The advantages to moving must surpass the disadvantages, the researchers point out. Even if it pays financially to move, we might still choose not to. The social transactions also help decide whether we move or not.

If there is a desire to increase labour market mobility in the Nordic region, the researchers believe it is important to dismantle said barriers.

"If you do not absolutely have to move or commute to another Nordic country, but perhaps fancy trying, your motivation does not increase if you end up struggling with a lot of red tape to make it happen, says Lundgren.

### Language is a barrier

The report also includes a survey of people who are interested in the Nordic labour market. Some labour market experts in the Nordic countries have also been interviewed.

The results confirm that bureaucratic and administrative barriers are considered to represent the greatest barrier to a more integrated Nordic labour market.

- 56 per cent cite bureaucratic and administrative barriers like taxation, problems related to electronic ID cards and different regulations for social welfare.
- 54 per cent say languages are a challenge.

- 51 per cent mentioned difficulties coordinating family life.
- 43 per cent said it is difficult to find housing.

The researchers were surprised to find that more than half of the respondents listed languages as a barrier to working in a different Nordic country.

Nordregio researcher Anne Lundgren wonders whether the reason might be that the older generation had a greater interest in and understanding of the Nordic languages than today's generation. Nowadays, much communication happens in English.

Lundgren believes it is important to understand each other's languages because this influences many other things.

“When we don't understand each other's languages, we understand less of our countries' similarities and differences.”

### **Competing for the same workforce**

All the Nordic countries face similar challenges like ageing populations, low fertility figures and an industrial society dependent on technology. The same Nordic countries also have a great need for labour in many of the same sectors – health, engineering and in business.

The report says the entire Nordic region faces a lack of hundreds of thousands of vocationally trained workers within 10 to 15 years from now.

Similarities between the Nordic countries can make it easier to get a job in a different Nordic country, but the researchers believe it is more likely that the Nordic countries have to compete for the same labour force.

In the future, we need to get better at using all of the available workforce, and labour immigration from other countries is an important part of this, concludes Nordregio researcher Debora Pricila Birgier.

“No matter how well the Nordic countries manage to utilise their common labour force, it will not be enough,” the researcher says.





## National rules dominate the common Nordic labour market

A new Øresund agreement has been signed. But there are still challenges facing commuters who cross a Nordic national border five days a week to get to work.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO TOMAS BERTELSEN

949 Swedish kronor (€84). That is the cost of a monthly ticket if you commute by train from Malmö in Sweden and as far north as Landskrona – some 45 km away.

2,670 kronor (€238) is what you pay if you instead choose to commute westwards to a job in Copenhagen – even though the distance is approximately the same.

Region Skåne's public transport committee is responsible for traffick in Skåne county, while Skånetrafiken according to their website is "an administration within Region Skåne with the mission to offer sustainable travel to everyone who lives, works, and travels in Skåne. All traffic is operated by various companies that have been contracted through competitive bidding"



*Øresundståg is one of the commercial actors contracted by Skånetrafik. Photo: Tomas Bertelsen.*

The Nordic Labour Journal have asked Skånetrafiken to ask the question so many people have been asking: Why is it so expensive to commute between Sweden and Denmark?

But first, some reflections from two people who live in Denmark and work in Sweden. They are thus part of the minority of 6 per cent and a total of 18,679 people who travel across Øresund to get to work.

The remaining 94 per cent commute in the opposite direction – from Sweden to Denmark. The figures come from the Öresundsindex from May this year.

### Expensive train fares make commuting less attractive

“I think it has become a problem when prices have risen by 20 to 25 per cent lately for those of us who commute by train. For me, the limit has been reached,” Kenneth Ekberg tells the Nordic Labour Journal.



*Kenneth Ekberg is Swedish and lives in Copenhagen – and commutes from there to Malmö. Photo: Tomas Bertelsen.*

Since 2016, he has been working at the city office at the City of Malmö. His department is Business and External Relations and it focuses on businesses and promoting sustainable growth in Malmö.

He specialises in international cooperation and regional development. He considers himself to be well paid “in a municipal context” as he puts it and has more scope to deal with high ticket prices compared to other commuter groups.

“If you have a less well-paid job for instance in the service industry, where there is a high demand for workers on the Danish side, the high ticket prices become even more burdensome.”

### Expensive and often troublesome as well

Kenneth Ekberg got a job at the Nordic Council’s office in Copenhagen in 2004, and the first year he commuted from Malmö where he then lived. For various reasons, he moved to the Danish capital one year later.

“I now have a family in Denmark and no plans to move back to Sweden,” he says.

But there are other things besides high ticket prices that scare people away. Even though the Øresund trains have been crossing the bridge now for 24 years exactly this summer, commuting on them is still not without problems.

“The trains have become safer and more punctual, but when there are issues you sometimes think – what is this? The other day, a train broke down at Malmö C, and all trains between Denmark and Sweden stopped running. Information was also poor,” says Kenneth Ekberg.

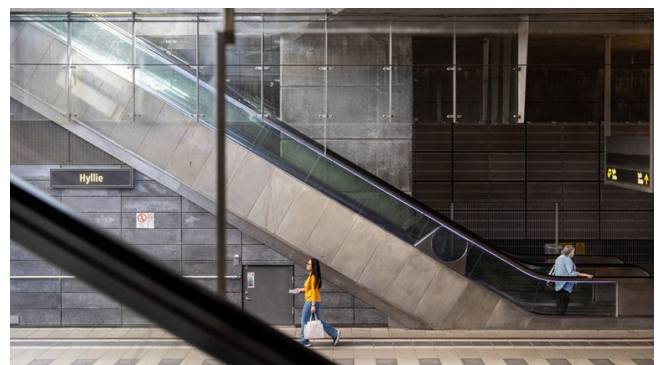


*Kenneth Ekberg usually gets a seat because he travels against the major traffic into Copenhagen. Photo: Tomas Bertelsen.*

The train journey alone from his home to his place of work takes him around 45 minutes. For obvious reasons, there is usually plenty of space on board.

But the journey could have been quicker. When the train has crossed the Øresund Bridge and stops at Hyllie station, the first stop on the Swedish side, it remains there for around seven minutes to allow police to perform border controls.

“I am aware that trains have issues in other places around Sweden as well. But when the train is stuck in Hyllie, it becomes yet another irritation, and it feels like someone is taking seven minutes of my life.”



He points out that for him personally, commuting between Denmark and Sweden works well in general. It is not only problems, most of the time it works well, he says.



For many years, the Danish bus company Gråhundbus operated route 999 between Copenhagen and Malmö, but stopped during the pandemic and never started the route up again. SJ (Swedish State Railways) also runs trains across the Øresund Bridge but only offers one-way tickets. Choice and competition for public transport across the bridge is, in other words, near zero.

### Currency and residency implications

At the time of writing, 1 DKK costs as much as 1.57 SEK. With such a weak krona, this effectively means a negative wage development for people like Kenneth Ekberg, who lives in Denmark and works in Sweden.

“Overall, the weak krona eats up the salary increases. I now have a good and interesting job, but if the Swedish krona continues to fall against the Danish krone, it will not be an incentive to commute from Denmark to Sweden,” he says.



*Jesper Jensen commutes – as one of pretty few Danes – to a job in Sweden.*

This is something Jesper Jensen also points to. He has been working for 12 years at Boozt Fashion AB's headquarters in Malmö's Hyllie district, where he has risen through the ranks to become Media & Online Marketing Director. He commutes to there from Denmark.

“When I began working in Sweden, the Swedish krona was far stronger than today. As an employee, you take a currency risk, just like the employer,” says Jesper Jensen.

The main rule in the Nordic tax agreement is that you pay income tax in the country where you work. Both Kenneth Ekberg and Jesper Jensen use a model called SINK, Special Income Tax for Foreign Residents, and pay 25 per cent tax while they cannot make any deductions.

“It works fine. I just have to remember to send in a tax return every year,” says Kenneth Ekberg, who in addition to declaring his income has to declare and pay property taxes in Denmark for his house.

“I have a digital perspective. But that's not how it works for those of us who work in one Nordic country and live in another when it comes to filing taxes. If the Swedish and Dan-

ish tax systems were interconnected, I could simply press a button to register that I live in Denmark and work in Sweden, and let the system handle the rest.

“Instead, I'm required to familiarise myself with both the Swedish and Danish tax systems and manually input all my information,” says Jesper Jensen, noting that he has colleagues who pay 6,000 Danish kroner to have an accountant handle their tax returns.

Like Kenneth Ekberg, Jesper Jensen has a job in Sweden that he enjoys, while his family, relatives and friends are in Denmark. And like Kenneth Ekberg, he is concerned about the train ticket prices.

“It's hard to claim that we have free movement in the Nordic region when it's much more expensive for me to commute from Copenhagen to Malmö compared to commuting to Odense, for example,” he says.

He also wants job opportunities in Skåne County to be more visible, explaining that people in Copenhagen often do not consider applying for jobs there.

“It should be possible to explain in a better way the opportunities that are there throughout the region, and the fact that it's a common job market – even though the challenges need to be reduced,” he adds.

### New agreements, new opportunities

Both Jesper Jensen and Kenneth Ekberg welcome the new Øresund agreement which makes hybrid work easier.

That also goes for Johan Wessman, CEO of the Øresund Institute, an independent Danish-Swedish knowledge centre run as a non-profit organisation.

“It will now become far easier for commuters to work from home in a modern way,” he tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

With the new agreement, tax residency is based on a full calendar year rather than the previous three-month period. This reduces the risk of needing to declare and pay taxes in both Denmark and Sweden within the same year.

“The new agreement affects many, but not all. Some jobs require a physical presence, such as at Copenhagen Airport, in public transport, healthcare, and at shops, restaurants, and hotels,” says Johan Wessman.

### A system shift for cross-border discussions

A new Øresund agreement also holds significant symbolic value, he believes, pointing out that the discussion on what needs to change to create better conditions for cross-border commuting has moved from a regional to a national level. Both countries' governments are taking concrete actions to show they consider the Øresund region important.

"Suddenly, we have broad support that has triggered a system shift. The discussions are no longer confined to a regional level. Now, we have a situation where Nordic ministers, other ministers, businesses, the Swedish and Danish ambassadors, the Øresund Bridge and the regional Danish-Swedish political cooperation in Greater Copenhagen are all participating in discussions, which is very encouraging," says Johan Wessman.

### **The pricing**

This is how Skånetrafiken answers the Nordic Labour Journal's question about the pricing of travel across Øresund:

#### ***Why does it cost so much more to travel to Denmark than for a similar journey within Skåne county?***

"The pricing, the so-called Øresund fare, is a cooperation between Skånetrafiken and DSB [Danish State Railways] and uses a completely different way of pricing compared to on the Skåne side of the sound.

"Ticket fares are basically made up of three parts – one Swedish part, the bridge part and a Danish part. Unlike the Skåne system, which is based on distance, the Øresund fare system is built on so-called "big zones" and that is why the pricing is different. A ticket between Hyllie and Kastrup Airport Copenhagen is valid in the zones FL and A, and not only for the distance you travel.

"When this system was set up at the time of the opening of the bridge, a ticket between Sweden and Denmark cost 70 kronor (€6) while a city bus ticket for a similar distance cost 14 kronor (€1), so there has always been a price difference in the system.

"The exchange rate also influences the pricing of tickets to Denmark. Since tickets should cost the same regardless of which currency you use, we adjust the prices in accordance to the value of the Swedish and Danish krone. This too has an impact on prices."

#### ***Why have ticket prices to Denmark risen so much lately?***

"We take three things into account when we adjust prices: price rises on the Danish side, price rises on the Swedish side and currency differences.

"On the Swedish side, the regional council has decided that price rises should be linked to CPI, while on the Danish side, the prices are set based on other factors. When we adjust prices according to CPI, the most expensive tickets in our range (i.e. tickets to Denmark) receive a higher increase in kronor than the cheapest tickets, even if the percentage increase is the same. However, the main "culprit" is the exchange rate differences. The Swedish krona's development alone has meant that prices have gone up."

#### **The Øresund Bridge is financed by the users. When it has been paid off, what will that mean for ticket prices?**

"Ticket prices are basically a political decision so Skånetrafiken cannot speculate on future ticket prices for crossing the bridge.

"Region Skåne is also not the only responsible stakeholder, since there is an agreement with the Danish state at the root of this. It is also important to remember that there are more parameters besides the actual bridge that affect pricing.

"The bridge can also not be viewed separately from a Skåne perspective because the revenue Region Skåne receives from Öresundstrafiken is part of Skånetrafiken's total budget.

"If this revenue were to decrease, the funds would need to be sourced from elsewhere, i.e. from the Skåne region. Since Skånetrafiken's revenue is roughly evenly split between ticket sales and regional subsidies, a reduction in bridge ticket revenue would require compensatory increases in ticket prices in Skåne, higher regional taxes, or a combination of both.





## What does the common Nordic labour market mean to you?

The Nordic Labour Journal asked some of the participants at the conference marking 70 years of the common labour market what it means to them – personally or for their respective countries' labour markets.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASEN, HALLGRIMUR INDRIDASON, MARIE PREISLER, BENGT ÖSTLING, ROLANT WAAG DAM

## Yngvar Åsholt



### Easy to move country in an economic downturn

Yngvar Åsholt is knowledge director at the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration NAV, and believes cooperation in the Nordic region has improved growth in several countries.

One backside has been young unemployed people with low education levels have lost out to youths from other countries when applying for service sector jobs, for instance, he says.

“Sectors such as healthcare, construction and service have benefited from the common Nordic labour market. In the construction sector in particular, workers from the Baltics have taken over many of these jobs.

“With Nordic workers, there has been next to no social dumping and the way the work is performed is very similar. So a common Nordic labour market is an advantage,” explains Åsholt.

“When Norway has experienced economic downturns, people have been able to easily move and work in a different country.”

Cooperation and the sharing of knowledge between authorities like NAV in the different countries has also been beneficial.

“The reason is that the countries are similar in many ways and face similar challenges.”

He believes the use of AI will be another area in which the Nordic countries can cooperate.

“It will be easier to develop common legislation and high-quality services in cooperation with countries which are relatively small.”

## Unnur Sverrisdóttir



### The common labour market makes finding jobs easier

“The common Nordic labour market makes finding jobs easier for Icelanders and other Nordics. The flow between the countries is completely free,” says Unnur Sverrisdóttir, Director General at Iceland’s Directorate of Labour.

She believes people take it for granted.

“The labour markets and the countries themselves are different but we look at it as a common market. If it wasn't like that, you would need a work permit. What is special about the Nordic countries is how long it has been a common market. Therefore, it's almost the same for Icelanders to work for a while in Copenhagen as in Akureyri,” Sverrisdóttir says.

There is still room for improvement. Sverrisdóttir mentions different tax rules between countries.

“I know of people who worked temporarily in Denmark and had to pay taxes in Iceland and Denmark, just to have it refunded a year later. This is problematic. But I hope the Øresund agreement can be a role model for fixing that.”

## Sarah Sofie Nielsen



### I have opened up for a job in the Nordic region

Sarah Sofie Nielsen (27) has been a labour market advisor for Greater Copenhagen since January 2024. She has a Bach-

elors degree in political science and a Master's in political communication. She lives and works in Copenhagen

Sarah Sofie Nielsen went on skiing and summer holidays to Norway and Sweden with her family as a child but never considered working in a different Nordic country. Now she has been given that opportunity as an employee of Greater Copenhagen, working with developing the common labour market in Eastern Denmark and Southern Sweden.

"Like many other young people, I have looked out towards the big world, not towards the Nordics. But this has changed after I got my current job."

As a labour market advisor for Greater Copenhagen, she works with colleagues from other Nordic countries at the office in the Danish capital.

"I thought the language would be a problem, but after a bit of adjustment, I understand what my Swedish colleagues are saying. I'm surprised at how easy it is, and now I can also see exciting opportunities in seeking jobs in another Nordic country. It will make perfect sense for me at some point."

Greater Copenhagen includes Region Skåne, Region Halland, Region Hovedstaden, Region Sjælland, and 85 Swedish and Danish municipalities. They collaborate on nine specific pathways to a well-integrated labour market in the region, including the newly adopted Danish-Swedish tax agreement.

### **Fredrik Karlström**



### **The Nordic region is like family**

Fredrik Karlström, a former politician in Åland and now a businessman, entrepreneur and member of the Nordic Council Freedom of Movement Group.

"I moved from Åland aged 16 and studied in Swedish Uppsala and later in the USA. It was obvious that you could go anywhere from Åland. It is about identity, freedom and security. I usually compare the Nordic region and Åland to a family; When you have a secure family you dare try other things and step out. You know that you are always welcome back. That is the Nordic region to me."

"The passport union and the common labour market are the two most important things in the Nordic cooperation. To be honest, there have not been that many other major Nordic reforms since those."

Fredrik Karlström would like to see something new and big which would be important to a lot of people.

"This could be electronic ID, which is absolutely necessary, or something simpler like a reform of the companies act. It is not that difficult politically but means a lot to the labour market and companies that want to expand. It could make it easier for people who want to set up and run businesses in a harmonised market."

Ålands location in the middle of the Baltic Sea and in the Nordic region means the common labour market works very well there. It is easy for people to move to Åland, which receives 1,000 new inhabitants every year while 750 move out.

"It is good that Åland is growing, I want it to. 30,000 inhabitants is too few, we need 50,000. But we also need more workers. People get older and companies don't have access to the right skills. We are good at attracting people to Åland, but there is still a way to go."

"It is mostly people from other Nordic countries who move to Åland, and the perception is that it is easy to move there. But sadly it is not that easy. Many have complex questions on taxation, social welfare and more, which the government of Åland cannot solve. But together, the Nordic countries can create solutions, simplifications and remove obstacles together."

### **Maria Häggman**



### **A Swedish personal ID number made it easy to work in Sweden.**

Maria Häggman is a Finnish citizen who now lives in Helsinki where she is head of international affairs at the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK), which has 13 member unions.

From 2014 to 2018, she worked in Sweden for the Council of Nordic Trade Unions. She had few problems settling into the neighbouring country.

"I was born in Finland, but as a child, I and my whole family travelled with my father when he made use of the freedom of movement to work at Nordisk Kontakt in Sweden. That's when I got a Swedish personal ID number."

Maria Häggman appreciates the access to a bigger labour market.

"For me, starting work in Sweden was a simple step. It is a bit more complicated for people without a personal ID number. With just a coordination number things are a bit more impractical."





## Danielle - from Party Swede to seamstress

Like tens of thousands of other Swedish youths, Danielle Backström travelled to Norway to work. She became one of the “Party Swedes” who worked in restaurants, cafés and bars. Since then, she has worked as a home carer and with plants. Now, she is training to become a seamstress.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Danielle Backström was 19 when she and a friend decided to look for work abroad in 2009. She is from Nordberg, one hour north of Västerås. It is a small community with nearly 5,000 inhabitants.

“Norway and Iceland were our choices, but the financial crisis hit and Iceland was no longer on the table.”

Norway did better compared to the other Nordic countries, however.

“The spring before we left college, my friend and I went to Oslo to see what it was like. We handed out lots of CVs and my friend got a job at a café. It made things easier. To rent a

flat you needed a job. It also allowed us to get a Norwegian bank account.

“We found a flat in the Grønland neighbourhood and I moved to Oslo in October of 2009. I had experience working with flowers and in a shop. But my first job was as a street seller of Omega 3 tablets,” she says.

### **A café job**

“But then I got a job at BIT, a café specialising in salads and baguettes which was a bit ‘fancy’.”

***What about all the logistics? Was it difficult to get established in Norway?***

"I had to go and see the Norwegian Tax Administration to register for tax of course. But that went well.

"The language had its challenges of course. I had a quarrelsome customer who, when I had just started working there, asked for a 'brus'. I didn't know what it was and he gave me an earful!"

*Brus* is Norwegian for soft drink - or *läskedryck* in Swedish.

"The job was a lot of fun. We were ten people working there, everyone was from Sweden and aged between 19 and 22."

### ***So you became a proper "Party Swede"?***

"Yes, you could say that. We used to party at Qadiz in the Grünerløkka neighbourhood. Nearly everyone there was Swedish."



*The graffiti that gave name to an entire generation of labour migrants appeared on a wall of a building ready for demolition in central Oslo for three years before a new building took its place.*

*Partysvensker* (Party Swedes) quickly became a popular term in Oslo after graffiti emerged on a building scheduled for demolition in St. Olavs gate. **Partysvensker; go home**, was perhaps inspired by slogans like "Yankee, go home".

The term spread further when hip hop artists Jaa9 and Onklp wrote a rap called *Partysvensker*. You could buy a drink called the same and the *Svenska Föreningen* – a Swedish association that hires out flats – even sold T-shirts featuring the term.

*Svenska Föreningen* was set up by Anders Eliasson. At its peak, it managed 35 large flats that could house 8 – 10 Swedish youths until they found their own place. When Anders Eliasson sold the business, 11,000 Swedes had registered with *Svenska Föreningen* which increasingly started working like a job centre.

### **Youth with "attitude"**

In an interview published in the book *"I takt och otakt"*, which examined Norwegian-Swedish cooperation at that

time, Anders Eliasson said he had watched so many youths arriving in Oslo that he could discern a pattern.

"When they arrive and present themselves for the first time, they are 20 and look down at their feet. In Sweden, young people get money but no work. They can have the best education in the world but no professional experience. They are shy and wimpy. But they all find jobs here in Norway.

"After a few months, they come back and have become more self-assured. They might have acquired a nose ring or a tattoo."

The Party Swedes did not give the impression of being cowed guest workers. They were labour immigrants "with an attitude" who knew their own worth.

The reason so many ended up working in hospitality was a change to Norwegian alcohol licensing laws. The number of restaurants and bars rose from 2,400 in 1980 to 7,300 in 2007.



*Oslo and other Norwegian cities changed in the early 2000s with the relaxation of alcohol licensing laws. Thousands of hospitality jobs were created. People are partying extra hard at Thank God it's Friday at Karl Johan in the picture above - it was taken minutes before the new legislation banning smoking in restaurants and bars, came into effect.*

Many of the Swedish youths worked to save money for The Big Journey, which often involved backpacking in Australia. They often gladly worked as much overtime as possible.

Despite a bit of bullying of Swedish workers, Danielle thinks most Norwegians had a very positive attitude to Swedes working in restaurants and bars. They were service-minded.

"When I moved to work as a home carer, I got nothing but good feedback there too. But I got another word wrong while working there. 'Rar' does not mean friendly as it does in Swedish - it means 'strange'.

But Danielle never went to Australia.

"My friend and I weren't so good at saving money. We moved around Oslo instead."



After three years working as a home carer, Danielle got a job in an H&M shop. She met a boyfriend on Tinder. He was from Larvik in Norway.

“We moved there and me being an optimist believed it would work out fine.”

### **Hard to fit in**

However, it turned out to be harder to integrate into society there, even though she got a good job as a deputy manager at a shop in a chain of garden centres.

“I also tried to pass my driving test in Larvik. I took driving lessons and even bought a car. But there were no intensive courses like we have in Sweden.”

The relationship did not work out so well either. It ended before she could pass her driving test.

“I realised, while living in Larvik, that Oslo is my home. So I moved back and decided to improve my grades so I could start studying to become a social worker.”



*Danielle Backström moved back to Oslo which she now calls home. She lives in Kampen, an old workers' neighbourhood with a lot of soul and bright colours.*

Danielle is dyslexic and took on too many subjects too fast.

“I tried to study too much at once. It didn't help when the pandemic struck. Online lessons did not work well for me.”

Another consequence of the pandemic was that students graduating from upper secondary school did not have to sit their exams. As a result, their grades were higher and it suddenly became much harder to enter the social worker programme.

“So I still haven't finished my studies. But I became a personal assistant to a young boy. During the pandemic, I couldn't go home to Sweden because I would have had to quarantine for two weeks on my return. He was vulnerable so I stayed put in Oslo.”

After the pandemic, she laid plans for the future.

“I enrolled in a one-year program in Sewing & Design at Folkuniversitetet because I wanted to fulfil another dream: to start making clothes again. I did some sewing when I was a child and teenager, but I hadn't done it since I was 17. I started there and realised that this was what I wanted to do.

“After my studies, I began as an apprentice with clothing designer Tine Solheim, a two-year training in ‘dress & costume’.

“Now my dream is to open my own studio or to work at the opera or a theatre, where there is currently a generational shift among the seamstresses,” says Danelle Backström.



# The story of the common Nordic labour market

The common Nordic labour market was established with little fanfare in 1954. Yet over time it has become one of the main pillars of the Nordic cooperation.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: DIGITALARKIVET.NO

The Nordic cooperation picked up pace after the end of WWII. Sweden had removed a work permit requirement for workers from other Nordic countries as early as in 1943. The country had had good experiences from welcoming Norwegian and Danish refugees into its labour force during the war. When it ended, more people flowed into Swedish industry workplaces, which were positioned to be able to export most of what Europe needed for the post-war reconstruction.

That is why the proposal to establish a common Nordic labour market was one of the first initiatives to emerge after the war. Already in September 1945, the issue was raised at a meeting of Nordic social ministers in Copenhagen.

Yet there was no public demand for the creation of a common labour market. In a 1946 survey in Sweden, only 22 per cent answered yes when asked whether other Nordic citizens should be equal to Swedes in the labour market. 47 per cent said no while the rest were undecided.

Denmark and Sweden signed an agreement on a common labour market in October 1946, but the other Nordics did not join.

## A golden age

But this was nevertheless a golden age for building bridges between the countries – both figuratively and literally. On 16



June 1946, the Svinesund Bridge between Norway and Sweden was opened. Its construction was nearly complete when war broke out, but it was mined on the Swedish side so it could be blown up in the case of an invasion of Sweden. But rather than German soldiers storming across the bridge, lightning struck and set off the explosives.

When the bridge had been repaired and opened, traffic was soon so heavy that cars might have to wait four hours to cross. They also had to change from driving on the left in Sweden to on the right in Norway.

The rapid rise in travel also impacted the number of Nordic citizens holidaying in neighbouring countries. Before the war, 36,000 people arrived annually in Norway in cars or buses. By 1957, the number had increased to 700,000. The 1952 passport union also helped the acceleration of tourism.



More people also travelled by air. The SAS airline was established on 1 August 1946 when the national airlines of Denmark, Norway and Sweden merged. SAS started flying regular routes on 17 September that year. It soon grew to be the world's tenth biggest airline and SAS competed with KLM among the European airlines to carry the most passengers across the Atlantic.

The Nordic cooperation suffered setbacks in other areas, however. In 1950, a proposed customs union was voted down by Norway. A Nordic defence union also never saw the light of day. But the Nordic Council was founded and held its first session in Copenhagen in 1953. It had a pretty unique composition of parliamentarians from – after a time – all of the Nordic countries.

### Not a great effect

In the beginning, the common Nordic labour market did not have any great effect. When the Nordic publication *Fri Fagbevegelse* summed up the first three years in 1957, it wrote:

“The labour force has moved across the border – to and from the country – in approximately the same way as it did before we got a common labour market. There is a tendency that more and more Norwegians travel to Sweden and find work. But the figures we see from this remain pretty much the same.

“On the other hand, the relationship with Denmark has developed in the opposite way. There is a considerable increase in the number of Danes arriving in Norway compared to the number of Norwegians going to Denmark.”

The reason numbers were not that big at first was also linked to the fact that job seekers' education for many professions had to be recognised. Nor were entrepreneurs automatically allowed to set up shop across the border.



The Nordic publication *Aktuell* wrote about Barbro Hellerud in 1956, two years after the common labour market was introduced.

It can be hard to understand now just how strict some of the rules were. The Norwegian publication *Aktuell* wrote a story called “The Mrs became a Norwegian School mistress” with the introduction:

The common Nordic labour market in practice: Unreasonably difficult for a Swede to become a teacher in Norway.

The publication had interviewed the Swedish teacher Barbro Hellerud, who had married a Norwegian. Because of the lack of housing in Oslo, she could not move in with him until 1952. Yet Norwegian education legislation stated that she would have to live in the country for ten years before getting a full time job as a teacher – even though she was now a Norwegian citizen. She would also have to take a one-year education to be recognised as a teacher. Barbro Hellerud appealed to the Norwegian parliament, which unanimously decided she should be naturalised.

Over many years, Nordic agreements were negotiated to recognise various professional qualifications regardless of which country the person had studied in. This included everything from doctors and dentists to teachers and accountants. These negotiations often took many years.

### Emigration from Finland largest

In the 1960s and 1970s, labour migration from Finland to Sweden increased. In 1969 and 1970, the immigration wave was so large that the Finnish population shrunk. Between 1945 and 1999, 530,000 Finns emigrated to Sweden. Half of them later moved back to Finland, according to Arkistojen Portti/Arkivens Port.

For a country like Iceland, the Nordic labour market has always been important. The country experiences large economic fluctuations and became an immigration country later than Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The Kingdom of Denmark has also seen movements between the mainland and Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

The latest larger movement started in the 2000s when many Swedes found work in the construction industry, healthcare and hospitality in Norway and Denmark. After the EU's eastward expansion in 2004, Swedish construction workers lost out to workers from Poland and Lithuania.

### **Underutilised?**

Today, we might ask whether the common Nordic labour market is actually underutilised. Only 0.5 per cent of the Nordic population commute to a different Nordic country, compared to the EU average of 1 per cent. The number of people moving to a different Nordic country is also low at 1.7 per cent, compared to the EU average, according to Nordregio.

What does the agreement for a common Nordic labour market really mean? Does it offer more than what is now regulated by other agreements within the EU/EEA and Schengen?

If you read the agreement on the common Nordic labour market as it appears after a 1982 revision, it only makes up a few points which can be summed up thus:

- Work permits should not be demanded from citizens from other Nordic countries.
- A country must not treat citizens from other Nordic countries worse than its own citizens. This includes wages and working conditions.
- Employers who wish to recruit labour from a different Nordic country should use the public employment service.



## “It had to be the Nordics” – why a Danish priest chose Norway

Anne Anker Bolstad is one of many Danish priests working in Norway, where there is a great priest shortage.

THEME

20.06.2024

TEXT AND PHOTO: LINE SCHEISTRØEN

Just before Christmas a few years ago, Norway’s national broadcaster’s news bulletin in Northern Norway had this as their top story:

“Nikolaj from Denmark and a group of pensioners saved Christmas service”.

The shortage of priests in Norway has not improved since then. On the contrary, the situation has become even trickier. It is estimated that the Church of Norway is short of somewhere between 100 and 200 priests.

The districts are hardest hit, but larger cities also lack priests. Each year, several dozens of Norwegian priests retire while not enough new ones are coming in. Interest in theological

studies is falling. The University of Tromsø even closed its theology program down due to a lack of interest.





When Danish Anne Anker Bolstad started studying theology at Aarhus University, neither she nor I had any idea that one day, several decades later, we would meet at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Campus Gjøvik, and talk about everything under the sun.

### **Secured a Nordic scholarship**

Anne comes from a farm on Bornholm in Denmark. After finishing her upper secondary education, she spent a year in the USA followed by six months at a Danish folk high school. She started studying theology at Aarhus.

"While I was studying, I was thinking that life must be about more than this," says Anne.

She applied for and secured a scholarship to study for six months at the Theological Faculty at the University of Oslo. She is fairly sure the scholarship was financed by the Norwegian Council of Ministers. She and another Danish student travelled to Oslo to take up their studies.

### **Why did you choose Norway?**

"I was attracted to the nature, culture and the language," says Anne.

When she was a child, her mother had also told her about the time she had hitchhiked all the way from the south of Norway to Narvik in the north.

Because she comes from Bornholm, an island in the Baltic Sea, nearby Sweden did not have the same appeal as Norway. It was somehow a bit too close. It is not without reason people from Bornholm are called "reserve Swedes".

Anne says the six months turned out to be fantastic. She enjoyed living in Oslo, a student city that offers both nature and culture.

### **Sharing mine and yours**

While she was studying in Oslo, a young man joined the same course as her. He was Norwegian and called Oddgeir. By amazing coincidence, Oddgeir had applied for and secured a scholarship to study in Aarhus the next semester. That is how they ended up studying together also in Denmark.

"Love decided that it should be the two of us," says Anne.

She is happy about the fact that Oddgeir has lived in Denmark. It is important to be able to share both home countries – not only mentally but also physically.

"When you find love, it is easy to forget what is yours and move to the other person's home country. But we all have roots somewhere and we cannot erase them. Sharing each other's culture, you experience what is mine and I experience what is yours, and it is important," she says.

Like student life and culture.



"There were many similarities between studying in Denmark and in Norway, but there were also differences. Not only between the two countries but also between the different universities. New opportunities arise.

### **Why travel far when you can choose the Nordics?**

As a student priest in Gjøvik and Lillehammer, Anne meets students who debate whether they ought to go on an exchange, and she also welcomes students from other countries who come on exchange to Norwegian universities. She believes exchange students represent a big resource for any place of study.

You do not have to travel very far, however, says Anne. Why, for instance, must a Norwegian student travel to Australia when you might as well travel to Denmark, she wonders.

"I believe we can learn much from spending time in our Nordic neighbouring countries. I was always drawn to them, to the languages, nature and the different temperaments of their peoples. We share a common history and are similar in many ways, but we are also different," says Anne.

### **Language of the heart**

When Anne talks fast, you hear that she is Danish even after many years in Norway – and before that other countries. She is a proud speaker of the Bornholm dialect. The island's proximity to Sweden means it has a sing-songy quality. With a mix of Bornholm intonation and a sprinkling of Norwegian words, Anne makes herself easily understood in Norway.

"The Bornholm language is my language of the heart," she says.

Anne graduated from her theology course both in Oslo and in Aarhus. There were many common subjects, but some were also specific to the country students were planning to work in – such as Norwegian church law and Danish practice. When entering the workforce, she wanted to be able to work in both Denmark and Norway.

### **Norwegian life abroad**

After graduation, the question was: Where do we work and live? Both were eager to travel, and rather than settling down in Denmark or Norway the priest couple went to Liverpool in England.

Here, they shared a pastoral position and parts of a housewife position. They were employed by the Norwegian Seaman's Church, which was as much a Scandinavian seaman's church with visitors from Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finns.



Anne describes those years as a beautiful journey through everything Nordic.

"It was an educational journey in Nordic cultural life. We are alike but the differences also become clearer. Yet because we are in a different part of the world, we become more generous with each other."

They celebrated Nordic holidays such as Swedish Midsummer, Norwegian 17th of May, Danish and Finnish national days and St Lucia on 13 December. The years also turned into a journey through Nordic food experiences.

"We were one big family. It was enormously valuable to be allowed to experience that," says Anne.

Although the married couple were Norwegian priests on paper, it did not matter in terms of how they met different people. Today, the same goes for the students. It does not matter where they come from and what they believe in, she does not ask.

"It is the meeting with the human beings that shapes us," says Anne.

### **Returning to Denmark or Norway?**

After six years in Liverpool, they moved to Switzerland and worked as priests at the Norwegian Church in Geneva. At the end of another six years abroad, which once more gave them many great experiences with people from the Nordics, they had to choose whether to stay in Switzerland or move home. By now they had three children.

"We did not quite see our future as a family to be in Switzerland. We felt we belonged in the Nordics and we wanted our children to spend their childhood and youth at home," says Anne.

But where was home? Denmark or Norway? They would have been happy with Denmark but chose Norway because both could work there.

"It was simply easier to find two priest jobs in the same place in Norway. And both of us wanted to work as priests."

That is how the family ended up in Lillehammer where both applied for and got jobs as priests. The husband in Lillehammer church and Anne as student priest at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences and NTNU in Gjøvik. As a matter of fact, she has never worked as a priest in Denmark. Perhaps something in her makes her want to try that?

"Perhaps I sometime could take a temporary position in a church on Bornholm?"

Anne says a lot of things are the same in the churches of Norway and Denmark, but there are also traditions and practices that differ.

### **The job as a student priest**

Anne had always envisaged a slightly alternative priest position. As a student priest, she is employed by the Church of Norway but works in places of study. As she welcomes me to the university in Gjøvik, one of the first things she says is:

"Of course, I have no church building. The campus is my temple."



She has been a student priest for 16 years now. She is known to host some rather untraditional activities on campus – such as inviting students to walk on a labyrinth mat. It is a copy of the labyrinth in the Chartres Cathedral in France. The idea is to walk and develop some good thoughts and get to know yourself better by navigating the labyrinth.

She also makes sure to mark important days, like Lucia.

### **Once a Dane, always a Dane**

Two years ago, Anne got Norwegian citizenship. She now has dual citizenship – both Danish and Norwegian.

When we ask why she applied to become Norwegian, she says:

"I think the main reason was I feel Norwegian."

At the same time, she is Danish.

"Although I have lived and worked for many years abroad and in Norway, I am Danish and proud of it."

And although Norwegians and Danes are similar in many ways, they are also different according to Anne.

"When I sometimes do something in a different way from what a Norwegian would have done, I can almost hear what the Norwegians are thinking: 'She knows no better, she comes from Denmark'," says Anne with a smile.

A little example to end on: Danes love singing both in everyday life and when there is a party. This is a tradition that Anne has brought with her wherever she has lived, including Norway. It is not necessarily something Norwegians are used to.

"In the middle of a meeting I might blurt out: 'Let's sing, everybody! Let's do *Surfbrett* by *Vazelina Bilopphøggers*.' When I do stuff like that, I think Norwegians put it on the 'she's Danish, she knows no better' account."

(*Vazelina Bilopphøggers* is a famous Norwegian band from Gjøvik, where she works.)