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The Nordics lag behind in the fight against economic crime

Jan 30, 2025

## Young in the nordic



Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 1/2025



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# Do we listen enough to young voices?

What is it like to be young in the Nordic region today? We tell the story of young people on their way into working life and the story of some who need help to find their place in the community. Measures aimed at children and young people are high on the political agenda.

EDITORIAL

30.01.2025

BY LINE SCHEISTRØEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In my very first job as a maid at the prestigious Grand Hotel in Bodø. It was the summer I turned 17. I got the job because my older brother was already working in the hotel's potwash.

That summer I learned to get up early, get to work and clock in before 7 am. I also learned that Saturday and Sunday were not necessarily days off.

I cleaned bathrooms, hoovered, dusted and made beds. The last activity was strictly monitored by the hotel manager's right-hand woman – his Swedish wife.

In the lunch room, I was comforted by the other, far more experienced maids. Some had been working there for decades. That taught me something about the importance of a good working environment.

At the end of the summer, I had experiences to put in my CV and hard cash in my purse.

This edition of the Nordic Labour Journal is about being young in the Nordic region.

These days, it is not that easy to get a job when you are under 18 and have no work experience or contacts.

“Our experience is that many have prejudices against people under 18. We want to show that many of us are eager to pitch in and want to work,” says Emma Aas. She has started the youth business RaskJobb with four classmates. It is an answer to those who label young people as being lazy.

Young Enterprise Norway is a not-for-profit enterprise that promotes enterprise among young people as early as in primary school, giving them a chance to try a bit of entrepreneurship and working life.

“Young Enterprise is important for the labour market and for young people,” says Grete Ingeborg Nykkelmo, CEO of Young Enterprise Norway.

Far from all young entrepreneurs carry on this career path. But our report from Denmark shows how more and more Aarhus University students choose to start their own businesses to solve important social issues. One of them is doctor Christina Gravgaard Andersen.

“I could not see myself in a job or creating a company where making the most money possible was the main thing,” says Gravgaard Andersen.

Children and young people are doing fairly well in the Nordics, but the place where they grow up matters for their education and leisure time. That is the conclusion of the new Swedish report “The importance of location—young people in rural areas.”

It shows that fewer young people from rural areas go on to study at universities or other higher educational institutions compared to young people in cities. If you are young and live in a rural area, chances are you will choose vocational training and start working earlier than city youths.

Measures aimed at children and young people are high on the political agenda in all the Nordic countries for a reason – not all young people are doing that well. Surveys show that many young people struggle mentally, are outside of education and work and they are pessimistic about the future.

We tell the story of how municipalities in Iceland and Sweden approach these challenges.

In the Swedish town of Åstorp, Emilie Holmkvist is one of many young people who have entered the workforce thanks to Ung Kraft 2.0, an initiative that focuses on successful matching between job seekers and employers.

At the Zelsíuz Youth Center in Árborg Municipality, located in southern Iceland, they have found that early intervention is key and that the most important thing is having the time and space to care for each young person.

Finland took over the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers at the start of the year. Children and young people will be a top priority.

What does this mean in practice? We asked Anders Adlercreutz, Finland's Minister of Education and Nordic Cooperation. He is particularly concerned about the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among young people and believes the Nordic collaboration provides an excellent platform for finding effective solutions.

So, do we have reason to worry? Unfortunately, yes, according to young people the Nordic Labour Journal has spoken with.

“The most important thing now is to give young people the opportunity and tools to make a difference today—not tomorrow. By then, it might already be too late,” says 23-year-old Andreas Salomonsson.”

My recommendation to everyone is to listen to those this is actually about: the young people.

Happy reading!



## Norwegian youths set up company to help other youths

Ungt entreprenørskap – a Norwegian entrepreneurship education programme – helps youths access the labour market. At the youth company RaskJobb, five 17-year-olds want to show that young people can and want to work.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN

The initiators of RaskJobb (QuickJob) are second-year students at Kireparken upper secondary school in Moss, Norway. They spend four hours a week studying “Marketing and leadership”. That is when they are their own bosses in the youth enterprise.



Iben Lerang-Håland is the managing director.

“We decide everything ourselves. This is our project. It’s fun,” she says.

“It is a more practical subject than the other theory subjects we take. We can be creative and we work very independently,” says Hedda Sandem Kleiven. She is head of sustainability at RaskJobb.

#### **Labelled as lazy**

They explain their idea: The company links youths who want work experience and money with older people who might need a little extra help with small tasks – fast and simple jobs.

“Many youths struggle to find jobs because they have no work experience and because they are under 18. I have experienced this myself. Meanwhile, there are older people who might need help with small jobs, for instance clearing snow or shopping. By linking these two groups, both young and older people benefit,” says Hedda Sandem Kleiven.

HR manager Emma Aas says the company is a response to those who label young people as lazy.

“Our experience is that many have prejudices against people under 18. We want to show that many of us are eager to pitch in and want to work,” says Aas.

They do, of course, know peers who are not that keen on working, but labelling everyone the same feels unfair to them.

“It is completely wrong to generalise an entire generation,” says Elise Klock Holmberg.



*Marketing their company is an important part of the job. They have made T-shirts and posters as well as a website and a presence in social media. Photo: RaskJobb*

#### **Hoping for more assignments**

RaskJobb UB uses social media like Instagram and TikTok to communicate with young people and Facebook to reach the older generation. The young entrepreneurs have also made posters and put these up around their neighbourhoods.

So far the response from the “employers” – those who need jobs done – has been somewhat muted. The hope is that assignments will stream in because several youths are ready to perform the jobs.

#### **Have learned a lot about working life**

Starting their own business has given them a lot of valuable experiences. They have seen that it takes up a lot of their time.

“We have to figure out stuff and do everything ourselves, for instance how to register the company at the Brønnøysund Register Centre and set up a bank account and the Vipps pay-



ment system. We have to get things to work,” says Hedda Sandem Kleiven.

“Because if we don’t do it, nothing happens,” adds Elise Klock Holmberg.

They have learned a lot about self-management, problem-solving and cooperation. They say it has been fun but also challenging to present the company to others.

“We have had good feedback which has motivated us to carry on,” they say.

This spring will bring competitions, like a county championship and a gathering which includes a competition in Strömstad in Sweden.

When school ends, the company might also end. This depends on how things develop in the coming months.

### **A bridge builder**

Grete Ingeborg Nykkelmo is the CEO of Ungt Entreprenørskap Norge (UE – Young Enterprise).

“Ungt Entreprenørskap is important for the labour market and it is important for the young people,” says Nykkelmo.

She describes UE as a bridge builder between school and working life.

“We give young pupils and students the chance to spot opportunities and to experience what working life is today. For the labour market this is an opportunity to give young people a taste of what working life really is, what chances and demands working life represents and it is a chance for the labour market to recruit young people,” says Nykkelmo.

### **Primary school entrepreneurs**

UE has programmes for primary school-aged children to higher education in entrepreneurship, work training and personal finance.

2023 was a record year for activities. In total, nearly 60,000 pupils and students were using UE’s entrepreneurship programmes. On top of that, more than 43,000 pupils finished UE’s education programme in personal finance for secondary and upper secondary schools.



*Grete Ingeborg Nykkelmo believes that entrepreneurship gives young people more arenas to master. Photo: UE - Young Enterprise*

Nykkelmo believes it is important that they offer activities throughout the entire educational journey, from primary school to higher education.

“This provides continuous learning, including entrepreneurial skills. With this we mean cooperation, creativity, problem-solving and the perseverance to endure setbacks and try again,” she says.

-Dette gir kontinuerlig læring, også for entreprenøriell kompetanse. I dette legger vi samarbeid, kreativitet, problemløsning - og utholdenhet til å tåle motgang og prøve på nytt, sier hun.

The programme Ungdomsbedrift (youth business) in upper secondary school is state-financed. Beyond that, UE has many supporters, including in private enterprise, from politicians and the social partners.

“We see that many are willing UE and our programmes on,” says Nykkelmo.

### **Arena for achievement outside of the classroom**

In a time when an increasing number of young people fall outside of education and work, Nykkelmo believes UE plays an important role. The UE CEO has many good stories about youths who were tired of school and then experienced achievement through UE programmes. They then realised why theoretical knowledge is also important.

UE is about giving youths more arenas of achievement, believes Nykkelmo.

“UE gives young people the chance to work with things they choose themselves which interest them. This gives them motivation and a sense of achievement in a different way than in an ordinary classroom setting. By working with the company they also realise to a greater degree why they need to learn things,” says Nykkelmo.

### **Future entrepreneurs?**

The Danish Fonden for Entreprenørskap (Fund for Entrepreneurship) last year published the report “Can you spot whether an upper secondary school pupil has participated in an entrepreneurship programme?”



A three-year-long survey was conducted on behalf of UE's sister organisation Young Enterprise (JA) in Sweden. The aim was to investigate how pupils and teachers perceive entrepreneurship and what kind of influence this type of teaching has on pupils throughout their schooling.

The conclusion was that yes, the programme was a motivator for learning, the understanding that it is important to learn other subjects and that young entrepreneurship can motivate more entrepreneurship.

"Innovators are needed everywhere!" is Young Enterprise's slogan in Norway. But will there be more of them just because they participated in one of the programmes as youths?

When researchers from the Eastern Norway Research Institute looked at this in 2018, they found that young entrepreneurs were more likely to become founders of startups.

"Female entrepreneurs who have taken the programme at school or while studying at university tell us that this is important. They describe the programme as a safe training ground which in turn has given them the confidence to take the leap and become an entrepreneur," says Nykkelmo.

Here it is worth mentioning that Statistics Norway late last year published figures showing a record number of young entrepreneurs in Norway. Never before has there been more entrepreneurs aged 16 to 24. There were 14 per cent more in 2023 compared to the previous year, and a great increase even on the top entrepreneur year of 2021.

### **Nordics doing well**

There is a tradition for competitions in young enterprise. In 2023, Norwegian youth and student companies took home several prizes from the European championships.

"Norway does well and the Nordics do well. The activity and opportunities for young entrepreneurs as part of the school system are growing in the Nordics.

"We share several common programmes and interests and collaborate quite a bit. This comes naturally as we have more similar education and social systems compared to the rest of Europe," says Nykkelmo.



## Finland's Minister of Cooperation: Put young people first in difficult times

A father of five children, young people and education are among Minister of Cooperation Anders Adlercreutz's areas of expertise. These are also among the focus areas for the Nordic countries in the coming year.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT AND PHOTO: BENGT ÖSTLING

Many projects from previous presidencies carried on when Finland and Åland took on the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers at the start of 2025.

"The red thread remains. We are looking for continuity in the Nordic cooperation," says Finland's Minister for Nordic Cooperation Anders Adlercreutz.

He enjoys his job as Minister for Cooperation, even though it is not "as operative" as the EU Council of Ministers. Discussions and the sharing of opinions also have value, he said in answer to criticism that the Nordic Council is powerless.

According to Adlercreutz, fighting border obstacles forms a central part of cooperation. This is an area where Nordic cooperation is visible on a concrete, practical level. This applies to travel, work, studies, trade, and everything else that must function across borders.

Resilience and preparedness have been introduced as new areas of cooperation now that security policy has become increasingly important. Adlercreutz also mentions the prime ministers' declaration that the Nordic region will become the world's most integrated and sustainable region by 2030.

Anders Adlercreutz left his Minister of European Affairs position last summer when Anna-Maja Henriksson was elected



to the EU Parliament. He became both Minister of Education and Cooperation and chair of the Swedish People's Party of Finland.

### **Making it safe to start a family**

What does the prioritisation of children and young people mean in concrete terms?

"For example, it involves recognising that mental health issues have increased among young people. There is Nordic co-operation on a ministerial level on how to address this."



*Anders Adlercreutz meets the newly founded company Vikaaria – a substitute placement service for the education sector – during the Educa trade fare. (Photo: Helsingfors Mässcentrum/Educa)*

The ministers have also been discussing the use of mobile telephones and the need for schoolchildren to engage in physical activities and exercise. Examples from Norway have been studied in this regard.

There has also been an awakening to the demographic challenges with low birth rates, says Adlercreutz. Finland has no solution to the problem, which is shared throughout the Nordics.

But the minister envisages an equal society with high levels of mobility, where everyone can trust their own future. As you grow up and get an education, you should know that this also leads to work with safe jobs and opportunities for advancement.

People also dare start a family in a society with good child-care facilities and high-quality schools. All this builds trust and confidence, and it motivates people to dare to start a family and have children, says Anders Adlercreutz.

He would also like to see a discussion on parenthood in general.

"There is no perfect model to strive for and have ready before you start a family. The expectations placed on parents might not always be entirely reasonable. In Finland, we wonder whether this, in turn, could lead to people postponing starting a family."

### **Tougher economic conditions**

The Finnish government talks about prioritising children and young people but is criticised for creating tougher economic conditions for schools and families with children.

"We have faced some criticism, but it is also worth looking at the bigger picture which includes a massive adjustment package aimed at saving nine billion euro in the budget," says Adlercreutz.

Adjustments have been made through index freezes, such as concrete cuts to student support and more.

But Adlercreutz considers this to be planning for the future and securing a more stable foundation on which to build the future. Schools and children's well-being also receive investments worth several hundred million euro, points out Adlercreutz.

### **Focus on literacy and mathematics**

Education has been Finland's pride, but in recent years, Pisa assessments have shown declining academic results in schools across the entire Nordic region.

"Of course, this is concerning. Finland does want to be the best in the world, and that should remain our goal. We are working to identify the key issues. The most important shortcomings will be addressed in the long term, but first, additional teaching hours will be introduced for mathematics and mother tongue/literacy.



*Anders Adlercreutz attended the Nordic region's largest fair for teachers, participating in a panel debate between Prime Minister Petteri Orpo and SDP Chairman Antti Lindtman. (Photo: Helsingfors Mässcentrum/Educa)*

Basic skills must be strengthened, says Anders Adlercreutz. A strong correlation was observed between literacy and performance in the other school subjects, especially among first- and second-generation Finns.

This is also where limiting mobile telephone use comes in. You try to create space for studying, focus, calm classroom environments – and also outside, points out Adlercreutz.



He wants to create space for sports or reading – both of which are better ways to spend your time than using six hours a day scrolling.

Anders Adlercreutz wants to create an environment that fosters the concentration and specialisation that the labour market needs, also required for lifelong learning.

He hastens to add that this is not about being anti-tech or going “against digitalisation”. This is about finding the right balance.

Adlercreutz also highlights the need for greater exchange of experiences in his own sector, such as school and student exchanges between the Nordic countries.

“The Nordplus exchange and Erasmus in the Nordic countries should be a given for Finnish students. After graduating from upper secondary school, it should be easy to consider university studies in Uleåborg, Tammerfors, or Uppsala.”

“Your world should not be limited to your own country, rather, you should see the Nordic region as your home market. Not only in terms of work but also studies,” envisions Adlercreutz.

### Similarities and differences between the Nordics

A lot has been said about the similarities between the Nordic countries. But there are also differences between Nordic education systems. One practical example is Finland’s free school meals.

“I also imagine that teachers’ positions differ in the different countries. The attractiveness of the teaching occupation varies. Here, we are very fortunate in Finland. There is a decent level of interest in teacher programmes,” says Adlercreutz.

Finland also requires teacher graduates to have a master's degree. Therefore, a very large percentage of Finland's teachers have teaching qualifications, which is not a given in the other Nordic countries.

“The way our schools are structured also differs quite a bit from, for example, Sweden. In practical terms, we have municipal schools and no free schools (privately run schools funded by public money). These may certainly have some advantages but I don’t think this should be the way to go for Finland.

“Finland’s primary school system’s fundamental strength has been that it is equal and accessible to all on the same terms. A school in Pori is the same as a school in Porvoo. Finland has had a relatively low level of ‘school shopping’, which I think is something we should maintain and protect,” says Anders Adlercreutz.



*The Teachers' Lounge at the Nordic region's largest fair for teachers. (Photo: Helsinki Fair Centre/Educa)*

Adlercreutz has led The Swedish Parent Association in Finland. The association exists in various forms in the Nordic countries, even though the relationship between schools and life outside might vary.

Minister Anders Adlercreutz highlights Nordic societies' strength when it comes to the relationship between children and school. Nordic children enjoy quite a lot of freedom. We trust the schools, we trust our children.

“Children go back and forth to school on their own. We trust that the world is not quite as dangerous as perhaps is the case in many other countries.”

### The political game

Recently a debate emerged in Finland surrounding the board game *Afrikan tähti* (also known as The Lost Diamond), in which players aim to collect as many gemstones as possible.

Many are calling for the game to be banned, arguing that it is racist and promotes a harmful, stereotypical portrayal of Africa and its inhabitants.

Adlercreutz would rather the game was used in education as a tool to discuss current affairs and history.

“Fortunately, we see the world differently now than we did in the 1950s when this game was created. This is something we could use to talk about how Finland and the world have changed,” he says.

“While what was unusual becomes more usual and immigration increases, I still have the impression that language use has become harsher, as has the general attitude, both in schools and society as a whole.”

The general attitude toward diversity is probably better. However, extreme opinions are louder and sometimes receive more attention.

Adlercreutz feels the racism debate has been politicised and immigration has become even more of a political battleground than before.

“When we talk about demography, I think it is extremely difficult to find a single national economist in Finland who would disagree that the country needs immigration and that Finland cannot manage our labour shortages without it,” says Adlercreutz.

### **Uncertain times call for unity**

Yet, there is one party in the Finnish government that takes a critical or even outright rejecting stance on immigration. The Finns Party has a different view of the situation than Adlercreutz and his Swedish People's Party.

“This is part of the political reality in Finland today. The four parties in this coalition need to arrive at something that everyone can agree on.”

Adlercreutz wants a facts-based analysis of the situation which can define the public debate, not fears, irrational threats or the need to box people into different corners. But he is also concerned about the tone of the discourse and the political developments.

“Yes, I worry about that, in Finland, the Nordics, Europe and globally. I believe an inclusive society is more resilient. A society where you don't build walls or create conflicts, but look for ways to cooperate and function together to become far better prepared for different crises.”

Adlercreutz also considers the security situation in the Baltic Sea and the external threats facing Europe.

I hope this can serve as a guiding principle for our politics in Europe,” says Adlercreutz.

Adlercreutz hopes the Nordic example can serve as a beacon in European contexts. This could inspire the Nordic countries to have the political will to take on a slightly larger role in Europe, working to counter polarisation by fostering structures built on both understanding and resilience.



*Anders Adlercreutz enjoys his role as Minister for Nordic Cooperation.*

“We have a war in Ukraine but also strong Russian hybrid action where narratives are created to sow division in Europe. They spread fears about immigration, discredit climate research and exploit culture war metaphors to create inner conflict.”

Anders Adlercreutz is happy that the Nordic region has shown itself to be reasonably resilient.

“Our education systems and media literacy have helped us withstand these pressures better than many other countries.



## Karen Ellemann: Nordic cooperation more important than ever

The Arctic has gone from being a region characterised by peaceful cooperation to a geopolitical flashpoint. This week, the Nordic Council of Ministers launched its tenth Arctic programme during the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø. It allocates 30 million Danish kroner (€4m) over three years to strengthen social, economic and environmental sustainability.

### NEWS

30.01.2025

TEXT: LARS BEVANGER, PHOTO: SVERRE-LEANDER SUNDSET

Karen Ellemann, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, participated in a range of events during this year's Arctic Frontiers conference.

### **Russia, China and Trump**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine means the largest of the Arctic countries no longer participates in the Arctic Council.

China is showing increasing interest in the region's raw material potential and a new Trump administration has already introduced fresh insecurity around the cooperation.

Finland has pulled out of the Barents Council, which has been a collaboration mainly between Russia, Norway, Finland and Sweden aimed at promoting stability and sustain-



able development in the region. Russia withdrew in September 2023.

This situation means the Nordic cooperation is more important than ever, argues Karen Elleman, who launched the Nordic Council of Ministers' Nordic Arctic Programme – number ten so far – in Tromsø.



*Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers Karen Ellemann participated in a range of events during the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø. (Photo: David Jensen)*

The Nordic Labour Journal met Ellemann during the Arctic Frontiers conference.

***What is the state of the Nordic cooperation today compared to just one year ago?***

“Clearly, a lot has happened in one year, and it is no secret that all of us in our large, wide, Nordic region to a large extent feel the geopolitical situation. We do talk about prepping, our defence, our private preparedness.

“That’s why preparedness and our resilience is much higher on the agenda now than last year.

“I also feel it is important to remember that climate change is still an important issue that must not fall as a priority compared to all the other crucial tasks we are facing. But there’s no doubt the debate about our resilience and preparedness is higher on the list now.”

***Security cooperation is not a main topic in the new Nordic Arctic Programme?***

“But the programme focuses on the need to create a resilient society. Being resilient and well-functioning is the best defence you can have, after all.

“With a new Arctic cooperation programme we can deliver economic support to incredibly important elements like civil society cooperation, allowing people to meet and share knowledge. This is a crucial part of creating strong, resilient societies here in the Arctic North.

“We must not take our democracies for granted but keep supporting cooperation between people. This is happening to a large extent on a local level. Without well-functioning, strong local communities you have poor resilience.

“In a time when there are good reasons to be concerned, it is important to remember the strong foundation we have through the Nordic cooperation with our solid and well-functioning democracies.

“We enjoy a high degree of trust – in our institutions, between people, in our politicians and in our democratic model. And again, this is not something we should take for granted.”

***You have also involved young people as part of the strategy in the new Arctic programme?***

“If you want to secure a sustainable society and especially a sustainable region, the people who live there must thrive. And thriving involves many things – having a job, it’s about the economy and about living in a safe society.

“It’s also about something as fundamental as establishing an understanding of democracy, and this begins as early as in preschools and elementary schools. Strong civil societies are built on this understanding of democracy.



*Karen Ellemann on a panel with (left to right) Stian Bones from the Arctic University of Norway, leader of the Norwegian Conservative party Erna Solberg and Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide. (Photo: Sverre-Leander Sundset)*

“Just a few days ago here in Tromsø, around 300 youths gathered for a large Arctic youth conference with representatives from across the Arctic nations. I had the opportunity to talk to several of the participants.

“I think we are in danger of sometimes forgetting how incredibly important it is to have such meeting places. We have to invest in this – partly so that young people to meet and have a dialogue, but also so that we can get involved ourselves in many of these discussions.



“Several mayors from the Arctic Mayors’ Forum have told me how they, on a practical level, make sure to involve young people when they develop plans for their local societies.”

***Do you see a changed role for the Nordic Council of Ministers now that Finland has pulled out of the Barents Council, the Arctic Council no longer has any meaningful Russian participation and there is uncertainty about the direction of the new Trump administration?***

“I see that the cooperation is more important than ever, and I want to highlight the strong cooperation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the parliamentarians on the Nordic Council, as well as the important cross-sectoral collaboration that also exists. This is often the prerequisite for finding good solutions to complex problems.

“I also see great strength in the fact that the Nordic countries now stand united in terms of defence, with both Finland and Sweden as Nato members. This creates a strong Nordic presence in Nato and supports collaboration on all the other important agendas I have mentioned.

“We need to have close cooperation in our region, that is the core prerequisite for us being able to be strong, sustainable societies and it makes us competitive.

“So yes, there is an extra momentum for Nordic cooperation right now, I am convinced of it. And all of our cooperation programmes in the councils of ministers underline this too. Preparedness and resilience are recurring themes. We have to maintain trust and uphold our strong democracies.



## Swedish Emilia got a job thanks to Youth Power 2.0

Despite a growing business sector, many young people were long-term unemployed in Åstorp in southern Sweden in the spring of 2024. Now, new job opportunities have been created through building relations with both private and municipal employers. The motto is: Everyone must get a chance.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT AND PHOTO: FAYME ALM

“When you apply for a job via the Public Employment Service on a screen from home, the human being is lost. Everything is in writing and you don’t get to show what kind of a person you are. I did get to do this during the matching, which is a great advantage,” says Emilia Holmkvist.

After finishing her childminder training, Emilia Holmkvist had only had zero-hours contracts in the industry and in municipal institutions. Now she is on a six-month full-time contract at the Fröhuset preschool in Kvidinge i Åstorp municipality thanks to Ung kraft 2.0.

This is one of two initiatives where the recruitment process includes matching jobseekers and employers and the two parties actually get to meet.

### Reactions to statistics led to action

In spring 2024, Åstorp municipality had the highest unemployment rate in Skåne according to the Swedish Public Employment Service. This municipality in north-western Skåne was the worst out of all of the 33 municipalities in the region.

“We had to do something.”

That was Annica Nilsson's reaction. She is the assistant head at Fröhuset, one of the municipality's 18 nurseries that ten years ago created an internship for a young unemployed person as part of the Ung kraft (Young power) project. Since then, they have had several interns.



*Annica Nilsson is the head teacher at Fröhuset, a preschool inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. This means that children are viewed as competent and important members of society, worthy of being listened to and provided with ample space to express their creativity.*

Nilsson tells the Nordic Labour Journal that she got in touch with the municipality's labour market department after reading the statistics from the Public Employment Service.

"I was wondering whether we could revive Ung kraft and include those who are furthest from the labour market. This is about building relationships with the interns in the same way that we build relationships with the children here in the preschool, taking them in regardless of their background.

"Over the years, we have succeeded in getting many of our interns into substitute jobs here or elsewhere, or into further studies. So I feel that we have made a contribution and we want to continue doing that."

Annica Nilsson was not the only one who wanted to act. Linnéa Engnes, the head of the municipality's labour market department, had received similar proposals. Together with development coordinator Anna Bergqvist, she was already working on drafting Ung kraft 2.0 to offer young job seekers jobs within some of the municipality's workplaces.

"Together with the Public Employment Service, my boss took the proposal to the politicians because a municipal decision was needed to secure funding to move the process forward," says Linnéa Engnes.

### **The location is crucial for business expansion**

Åstorp has many businesses and a favourable location. Helsingborg and its large harbour is around 20 kilometres away, and both the international E4 road, national road 21 and county road 112 pass through the municipality – creating

good conditions for a hub, which several businesses have taken advantage of.

Among them are the sustainable food logistics company Frigoscandia and logistics company Frode Laursen, whose warehouse is just around the corner from the building housing the municipal labour market department, Komvux and day-to-day operations. Pet accessory firm Dogman is another.

The municipality – which besides the central town of Åstorp also includes the localities of Kvidinge, Nyvång and Hyllinge – has around 16,500 residents and 1,250 registered companies.

All of them benefit from the well-developed public transport system. The central town has a train and bus station for Skåne's regional buses, which increases access not only for the municipality's residents but also for those who want to commute here.

This is also a municipality that invests in development to strengthen its attractiveness, explains Linnéa Engnes.

"We are renovating and building schools and the town centre is being revitalised with, among other things, a new municipal building."

### **Municipal and private project involvement**

Linnéa Engnes and Anna Bergqvist did not put action against the high youth unemployment rate on hold while waiting for a municipal decision on the financing of Ung kraft 2.0. They used that time to launch the project Ungdomsboost (Youth boost).



*Linnéa Engnes (left) and Anna Bergqvist work closely together with both Ung kraft 2 and Ungdomsboost. Photo: Anna Johansson Fast*

"We had to put words into action and focus on individuals, not the target group," says Anna Bergqvist.

They approached local businesses to ask if they might accept a long-term unemployed young person for potential future employment.



“Ungdomsboost did strike a chord with employers. We got the impression that they felt this was something they had to help solve,” says Linnéa Engnes.

When ten businesses had said yes, the labour market department turned to young people in the municipality who had been unemployed for at least nine months.

“The reactions varied. Some were happy. Others felt it was scary, like a near-job experience. Others again were waiting for admission results or had another good plan in place.”

The matching between businesses and the unemployed youths took place in September.

“The ten youths who came were well prepared. They had done job interview training, were well-dressed and had well-written CVs. That made an impression on the employers who said: What great young people,” says Linnéa Engnes.

Eight of these ten got internships. After the first month, five have secured a one-year contract with practical work at one of Åstorp’s companies in industries such as logistics, technology, industry, and heating, ventilation and sanitation. They all work full-time 40 hours a week and have a supervisor on-site.

When Ung Kraft 2.0 received funding, eight internship positions were created at municipal workplaces in care and welfare, the technical office, with a primary school’s caretaker and kitchen, and at various preschools, including Fröhuset.

All those who accepted started with one month of internship, just like with Ungdomsboost. If all went well, the intern moved to a six-month contract.

What is common for both Ung kraft 2.0 and Ungdomsboost is that the young people still get their Public Employment Service employment support. The support is individual, and for Ung kraft, the municipality covers the difference between it and the monthly salary of 22,500 kronor (€1,960).

The same applies to businesses participating in Ungdomsboost, with the difference being that they offer individual wages. This means that 22,500 kronor is a minimum wage.

“Thanks to this project, young people have the opportunity to access the labour market and work full-time in one place, giving them a reference they can use on their CV,” says Annica Nilsson.

### **A childminder in the right place**

Emilia Holmkvist took this opportunity and secured a full-time job in the occupation she was trained for.



*Emilia Holmkvist felt happy at once at Fröhuset preschool.*

“I have always loved children and have a younger brother and two older sisters, one of whom has two little children.”

Emilia, the staff and children at the Fröhuset preschool got along straight away.

“When I came here, I felt welcome and immediately started enjoying myself. Everyone was nice and it felt like the staff meant what they were saying.”

Another source of joy is that the three-year-olds Emilia works with develop all the time.

“After the Christmas holidays, some of the children had learned new words, and that makes it even more fun to chat with them and notice how their language is developing.”

Emilia is dyslexic and did not get any help with this during her time in primary school. Hers was a big class and teachers often came and went, she explains. In upper secondary school she got support from a special education teacher and today she knows how to handle her dyslexia.

“I can read aloud for the children without problem,” she says, and adds that if she can help others succeed she gladly does this.

### **The future is around the corner**

The aim of Ung kraft 2.0 and Ungdomsboost is to give young people workplace experience, creating a frame of reference that helps them move forward.

Emilia Holmqvist and all the other young people get a labour market coach from day one. This is a municipal employee who follows them up regularly and is available for both the employee and employer when needed.

This spring, the coach will help the young people plan for their future. The choice is between working or studying.

### **Open doors**

Ung kraft 2.0 and Ungdomsboost have increased cooperation in the municipality.



“Different stakeholders now find it easier to get in touch with each other and we have learned how to find different ways in,” says Linnéa Engnes, and tells us how a business owner got in touch after their first match with a young person.

“He wanted to know whether we had another one. In that case, he could hire that person without getting any economic support.”

After the first rounds of interviews at Ungdomsboost, Linnéa Engnes had the pleasure of calling a young person to tell them that “four employers have chosen you, so now you get to choose”.

“The feeling of being able to give that message is hard to describe,” she says.

The programme's goal is to run a fresh round of Ungdomsboost and also continue Ung kraft, but the future depends on the influx of young people and on political decisions.

“When we got in touch with the businesses in the municipality, many answered: not right now, but do get back in touch in the spring. We hope to be able to do that.”



## Danish students turn entrepreneurs to make a difference

An increasing number of students at Aarhus University choose entrepreneurship to solve important social challenges. One of them is medical doctor Christina Gravgaard Andersen, who has set up her own company while studying.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

During her medical studies, Christina Gravgaard Andersen interned in a hospital's pediatric surgery ward and realised that many of the children were terrified because they did not understand what was going to happen. This gave her the idea to start her own company, providing patient communication solutions for the healthcare system.

"The children on the ward knew that they were going to be cut and that they would be sedated first, and they were very scared. This made a huge impression on me and I wanted to give both the children and their parents more information in a format they could understand."

### Wants to make a difference

She produced a video for the pediatric ward with easy-to-understand information about the operation. When she later on studied the effect, it turned out that children who had seen her video were less afraid and knew more about what would happen.



*Aarhus University also holds meetings for students where entrepreneurs from The Kitchen talk about being an intern or student assistant in a startup. (Photo: Private)*

This resulted in other hospital wards asking for similar videos, and on this basis, she and her brother Thomas Gravgard Andersen founded Klinikken, a company that produces short videos with patient information.

Contributing to making something better for someone is the main driver for the two young entrepreneurs.

“To make a difference for people and society makes it meaningful for me to be a doctor and now also an entrepreneur. I could not see myself in a job or creating a company where making the most money possible was the main thing,” says Christina Gravgard Andersen.

She is not an entrepreneur to make money:

“Both I and my brother have chosen educations with fairly good job security prospects, so we did not start a company because of the money. I am primarily an entrepreneur because I saw a need to change something for the better. That is an important quality to me.”

### Help from the university

The siblings did not know anything about entrepreneurship and asked for help and still receive it from The Kitchen, Aarhus University’s startup incubator. Its task is to create a dynamic entrepreneurial environment and support university students’ and researchers’ innovative ideas.

At The Kitchen, Christina Gravgard Andersen and her brother have access to a free office. They have also participated in workshops and have had a personal advisor who helped them turn their idea into a product and take the concrete steps needed to establish a company.

“Help from the university has been invaluable because neither of us had any experience with start-ups. We have benefited greatly from our advisor and from being in an environment with other entrepreneurs.

“Among other doctors I encounter understanding but also curiosity about why I became an entrepreneur when I could easily make a living from being a doctor.”

The Kitchen has existed for four years and has so far helped more than 1,000 students and staff at Aarhus University establish their own companies or in other ways turn ideas into reality.

Right now, some 250 companies are part of the programme and the number of new companies is climbing, explains Aarhus University’s head of innovation Jeppe Dørup Olesen.

“We see a significant increase in the interest in entrepreneurship and creating your own company among our students and staff. Today, The Kitchen is helping far more students and staff create their own companies compared to just a few years ago.”

### Impact and freedom

Students and staff who bring an idea to The Kitchen are typically driven by a desire to make a difference for society, explains the head of innovation.

“Some are driven by a desire to make money, but in my experience, there is considerable interest in creating companies or solutions that address important social challenges. Entrepreneurs, and especially young entrepreneurs, are very focused on impact. They want to make a difference in the world.”



*Jeppe Dørup Olesen is head of innovation at Aarhus University, (Photo: Aarhus University)*

According to Jeppe Dørup Olesen, the increased desire to be an entrepreneur is also linked to the fact that today’s young people want something more out of working life than earlier generations.

“Some young people want to be part of making decisions and not simply be small cogs in a large machine. Many want a

working life with many elements rather than just one job. They desire freedom, flexibility and space to do other things than just work.

“This is a part of the zeitgeist, which also boosts people’s desire to start their own business.”

### **A change is coming**

The startup only means more work for Christina Gravgaard Andersen, however – at least in the short term. This past year, she has been able to work full-time at Klinikken thanks to a grant from the Innovation Fund Denmark. But now that money has been spent, and in future, she has to look after the company while working full-time as a doctor.

“The company cannot pay us founders a salary yet, but the aim is to create a large enough turnover to hire staff who can produce the videos, and then I can take a leadership position and share my time between the company and my job as a doctor.”

Christina Gravgaard Andersen still has not figured out how she will find time for all this, but she remains optimistic.

“The medical profession has a tradition of working a lot and many workplaces expect student and junior doctors to work far more than the 37 hours a week we are being paid for. But my generation doesn’t want to work that much, and I feel a change is coming. So I reckon I will get enough spare time to also run my own company.”

### **A path to working life**

Offering students help to set up their own company is a multi-year initiative for Aarhus University, which has received financial backing from several non-profit foundations. These foundations support The Kitchen with the primary goal of providing young people with more pathways into working life.

Meanwhile, young entrepreneurs at The Kitchen are part of promoting the innovation that is necessary to solve major social challenges. They develop solutions that help solve important societal problems, points out Jeppe Dørup Olesen.

The Danish parliament has set aside nearly 100 million kroner (€13.5m) to promote research-based innovation at Danish universities.





## Nordic youth on what is needed to give them faith in the future

Many young people in the Nordics have a dim view of the future. Some struggle with mental health, remain outside education and work, and many worry a lot about their own generation. The Nordic Labour Journal has asked what they think is needed to create a brighter future.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN





*Photo: The Liberals*

**Edvin: More must get politically engaged**

**Edvin Mårtenson (20), lives in Uppsala, Sweden, studies law and Russian and sits with the social liberal group on the Nordic Youth Council.**

1. We should definitely be worried. Our Nordic state systems are based on participation in elections and representative democracy. If the younger generation no longer feels politicians are listening to its concerns and challenges, there is a risk the legitimacy of democracy itself is undermined.

We already see this in poor voter turnout among young people. The younger generation must also understand that change can only happen through our democratic systems. More need to get engaged politically to change worries into practical action!

2. It is difficult to overestimate social media's role in young people's mental health. It is very easy to fall into spirals of harmful content, whether it is body image pressure from influencers or graphic violent material.

Many young people are aware of this and try to reduce their screen time. However, we need more initiatives for sustainable social media use, such as less addictive algorithms from tech companies or better tools to help individuals manage their own screen time.

3. Young people face many challenges in the Nordic labour markets. I still want to draw particular attention to the issue of mental health, however. This should absolutely not be overlooked as a reason why young people stay home from school, studies or work. Addressing this would make it easier for young people to complete their education, for example.

4. The Nordic cooperation largely revolves around issues that are very close to young people's hearts. Climate and environmental issues, of course, but cultural and educational matters also directly affect young people's daily lives.

Tackling the challenges in these areas through more coordinated efforts to combat the climate crisis and offering more opportunities for young people to move between the Nordics

and their labour markets – via a focus on language and initiatives like Nordplus – are examples of how the Nordic region plays an important role for young people. That is, if they were only aware of all the Nordic projects that actually exist.



*Photo: FNUF*

**Steffen: More should take on active community roles**

**Steffen Bagger (22) lives in Greater Copenhagen in Denmark and studies theology at the University of Copenhagen. He represents the Youth League of the Norden Associations in the praesidium of the Nordic Youth Council.**

1. It's concerning that young people aren't looking to the future with optimism and hope, especially in the Nordic region where our welfare societies and solid labour market model ought to secure an optimistic outlook.

This is troubling, as hope among today's youths forms the foundation for a strengthened and improved future society.

2. The Nordic region is a collective region, a region of community, which means we perform worse when we are part of fewer communities and engage less in our societies.

To change this development, more people should join associations and actively participate in them, seeing themselves as part of a whole. The Nordic associations, the states, and each of us individually must contribute to making this happen.

Community is the cornerstone of the Nordics. Nordic associations, the states and all of us need to contribute to make this happen.

3. School communities, supportive parents, families or guardians, and municipal support for workplace visits and internships.

4. By supporting projects like Nordjobb and providing economic support to associations, enabling them to offer better services for their members and more easily integrate new members into their communities.



*Photo: Felix Lindvik*

Cecilia: - We are in the same boat on many issues

**Cecilia Huhtala (21), is from Vasa in Finland. She is taking a gap year after working in various associations and is currently preparing for higher education. She represents Finland on the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People NORDBUK.**

1. We need to take the results from these surveys very seriously. Young people's confidence in the future is low, which is worrying in light of all the crises we face.

Many young people have little faith in their ability to buy property, secure a safe pension or achieve economic stability. We risk creating a generation with reduced hope and motivation.

We need to provide young people with the tools they need to manage their emotions and create spaces where they can talk about their thoughts about the future.

Decision-makers and adults in general carry a great responsibility for taking these issues seriously, not only by listening but also by taking action. By being role models, addressing social crises and demonstrating that change is possible, we can help instil greater hope for the future in young people.

2. The main causes of mental health issues among young people in the Nordics are complex. The demands of society, the impact of social media and less access to meaningful leisure time are major factors.

Many young people also experience increased insecurity at home and worry about global issues, which again contribute to their anxiety and depression.

To turn this negative trend around, we need to make hobbies and leisure activities more accessible, work to reduce the pressure to perform and offer more supportive conversations and resources for young people's mental health.

We need a holistic approach where schools, families and society as a whole collaborate to create a safer and more hopeful environment for young people.

3. To help young people back into education and work, we need a combination of measures. Preventive efforts should be prioritised and should receive adequate funding so that young people can get support before they are marginalised.

We also need to promote projects aimed at fighting marginalisation, where the diversity of young people is taken seriously.

The labour market must become more flexible and inclusive, with a focus on reducing obstacles preventing minorities from getting jobs and securing the just treatment of young people.

Mentorships, internships and adapted training programmes can also create bridges to education and jobs.

4. The Nordic cooperation can help by strengthening research on the challenges facing young people, facilitating mobility and the exchange of experiences between the countries and making sure young people's voices are heard in all decision-making bodies.

We are all in the same boat on many issues. Together, we can develop common solutions for mental health challenges, education and work, and create a more secure future outlook for young people in the Nordic region.



*Photo: Emma-Jessica Johansson*

**Andreas: Tomorrow could be too late**  
**Andreas Salomonsson (23) studies political science at Linköping University and lives in Linköping. He is the Vice President of the Nordic Youth Council.**

1. We are undoubtedly living in less stable times with many challenges. Our generation will need to deal with a range of tricky problems and many young people are aware of this.

The most important thing is to give young people the opportunity and tools to make an impact today, not tomorrow

when it might already be too late. We must improve young people's opportunities to influence politics and promote innovation and new solutions to large challenges.

2. Personally, I believe that social media plays a significant role in this issue. It helps perpetuate the illusion that most people live "perfect" lives and promotes unattainable beauty standards, something today's children and youth are exposed to at increasingly younger ages.

I believe we need to hold the companies behind these platforms to higher standards and enforce age restrictions for social media use.

3. Mental health challenges are contributing a lot to the marginalisation of young people in education and the labour market. We must get better at identifying those who are struggling as early as possible.

The lack of qualified healthcare staff and long queues means many do not get help in time and sink further into poor mental health. This makes it even harder to return to a normality where they can manage everyday life.

We also need to improve cooperation between schools and healthcare so that pupils who struggle are identified and get help sooner. We must also make sure we have more qualified psychologists, psychotherapists and councillors.

4. The Nordic cooperation is well placed to help young people. A key aspect is that we can share knowledge and methods that improve our societies. We can use various programmes and projects to focus collective resources on specific issues.

At the same time, the Nordic arena provides young people with a greater opportunity to have a political impact. That's why it is crucial that we promote young people's political participation within the Nordic cooperation.



*Photo: Privat*

**Sofie: The crucial thing is to meet young people where they are**

**Sofie Sæther (27) lives in Oslo, Norway, and is the Secretary General of the Norwegian Chess Federa-**

**tion, Deputy Leader for the National Council for Norway's Children and Youth Organisations (LNU) and Norwegian representative in the Nordic Children's and Youth Committee NORDBUK.**

1. It is sad to see the development of young people's worry about the future. I think this can be seen in light of which issues young people are allowed to discuss themselves.

Those who are not heard can lose their belief in the future. That makes it even more important that children and young people have a seat at the table and can influence non-academic arenas and activities.

This way, they can feel that their voice matters. It can give individuals a sense of purpose, and it creates resilience that can extend to other spheres of life.

2. There are many reasons why this is the case, but I believe one of the main causes could be the lack of real influence. Increases in mental health issues among young people could have many causes, including performance pressure and constant exposure to bad news.

We read about catastrophes and scary news and constantly get updates on social media. The abundance of shocking news probably leads to apathy about the state of the world.

This can be countered by allowing children and young people to make a change in society. Children's and youth organisations provide a community that makes it easier to participate in processes that can influence developments.

Here, children and young people can contribute and promote their opinions. Good and safe communities in children's and youth organisations give young people a platform where they can talk together about their concerns, but also about actions.

3. It is important to commit at a young age to participating in something where you experience different perspectives on thoughts and problems. Challenging your perspectives and worldview is crucial, and this can be done in diverse children's and youth organisations.

The most important thing is to meet young people where they are. Measures combining voluntary activities and responsibility. Voluntary organisations can play a key role by offering community, guidance and experiences which strengthen young people's skills and self-confidence.

4. I believe Nordic cooperation is important, also for young people. One example is a cooperation project between national youth councils in the NORD project. The aim is to bring together youths across countries and organisations. They can learn from each other and we can find out that what works for young people in Denmark, might also work in Norway.





## Why Swedish countryside youths are ahead in the labour market

In Sweden, fewer young people from the countryside go on to university or other higher education compared with city youths. Yet more young people in rural areas – and especially men – start working earlier than their peers in cities and metropolitan areas. Many also work while studying.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

Children and young people in the Nordics are doing pretty well generally. But where they grow up makes a big difference in education and leisure opportunities.

That is according to the new Swedish report “The importance of location—young people in rural areas,” which was recently presented by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, MUCF.

“Where you grow up does matter. Most young people growing up in Sweden are doing well and living good lives, but there are major differences depending on where they grow up. Young people in the countryside face bigger obstacles in

terms of access to meaningful leisure activities, culture and education.

“They struggle more settling into education and work. They feel less included in society and have poorer access to health-care and good health,” said Stefan Holmgren, Acting Director General of MUCF, as he opened one of the agency’s conference days in November 2024.



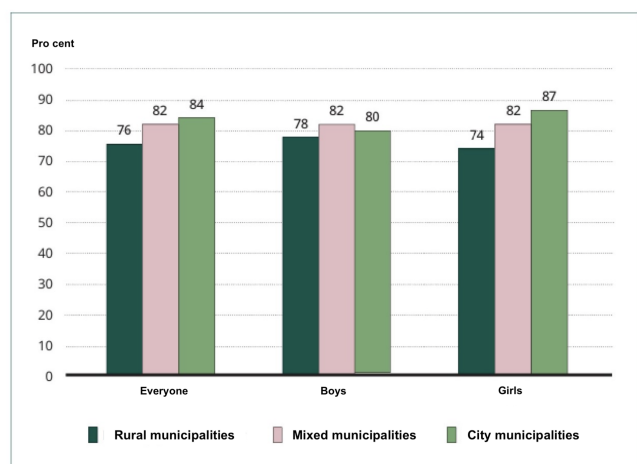
*Stefan Holmgren, Acting Director General for the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society. (Photo: Christoffer Rikardsson/MUCF)*

He underlined how important it is for decision-makers to take into account young people, regardless of whether they are in cities or the countryside. Sweden has 290 municipalities.

According to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR), one-third of the population lives in the 13 largest municipalities, one-third in mid-sized municipalities and the rest are divided between the 226 smallest municipalities.

The median municipality has 16,189 residents, while the smallest, Dorotea in northern Sweden, has just 2,339 residents. For young people, this results in significant differences in their upbringing, as highlighted in the report “The importance of location – young people in rural areas.”

The report is based on register data from Statistics Sweden, the agency's own youth survey as well as focus groups including secondary school and upper secondary school students from rural areas.



*The proportion of young people aged 16 to 25 in 2021 who report having fairly or very good opportunities to find a job within a reasonable distance. Source: MUCF's national youth survey.*

The report focuses on young people aged 13 to 25 and compares their living conditions in the countryside to that of young people in towns and cities. It addresses living conditions across several areas, including education and studies, work, health and safety, participation, inclusion plus culture and leisure.

Do young people have a place in the community? Are they being listened to? What is the availability of leisure activities like and how do they view education and their future working life?

18 per cent of Swedish youths aged between 16 and 25 live in rural municipalities, 49 per cent live in so-called mixed municipalities and 33 per cent in big city municipalities. Yet there are also differences between rural municipalities which impact education and work.

For young people, this could be things like proximity to the central town, the distance to their upper secondary school, access to public transport, the opportunities for socialising and which sports and cultural activities are available.

### **Vocational programmes more common in rural areas**

Compared to their peers in bigger towns, many young people in rural areas choose vocational programmes in upper secondary school.

“It is very clear that young people in rural areas choose vocational programmes to a greater degree compared to young people in towns and cities,” says Klara Johansson, one of the report’s authors.

This is not necessarily a disadvantage. According to the Swedish National Agency for Education, vocational programmes are generally a more secure path to the labour market than university preparatory programmes across Sweden as a whole.

That means that many young people in rural municipalities access the labour market quicker than their peers in cities. This is particularly true for young men, but also for young women with a Swedish background.

More young people in rural municipalities than in other types of municipalities also work while still in upper secondary school – often motivated by the need to earn extra money to pay for transport into work or for leisure activities.

### **Stay or leave**

Young people on university preparatory programmes usually have to move from home to study at university, while those who take vocational training stand a better chance of staying in their home town, depending on their chosen specialisation.

In the focus groups, young people who wish to stay in their hometown take into account which educational path will al-

low them to remain there. Those who wish to take university preparatory programmes in order to carry on studying, face different choices.

In some rural municipalities, young people face having to move even earlier, before they start upper secondary education.

“The focus groups show us that upper secondary school students living in municipalities that do not have upper secondary schools within a reasonable commuting distance feel stressed about having to move from home and do a weekly commute to their upper secondary school.

“We don’t know how many young people in Sweden are in this situation today, but in the municipalities where this issue arose in the conversations, it applies to all young people within the age group in the municipality,” says Klara Johansson.



*Klara Johansson, one of the authors of the report “The importance of location—young people in rural areas”. (Photo: Privat)*

These are difficult choices for both the young people and their parents. According to the youths in the focus groups, this might impact those who are still living in the towns, since they see it being emptied of secondary school-age peers.

### **Falling populations and a weaker economy**

“The small rural municipalities are facing the greatest challenges. The population is falling and ageing, while fewer children are being born and the number of working-age people is shrinking.

“This has an impact on expenses and income,” says Åsa Ernestam at the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR). They recently surveyed eighteen small municipalities in Sweden about schools in small municipalities. She also gave a lecture during MUCF Day.

The smallest municipalities have long been living with this demographic change and dwindling incomes. Now, fresh statistics show that larger municipalities are also hit. Åsa Ernestam provides one concrete example that illustrates the significant differences in economic conditions between municipalities with large and small populations.

In Pajala, for instance, each working person supports 1.24 people in addition to themselves, while the corresponding figure in Danderyd is 0.5 people.

### **The compensatory role of schools**

The interviews with the 18 small municipalities focused on the situation in schools and in a few weeks SKR will launch a publication called “Did you know this? About school in small municipalities”.

In concise points, it presents facts about schools and demographic trends based on municipal size. Stockholm, for instance, has 247 elementary schools, while Malå, Arjeplog and Skinnkatteberg have one each.

For young people in small municipalities, this means less freedom of choice while the smaller communities also bring advantages. They are often close to nature, and there is also often a closer connection between people. This again can mean elected officials know what is going on in the schools.

Yet the small municipalities struggle more to secure existing state support and also to attract educational staff. The solution is for municipalities to cooperate and change the way education is organised. This could be achieved through merging schools, meaning children will have to travel to go to a different school.

How education is perceived is another factor that impacts youths in small municipalities. Expectations for further studies are often lower. Fewer parents have higher education compared to in urban areas – for example, 76 per cent of parents in Danderyd have post-secondary education, compared to 21 per cent in Filipstad.



“This has an impact on how children and young people view education. There are fewer parents who can encourage the



youth, and that places greater responsibility on schools to help students recognise their opportunities and reach their full potential. Schools take on a larger compensatory role," says Åsa Ernestam.

With the publication "Did you know this? About schools in small municipalities", SKR wants to alert the government, parliament and educational authorities to the widely differing conditions that exist for creating an equitable school system across the whole of Sweden.

Regulations, funding, and administrative practices must be adapted to the reality on the ground, and one key question SKR highlights that should be considered in all decisions affecting schools is: How will this work in a small municipality?

### Do young people get a space in their home town?

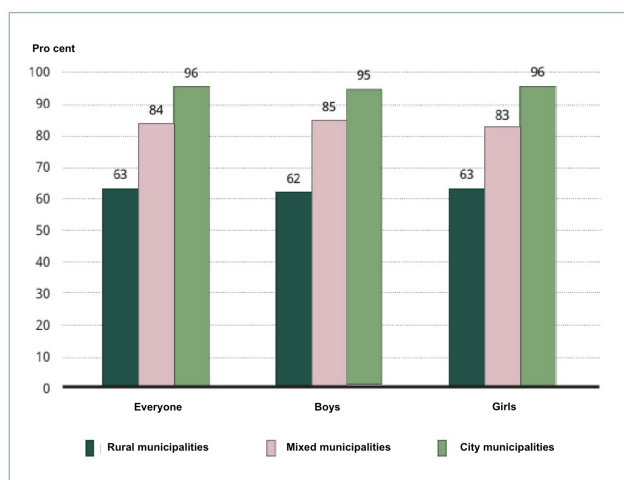
The report "The importance of location – young people in rural areas" paints a mixed picture. Getting into the labour market early is a good thing, but many young people in rural areas often miss "something to do", for instance, access to leisure and cultural activities.

Even if something is happening, many youths say it is difficult to get to where it happens. Public transport does not match their needs and also means spending more money.

One advantage of being young and living in the countryside is that it is often easier to find housing and many move from home earlier than in larger places. They also feel safer in their neighbourhoods and many express a strong belonging to where they live.

"These are also values we need to highlight and build on. There are not only challenges but also opportunities to create more just preconditions for young people in rural areas.

"The aim is to create a society where young people regardless of their background and where they live feel included, engaged and hopeful for the future," said Stefan Holmgren.



*The proportion of young people aged 16 to 25 in 2021 who report having fairly or very good opportunities to use public transport to access activities, studies, or work. Source: MUCF's national youth survey.*

As a result, many young people in rural areas find it harder to create meaningful spare time and many feel less included and engaged in society compared to their peers in larger cities.

This is particularly true for young women, who report a lower sense of societal participation compared to women of the same age living in urban areas.



## The Nordics lag behind in the fight against economic crime

Economic crime is a threat to the Nordic welfare societies, warned this year's conference on the black economy. The fight against creative and innovative criminals needs more resources and better legislation, the trade union movement argues.

### NEWS

30.01.2025

TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN, PHOTO: NORWEGIAN CIVIL SERVICE UNION (NTL)

“Think it is relatively risk-free to engage in labour market crime in Norway, said Kjersti Barsok, President of the Norwegian Civil Service Union (NTL) as she opened the annual conference on the black economy in front of a packed hall in Folkets Hus in Oslo.



*Union leader Kjersti Barsok of the Norwegian Civil Servants' Association (NTL) believes that more resources are needed for the work against economic crime.*

The conference is part of The Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees' and NTL's fight against economic crime and gathers experts, researchers, politicians and not least many representatives from the trade union movement.

This year, the conference focused on the Nordic labour market. On the agenda were topics like the role of the facilitator, welfare crime and hidden ownership.

Interest in the conference was reported to be record-high.

### **More and better measures needed**

NTL President Kjersti Barsok underlined that collaborative efforts to fight labour market crime and improved access to information sharing are good things, but she also said more is needed.

"The very few actors who are caught get a low or no penalty. The sentences for tax fraud are low or non-existent. Could it be that the de-prioritisation of economic crime and wage theft is actually a reflection of class justice in the 'egalitarian society' of Norway?," she asked.

"The regulations are not good enough to facilitate enough cross-agency cooperation. The resources that are allocated to this work are not nearly as large as the resources criminals use when they come under the spotlight," the union leader said.

### **No lone swan**

One of the speakers was the man behind the Danish documentary "The Black Swan", Mads Brügger. He took the audience behind the scenes and spoke about the methods he had used in the making of the documentary.

The Nordic Labour Journal has previously written about the documentary: **Denmark cracks down on social dumping and money laundering.**

Brügger believes it is crucial for Nordic welfare societies to succeed in fighting economic crime.



In a debate after his talk, Brügger warned against believing "The Black Swan" is a lone swan. He thinks there are many more out there and that they are far more dangerous than what many believe.

"The criminals are creative and have long-term strategies," he said. Brügger believes it is time police, politicians and others opened their eyes to what is happening. So far too many have been too naïve and controls have not been good enough, he argued.

The documentary has helped a bit, he hopes.

"It looks like Danish politicians have understood that there is something seriously wrong with our control agencies," said Brügger.

### **Transparency vs. privacy**

Tor-Arne Vikingstad is an economist and NRK journalist. He worked with the Danish documentary when it was shown on Norwegian television. The retrained economist was surprised at how hard it is to get people engaged in this issue.



“Transparency is one of the most important tools in the fight against labour market crime. But we often face closed doors. The information we are looking for is not available to us. Privacy concerns often trump transparency,” Vikingstad said.

### How to create the right measures?

Leif Vagle is head of Fair Play Bygg Agder, an organisation working against labour market crime, in particular in the construction industry. He believes the situation is as serious in Norway as in the neighbouring countries.



*NRK journalist Tor Arne Vikingstad believes that in their job, they face far too many closed doors.*

Through their work, Vagle and his colleagues come into close contact with foreign workers in Norway. They have access to environments that the police do not.

“I don’t think neither police nor politicians know the scale of economic crime in Norway. So how can they implement the right measures to stop this type of crime?,” asked Vagle.

### Doctors, do they cheat?

Linnéa Graaf calls herself “an engaged welfare crime nerd”. She is focused on how we get the most and best possible welfare for our tax money. She now runs her own company, but earlier she worked as a coordinator against welfare crime in the health and care sector in Region Stockholm.

Graaf explained that she was met with scepticism when she wanted to investigate economic crime in health and care services.

“Many argued that we surely don’t need to investigate doctors because we trust doctors,” remembered Graaf.

### Real, not ritualistic controls

Today, she can tell a different story. Because her investigations show that many, including several doctors, were carrying out comprehensive welfare crime in the health and care sector. Some of the things that were revealed included cheating in private care services, in pharmacies and among botox doctors.



When the scandals were revealed, Linnéa Graaf told Swedish media: “The financial statements tell you so much about health personnel’s activities that it becomes like a mirror. If you lack finances, you probably also lack quality and patient safety.”

She told the audience in Folkets Hus in Oslo:

“There is loads of money in health, and where there is money there are criminals. But we are not only talking about money here, we are talking about economic crime that involves life and death. This is about human beings, after all,” said Graaf.

### Privatisation, a risk factor?

Lars Korsell is a criminologist at the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. He believes that Sweden has potential for improvement when it comes to preventative measures.

“We have to do more in this area. For instance, it is about the business community and trade union movement playing a larger role in the preventative work.”

Korsell was also wondering about the question that many in the hall were focused on: Does the privatisation of health and care services make them more vulnerable to economic crime?

"It might be that it is better for the state to run these kinds of services," said Korsell in a later debate.



*Lars Korsell believes it is important to look at whether privatization of welfare services leads to more economic crime.*

Linn Herning is the leader of For Velferdsstaten (For the welfare state) in Norway, an alliance that works against the increased privatisation of public services. She believes that experiences from Sweden show that the risk of financial crime increases alongside privatisation.

"There is no reason to believe that we are shielded from this in Norway. Experiences from Sweden show that no sectors are protected," she said.

### **Hidden ownership, a threat?**

Hidden ownership was the topic for the concluding discussion. In Norway, the Police Security Service (PST), the Norwegian Intelligence Service (E-tjenesten), and the National Security Authority (NSM) have warned that hidden ownership poses a national security threat.



*Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre of Norway characterized economic crime as poison.*

Over ten years ago, the Norwegian parliament decided that there should be more transparency regarding ownership. The conference asked why this had not been achieved.

Several speakers called for more transparency.

Henning Lauridsen, CEO of Realestate Norway, shared the following paradox: In Norway, there are rules for registering the purchase of a moped, but if you buy a property worth 100 million kroner, the state does not require it to be registered anywhere.

"Norway has rules for a 'nice' society where not many do what they're not supposed to," Lauridsen said.

# Collective bargaining – where exactly does the EU stand?

Will there be any real change when the EU now aims to promote collective bargaining at all levels – or is it just pretty words? This was one of the questions discussed at a Nordic conference on current EU issues at the end of 2024.

## NEWS

30.01.2025

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

Will there be any real change when the EU now aims to promote collective bargaining at all levels – or is it just pretty words? This was one of the questions discussed at a Nordic conference on current EU issues at the end of 2024.

The conference was organised by the Nordic newsletter *EU & arbetsrätt* in collaboration with the Swedish Ministry of Employment.

Under the heading “The status of collective agreements in EU Law – theory, practice, and rhetoric”, Professor Niklas Bruun from Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki described the gap between theory and practice.

First, the theory: According to the treaty that dictates what the EU can and cannot do, unanimous decisions from member states are required for the EU to adopt regulations on collective bargaining.

And the EU cannot legislate at all on “pay, the right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs.” The EU must also respect the autonomy of the social partners and take into account the differences between member states’ systems.

Thus, in theory, regulations on collective bargaining and collective agreements are essentially the member states’ own business.

However, in practice, the social partners have gradually seen their freedom of contract curtailed. This has mainly occurred in cases where the EU Court of Justice has concluded that collective agreements and industrial actions conflicted with EU treaty provisions on the free movement of services, competition, and the freedom to conduct business.

In such cases, these treaty provisions have been considered superior. Yet there are also examples of the Court rejecting

collective agreements that have implemented pure labour law directives.

All this leads to particularly large consequences for the Nordic countries, where the social partners enjoy an unusually large leeway compared to the rest of Europe. So, when the EU adopted a directive on minimum wages in 2022, it was the final straw for Danes and Swedes.

The Union had gone too far by legislating on “pay,” which it is not supposed to do. That is why Denmark and Sweden are currently trying to get the EU Court of Justice to annul the directive.

However, Bruun pointed out an aspect of the minimum wage directive that has not received as much attention, an issue which he described as a paradigm shift. The directive imposes a number of obligations on member states aimed at increasing collective agreement coverage and facilitating collective bargaining on pay both at the sectoral and national levels.

Does this represent any real change in the EU’s stance on collective bargaining, or is it mostly rhetoric, he wondered.

Mette Søsted Hemme from Aarhus University pointed out that the directive contains some assurances: It will not affect “the full respect” for the autonomy of the social partners and will be applied “in full compliance” with the right to collective bargaining.

So at first glance, it seems that it will have limited implications in Denmark. The fact that Denmark has brought the case before the EU Court to have the directive annulled is primarily a matter of principle, linked to negative experiences of how the EU Court typically interprets EU law.



For example, it has not yet accepted the idea that a collective agreement is in itself fair as a compromise between conflicting interests.

Mette Søsted Hemme emphasised that the language in the directive is vague, allowing the EU Court room for interpretation, and provided several examples of possible indirect consequences this might have in Sweden and Denmark.

Professor Łukasz Pisarczyk from Silesian University in Katowice provided an entirely opposite perspective. He spoke about the situation in Central and Eastern European countries.

There, it is not about preventing the negative consequences of the minimum wage directive. There it could – perhaps – contribute to restoring the systems for wage bargaining at the sectoral level that collapsed under neoliberal ideology during the transition from communism.

Another theme at the conference was how Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are complying with the EU Court's ruling on working hours. Two cases were discussed in particular.

In the first case, the EU Court ruled that employers must have an objective and reliable system for recording the daily working hours of each employee. Otherwise, it is impossible to verify that the employee is not working too much.

With today's flexible work arrangements, creating such a system is no easy task. Still, you might think that the countries would have had time to adapt to the ruling, which came five years ago.

However, in Sweden, there is still no general requirement for employers to record employees' working hours, despite the Swedish Work Environment Authority recently issuing new regulations, noted Associate Professor Erik Sjödin from Stockholm University. This means that Sweden is the only Nordic country without such rules.

In Denmark, as of 1 July 2024, employers are required by law to register the daily working hours of each employee, said Mette Søsted Hemme. There are some exceptions, but they are very limited.

Finland already had such requirements, explained Associate Professor Jari Murto from the University of Helsinki. Norway also did not consider it necessary to adopt any new regulations beyond what already existed in the work environment law, said Associate Professor Melanie Regine Hack from the University of Bergen.

The second case discussed came as recently as July 2024. The case involved part-time employees who only received their regular hourly wage when working overtime. They were entitled to overtime pay only if they worked more than the full-time hours at the workplace.

The EU Court, however, ruled that this constituted discrimination, stating that they were entitled to the higher compensation when working more hours than they were contracted for.

This ruling is expected to have significant consequences in the Nordic countries, the conference heard. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the same practice applies: Part-time employees only receive their regular hourly rate when working overtime. Most collective agreements will need to be amended.

But collective bargaining involves give and take from both parties. You could question whether workers should "pay" in collective negotiations for something they are entitled to under according to the EU Court, noted Erik Sjödin.



## Early intervention helps Icelandic youth back on their feet

In southern Iceland, a youth centre is working closely with other municipal agencies to ensure young people do not slip through the cracks on their journey to further education or the labour market.

THEME

30.01.2025

TEXT AND PHOTO: HALLGRÍMUR INDRÍÐASON

Árborg municipality in southern Iceland has put a lot of emphasis on supporting young people who are at risk of social isolation and helping them become active in society, either through education or work.

The youth centre Zelsíuz has been focusing on this with children aged 10-16 in cooperation with the municipality, and now a special project is helping young people aged 16 and up who have problems finding their feet socially and too often end up claiming benefits.

### **Activating isolated youths**

The Zelsíuz youth centre special support program has been running since 2016.

“The aim was to bring in socially isolated children and youths in order to activate them,” says Guðmunda Bergsdóttir, head of Zelsíuz.

“At first, we wanted them to participate in activities at our centre. We started cooperating with the municipal welfare service and got funding to employ a person who could focus on the project. We received the youths at the centre and had one-on-one talks with each of them once a week.

“The main aim here was to do something that the young people were interested in, for example playing a videogame, and have talks with them while doing that. And then we gradually worked with them to get them more active in our work.”

Bergsdóttir says that this project has developed over the years. In addition to the employee who focuses on the projects, other staff at the youth centre have been doing the one-on-one interviews.

“We want the employee and the youths to have similar interests to make it easier to connect with them. We have five staff members doing those interviews.”

### **From inactivity to playing football**

The municipality welfare service has systematically pointed youths they think can benefit from it to the centre.



*(Left to right): Leader of the Zelsíuz youth centre Guðmundi Bergsdóttir, Zelsíuz employee Thelma Sif Kristjánsdóttir Elja project leader Ellý Tómasdóttir.*

“They get cases where the person is isolated and inactive. The youth centre can help them find something that works for them. We’ve even sometimes gone home to kids who don’t want to leave their room. That way, when they come to the youth centre, they already know someone there.”

Bergsdóttir says they have seen great progress in their work.

“We had, for example, a girl in year 9 who had almost stopped going to school and was fairly inactive socially. She started meeting with one of our staff and then got to know the facilities at the centre.

“She then started showing up at the centre in the evening. This changed a lot for her – she started practising football and going regularly to school again. She was with us for a year and a half and the change during that time was huge.

“Then she went to upper secondary school and today she is doing really well. It’s great to have had the opportunity to help her and other individuals and see such progress.”

### **The first step is the hardest**

For many of the youths, the most difficult thing is taking the first step – in this case coming to the centre.

“When you don’t know the environment, it is difficult to take that first step and they often need some help with that. It

can help them to previously have had a one-on-one talk with someone who works at the centre.

“When we eventually get them to come, we help them to try new things, find something they like and make friends. And if that is too overwhelming for them, we also have the option of smaller group gatherings.”

### **New project provides continued support**

But the need for support does not necessarily end when you are out of secondary school. In Árborg, it all started with an educational trip to Finland for municipal social services staff.

“There we got an introduction of a so-called Outreach Youth Work which we were very impressed with,” says Ellý Tómasdóttir, project manager at Elja, a support organisation helping young people who face challenges in accessing education and employment.

“So we wanted to do something similar that would be a continuation of the support at Zelsíuz. Some of the youths still need support when they’re too old to go there. At social services, we have seen that there is a gap in the support for ages 16-18.

“If they’re not strong socially and don’t go to upper secondary school, they’re out of sight until they’re 18 and by then they might even need financial support. In these cases, we would have wanted to act earlier.

“So we wanted to build a service that would also serve as a bridge between systems and ensure that these individuals don’t get lost in between. We started to build that system and got financial support from the Ministry of Education and Children.

“When that support ends in 2027, we will have a project that other municipalities can use and we will have a manual for it.”

### **Building up good routines**

This service is intended for youths aged 16-29 who are neither in school nor working.

Thelma Sif Kristjánsdóttir, who works full-time on this project as an activation consultant, says that the service is gradually starting up.

“Right now we are servicing 22 individuals. Half of them receive social benefits from the municipality. We are working on the more challenging cases within the municipality where the individuals need more support.

“We meet them at least once a week, even more often if they want to. We try to make the individuals who have been inactive for a long time more active in their daily lives and build up a good routine – for example when it comes to sleeping, eating and exercising.



“Some of them want to study or work and we support them on that journey. We already have some connections with companies and institutions in the area.”

### **Small things can be a big challenge**

Tómasdóttir adds that this can apply to things that most people consider simple, like taking a walk in a shop or driving between car sales. These things can be a big challenge for those who have been inactive for a long time.

“That is something the advisors can do with them for support. This can save their day and sometimes it is all it takes. They can do anything with them – go to the gym, for a walk, anything they want. This is a service you can’t get in many places.”

Tómasdóttir says that part of the preparations was to start cooperating with other social, educational and health institutions, both local and national.

“That is very important, especially cooperating with work rehabilitation institutions. So this has started really well. But one of the challenges we face is the lack of part-time jobs.

“Those who have not been active for a long time but want to work might not be ready for a full-time or even a half-time job and need support and even discipline to do it. It can also help them to get socially active.”

### **Building bridges**

One of Tómasdóttir's goals with this project is to ensure greater continuity in youth support.

“The system here, and probably elsewhere, is that someone supports you until you’re 18 and the door closes and the next one is supposed to take over. We want to break that up and build bridges between these systems. So we adjust to the individual, not vice versa.”

Kristjánsdóttir is happy with the way things have gone so far. The individuals are different so it varies how ready they are to make the necessary changes.

“I think we have done well in the short time that we’ve had available. We have for example supported an individual to go back to upper secondary school after dropping out. We have individuals who haven’t been active for a long time participating in social activities.

“And the main thing is that we have the time and space to take good care of each individual.”

### **Monitoring continues post-project**

Tómasdóttir adds that when a person is discharged from the project – which still has not happened because the project is new – the staff still supervises progress to prevent a backlash.

For the longer term, Tómasdóttir hopes that getting more people active will lower the number of youths on benefits.

“It is important to create a positive attitude around receiving help. When we are 16-18, we are usually not sure where we want to go, so then it is good to talk to a professional about it.”

Kristjánsdóttir adds:

“We also want to take early action to prevent other problems that could emerge if no action is taken. That would be a huge benefit. The longer someone is inactive the harder it is to get going.”

Tómasdóttir explains that the value of a service like this cannot easily be measured in financial terms or reflected in the accounts—at least not in the short term.

“Our dream is to help those who need it as soon as they graduate from secondary school. And we can catch them if they drop out in upper secondary school and don’t have the support at home to get back on their feet.”

# Could we ask for your help? Take part in our survey!

We would like to improve the websites for Arbeidsliv i Norden and the Nordic Labour Journal and would very much appreciate if you took time to answer some questions.

NEWS

30.01.2025

The survey will take less than five minutes to complete.

You can find the survey [here](#).