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Theme: What happened after #metoo?



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The multi-faceted fight against sexual harassment

This October it is three years since the American actor Alyssa Milano sent out the first tweet with the hashtag #metoo. That set off a reaction that spread from Twitter to the streets and into the corridors of power. Suddenly sexualised violence and harassment was being discussed in a new way. But what has really changed in these three years?

EDITORIAL

18.10.2019

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Iceland and the Nordic Council of Ministers hosted a conference in Reykjavik in order to find answers to that question. It resulted in three days packed with exciting and riveting speeches between 17 and 19 September. The Nordic Ministers for Equality also met, and decided even more research is needed.

The issues raised by #metoo are as many-faceted as the facade of Harpa, Iceland's opera house where the conference was held. Should men accused of harassing and in certain cases raping women still be afforded anonymity? What about the men who want to apologise? Should there be someplace for them to do that?

Where do you begin when you want to limit the scale of this "world-wide pandemic of gender-based violence", as Angela Davis put it? Do you have to change the suppressing structures from the bottom up?

In this edition of the Nordic Labour Journal leaders for both the Nordic and Baltic trade union confederations encourage their respective governments to quickly ratify the new ILO convention on violence and harassment in the world of work, which was adopted by the ILO's international labour conference in June this year.

There is now a race between the Nordic countries to be the first to do so. But what if you aim even higher? The Nordics could ratify the convention together. "That really would be leading by example," Marie Clarke Walker from the Canadian Labour Congress told me during one of the breaks. She was herself deputy chair for the employees' delegation at the ILO conference when the convention was adopted. Sweden's Minister for Employment Eva Nordmark can become one of the drivers for such an initiative. Read her portrait in this issue.

But men also need to engage in the fight against the toxic masculinity which is hurting both society as a whole and the men themselves. In Finland you find Miehet, an association inspired by feminism.

"In today's Finland, a man must be strong and a norm-breaker in order to be a good father," says Tom Kettunen, who sits on the association's board.

Iceland is already doing some of the work which is being called on – changing the structures in society. The Icelandic government wants to introduce new ways of measuring happiness. It is not enough to just look at GDP growth as the most important goal.

But what is happiness really? The Icelandic happiness researcher Dóra Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir is studying the notion, and has arrived at a thought-provoking result: the lack of money might bring unhappiness, but having a lot of money only represents 1 % of the happiness currently experienced by Icelanders.

Previous research shows people get stressed by rapid changes – positive or negative. Greenland is experiencing such change right now, where good fishing and long tourism seasons lead to a great need for labour.

"Greenland's economy is at risk of overheating, and we must make the right priorities in order to avoid an economic collapse," says Minister of Mineral Resources and Labour Erik Jensen, in Marie Preisler's report.



Angela Davis in Reykjavik: We must see the structural powers that support the violence

“If we don’t challenge the structures in society, we risk getting into a situation where we end up fighting for women’s rights to be as violent as men,” warned Angela Davis when she addressed the large #metoo conference in Reykjavik on 17-19 September.

THEME

18.10.2019

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: BIG

The conference aimed to sum up what has happened to the fight against sexualised violence and harassment since the American actor Alyssa Milano first tweeted on 15 October 2017 launching the hashtag MeToo. She was upset after female actors talked about how film producer Harvey Weinstein had exposed them to sexual harassment.

That is why she encouraged women who had experienced similar things to tweet “me too” in order to illustrate how widespread the violence is.

The simple message “me too” led to Milano’s message being retweeted 23,000 times before spreading to nearly all the

countries of the world where Twitter is a major social medium.

MeToo also had consequences in Iceland, which has topped the World Economic Forum’s list of over the most gender-equal countries in the world ten times, the so-called Gender Gap Index.

“Bridging the gender gaps in finance, education and politics does not necessarily lead to less violence,” pointed out Angela Davis, who was the conference’s keynote speaker. She called sexualised violence a global pandemic.

Davis got a standing ovation from the 800 participants. She first became known as a member of the Black Panthers in the 1970s, a group of African Americans who fought racism in the USA using militant methods. She was accused of taking part in an infamous kidnapping but was acquitted after 17 months in prison and became a prominent feminist and researcher.

In her presentation, Davis asked why it had taken so long before the spotlight was turned on sexualised violence.

“Women have been saying ‘me too’ for a very long time. We should have realised long ago that sexualised violence and harassment are structural problems, deeply entrenched in cultures, traditions and institutions.”

Angela Davis pointed out that safe houses for women have existed for 50 years, just like women’s rights demonstrations have existed for 50 years. She reminded the audience that the UN launched the first International Women’s Year in 1975, which was later turned into an entire decade. When the decade ended with a conference in Nairobi in 1985, she was there.

“That is now three decades ago. Perhaps it is time the UN launches a women’s century?” she asked.

Solidarity and struggle has led to changes, even though they have been slow in some places. Women in Iceland and the other Nordic countries quickly realised they could achieve a more equal economy and more political influence. Iceland tops the World Economic Forum’s list of the most gender equal countries – while the USA is number 51.

Not everything is perfect in Iceland either. A comprehensive Icelandic survey on sexual violence and harassment in the labour market was presented a few days before the conference got underway. It had been commissioned by Iceland’s Minister of Social Affairs and Equality, Ásmundur Einar Daðason.

“We have for the first time looked at the labour force as a whole, and not only individual occupational groups. We found that 24.9 % of women and 6.8 % of men have experienced sexual harassment,” said Ásta Snorradóttir, who led the survey.

“When we limited the question to the latest six months, 1.6 % had experienced it. But 16.3 % said they had experienced unwanted sexual advances during that same period.”

The perpetrators included bosses, colleagues and customers. For women, they were nearly exclusively male. For the male victims, 44 % of perpetrators were female colleagues and 21 % were male colleagues.



Gary Baker

“Those figures sound quite low,” pointed out Gary Barker, one of the few men who addressed the conference. He launched the international campaign MenCare and was named one of the world’s 20 most influential people in gender politics in 2017.

“Some American surveys show up to 60 % of women have experienced sexual harassment.”

In his presentation he also pointed out that men are victims of a culture of toxic masculinity, which harms both society and the men themselves.

“Boys are not born with that type of masculinity. When they are 8 to 15 years old they say people should be good and nice to each other. It is only after 15 they start saying ‘showing emotions makes you look weak’.”

Gary Barker was also one of the initiators of IMAGES, which is so far the largest survey of men’s attitudes to violence, parenthood and gender equality.

“63 % of men say they have experienced violence from other men,” he said.

Angela Davis pointed out that the reaction in the USA to #metoo had been a call for more and longer prison sentences. But there is a link between violence and institutionalised violence, she believed. When institutional violence, like imprisonment, increases, it also affects women.

“One third of all the world’s incarcerated women are in an American prison,” she pointed out.

While Angela Davis believes social structures must change, another women’s movement veteran – the author and researcher Cynthia Enloe – was more interested in #metoo on a micro level.



Cynthia Enloe

“Metoo has made us aware of what is going on in different workplaces, and allowed us to link what we see with the greater picture of how the patriarchy works. What happens in the lifts? Who avoids getting into the lifts with certain people? What happens at work when the working day is done and only a few staff remain?”

“What we have learned from feminism is that we cannot see the bigger picture if we do not seriously try to understand the small pictures. The small, ordinary, daily and frighteningly small pictures.

“It is rarely popular to apply the strategies available to women to avoid sexual harassment at work – like a secretary placing her desk so that she sits with her back to the wall to stop men coming up behind her and leaning over her with their memos.”

Angela Davis warned against celebrating the small progressive steps that are being taken, like the fact that four of America’s largest five defense companies are now led by women.

“If we forget about the ideological fight, the small positive advances for women can in themselves strengthen structures that maintain male superiority. People from marginalised groups end up being recruited only so that the suppressive structures can function better.

“I believe one of the reasons we haven’t come further in the fight against sexualised violence is that we have a tendency of individualising the problem. We treat it as if the individual perpetrators are the beginning and end of the problem. We rarely consider which structural and institutional powers are actually propping up the violence.

“The fight against racism can teach us that if we only focus on the individual, we end up always repeating the same solutions to the problems.”

Iceland’s Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir, who also holds the gender equality portfolio, invited Angela Davis to be the key speaker at the Metoo conference in Reykjavik

According to Angela Davis there is misconception that you can just remove and imprison the individuals who are behind the violence. If we do nothing about the structures, new perpetrators will keep coming. For the same reason, it does not help to simply swap men with women in the hierarchies.

“If we do not challenge the content of the hierarchies, we will end up in a situation where you could say that women are fighting for the right to be as violent as men.”

Despite all the challenges and the fact that things move so frustratingly slowly, Angela Davis nevertheless concluded that she did not believe sexualised violence would carry on in all eternity.

“I believe we can all contribute to putting an end to gender-related violence. How was it possible to eliminate smoking in public spaces, for instance? When we first got engaged in that fight, many of us were smokers. I always shudder when I see myself in old TV documentaries, because I was a chain smoker!”



Eva Nordmark's task: to liberalise Sweden's employment act and reform the employment service

When former TCO President Eva Nordmark accepted to replace Ylva Johansson as Sweden's Minister for Employment, she also accepted to follow up on proposals she had been critical of in the past, like the liberalisation of the employment act.

PORTRAIT

18.10.2019

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO KRISTIAN POHL/SWEDISH GOVERNMENT OFFICES

The Social Democrats and the Greens formed a coalition government in January this year, with the support of the Center Party and the Liberals. That support did not come for free. The Social Democrats had to compromise on some of the issues closest to their hearts, including changes to seniority rules in the Employment Protection Act (LAS).

Another demand was dramatic cuts to the Swedish Public Employment Service, and that much of its work should be given

over to private operators. Tens of thousands of employment service workers have already left their jobs, and the employment service is proposing the closure of 132 local offices.

The coalition's "January agreement" also includes a review of unemployment benefits. This means the former trade union president must now deal with proposals which go contrary to issues that are usually considered to be at the core of Social Democrat beliefs.

“I have helped make tough decisions before, and will take tough decisions in the future,” Eva Nordmark said about the situation in an interview with Dagens Nyheter on 12 October.

An active career in politics and trade unionism

Eva Nordmark has been involved in politics and trade unions for nearly all of her working life. Her interest in society started early. In a 2011 Nordic Labour Journal interview, the then newly elected TCO President talked about how she visited the municipal council in her home town as a teenager, to see how they worked.

Early on, she also joined the Swedish Social Democratic Youth League SSU in Norrbotten and became their chair. At 20, she became a local councillor and was elected an MP at 24. After graduating, Eva Nordmark started working for her local branch of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, while becoming increasingly active at the then SKTF trade union, now called Vision. She made a name for herself as a rejuvenator of the union, partly by aiming for 30 % of all elected representatives to be younger than 35.

In 2011 Eva Nordmark was elected President of the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees, TCO, which comprises 13 trade unions with 1.4 million members.

Eva Nordmark has been touted as a possible government minister before, but has so far said no. In an interview on Swedish Radio she talks about how happy she now is to take on the challenge and to be given the opportunity to work with the labour market issues that are very close to her heart. Through its labour market policies, Sweden can strengthen its competitiveness and improve workforce adaptability.

Promises to do her very best

She is well aware that she has been critical to the January agreement's proposed changes to employment protection. The current LAS legislation allows employers to make exemptions to the “last in, first out” rule if they have fewer than ten employees. The January agreement calls for an easing of this rule, allowing larger employers to make exemptions too. The trade union movement has been protesting, and one representative of that protest has been Eva Nordmark in her role as TCO President.

“It is no secret that I have been critical, but so have many Social Democrats. With my background I want to protect the social partners' free, independent and strong role in the labour market. The January agreement contains compromises, but also good bits like improved rights for skills development and better protection against arbitrary dismissal,” she told Swedish Radio.

A new proposal will be presented next spring. Eva Nordmark does not want to prejudge that or the political parties' work, but will discuss the issue further with the Centre Party and the Liberals based on the proposals that emerge. According to the agreement, the social partners can come to an agree-

ment in anticipation of a change in the law, if this is in line with the January agreement.

Agreements must be upheld, including the January agreement, says the new Minister for Labour. She is well aware that she will be facing some difficult questions in the coming year, but is not nervous.

“I think it will be exciting and I promise to do my very best,” says Eva Nordmark.



The male role in Finland is changing

One ended up in prison for refusing to do his military service. Another did his military service and ended up working for the armed forces. Today both are on the board of the new feminist association for men, saying they have a lot to learn from the Finnish women's movement.

THEME

18.10.2019

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO: KIRA HAGSTRÖM

“I refused to do military service as a protest against war and what the army stood for. Friends had told me that the talk in the army was to turn boys into men, just like you would hear in other places too. A one-track masculinity mixed with sexism and problematic attitudes to minorities, which in the worst-case scenario could turn violent.”

Tom Kettunen went to prison in 1999. He spent six and a half months inside. When he came out, it was a new millennium. 18 years later, in November 2018, Miehät (Men in English), a feminist association for men, held its founding meeting. Tom Kettunen provided the necessary preparatory work to get the association up and running, and today he is on the board.

Strong and norm-breaking

“The association is needed because patriarchal structures present disadvantages to men as well as to women. These structures cause bad behaviour which might be about power, but also other things. Men take less parental leave than they are entitled to, for instance, because of the norms in some workplaces. It is a small structural issue that has major consequences. In order to develop a proper relationship, it is crucial for fathers to get to know their children. In today's Finland, a man must be strong and a norm-breaker in order to be a good father,” says Tom Kettunen.



He is responsible for international relations at Miehet, and also for creating discussion groups of various sizes where Finnish men get the chance to talk to each other.

“People do not show all that much openness in Finland, so many men keep what they feel and think to themselves. Perhaps they don’t quite understand what they feel and think, because they do not talk about it. This can have disastrous consequences. We have for instance a lot of violence within relationships, this is a big problem,” says Tom Kettunen.

Juho Pylvänäinen is also on the Miehet board, as deputy chairman. Unlike Tom Kettunen, he did do his military service. Afterwards, he chose to stay on in the armed forces, and today he is a boatswain at the navy’s Pansio base.

The same basic values

“I had been thinking about social justice for a long time, that all people should be treated equally. It was only after I got to know some Finnish feminists that I understood how we shared the same basic values. It is all about how you want people to be met and treated.”

The association held its founding meeting at the Kvinnosaksförbundet Unionen (League of Finnish Feminists) Helsinki offices. The board members are both happy and thankful for that.

“We feel more than welcome in the field of feminism. When many work with gender equality issues, you get more power, and when several associations cooperate, it becomes easier

to coordinate measures. We also have so much to learn from Unionen, which was formed as early as in 1892,” says Juho Pylvänäinen.

“Since our organisation is organised on a voluntary basis, it is important to work on projects in cooperation with other organisations that work with gender equality and human rights,” adds Tom Kettunen.

Two army professionals

Juho Pylvänäinen has had nothing but positive reactions at work when Miehet has come up for discussion.

“We are two army professionals in the association, and I know there are others in the armed forces who share our views and support our work,” he says.

In the past year, Juho Pylvänäinen has taken a break from his navy job in order to study social sciences at the Åbo Akademi University and at the University of Turku.

“I study social sciences and gender studies among other things, to learn more about society and its structures,” he says. He is aiming for a Bachelor’s degree.

Miehet has got a lot of attention during its first year, and the association has also been invited to participate in different campaigns about discrimination, climate change, compulsory military service and rape-related legislation.

The members like the attention which the association has created, but they sometimes need to remind journalists and others that there are other people who know far more about gender equality than they do – including the Finnish women’s movement with its long history.

Male privileges

“It’s yet another privilege we have as men, how easy it is to get credibility when we set up an association working for gender equality that wants to break down problematic male norms. So we make sure to inform everyone about all the clever things that have already been done. By women,” says Tom Kettunen.

Although there is more space today for men to be men in more areas than before, there is still much left to do before reaching full gender equality, believes Tom Kettunen. One example is the Finnish conscription system:

“Finland’s constitution says that everyone is equal before the law. Despite this, only Finnish men face compulsory military service. You could see this as a form of legalised discrimination.”

New commission

He is not alone in his thinking. The Finnish defence minister has asked for the creation of a commission to look at the possibility of introducing conscription for women.

Swedish Yle is shining a critical light on Finnish conscription in relation to the Training 2020 reforms carried out by the defence forces.

Yle's investigation explores different perspectives with the help of the public, to gather stories about "bullying, discriminatory or abusive behaviour which you were exposed to during your military service" writes Swedish Yle on its webpages.

1,000 women

Some 20,000 people do their military service each year in Finland, including 1,000 women who are volunteering to do it. In the units where women have served, they have experienced more sexual harassment and bullying than men, says Esa Janatuinen, a civilian sociologist at Defence Command Finland, who works with gender equality and gender discrimination.

"When leaders for each unit are ordered to focus on gender equality, we see fewer problems. When it comes to sexual harassment, it is most often the spoken kind we see," he says.

"We work hard to stop bullying and we are gradually getting better. Our annual surveys show that more staff and conscripts are happy at work and with their military service."

Esa Janatuinen believes there is a need for a changed male role, and welcomes the fact that Finland now has its own feminist association for men.

"A good initiative. We are promoting gender equality in the armed forces, so it is good to find support for that work," says Esa Janatuinen.

The Finnish Defence Forces website states: "Equality and gender equality have been top priorities in the Finnish Defence Forces since 2006." They also have a national equality and gender equality plan.



Money can't buy you happiness in Iceland

Families need decent wages in order to afford all the essentials. But high wages do not necessarily make families happy. There is no direct correlation between money and happiness, unless the family has real economic problems. The key to happiness is mainly spending time with family and friends.

NEWS

18.10.2019

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: YADID LEVY/NORDEN.ORG

Icelanders are considered to be the world's happiest people, along with their Nordic neighbours. Iceland has been ranked among the five happiest countries in the world for many years now. Researcher Dóra Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir at Iceland's Directorate of Health says happiness is what is left when you have experienced both joy and sorrow.

"Happiness is about more than laughing and having a good time. It is necessary for us to experience difficult emotions, sorrow and sadness. We have to go through tough times in order to experience happiness. We cannot become happy by shutting out other feelings," explains Dóra.



Research into happiness started way back in the 1960s. To begin with, American researchers presented the hypothesis

that the happiest people were those who had not experienced any setbacks. But that is not at all the case. Surveys showed that the happiest 10 % of people had all experienced real setbacks and had worked through their experiences in a constructive manner.

Important how setbacks are handled

Researcher Dóra Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir has spent the past 15 years finding out just how happy Icelanders in general consider themselves to be. She points out that the most important thing is how you handle setbacks and that you do it in a constructive manner. That way, individual people will find a higher and deeper meaning with life, and end up happier.

“Today’s generation is often criticised for being over-protective of their children. But we must learn the children how to handle difficult things in life. If the children fail to face setbacks in a constructive way, they are less likely to be happy later in life,” says Dóra.



The economy has always been rising and falling with the fisheries and shipping. In the background is Harpa, the opera house which was finished during the crisis.

During the economic crisis just over 10 years ago, Icelanders proved that money is not as important as many seem to think. 40 % of the adult population remained as happy as ever, 30 % were happier than before and 30 % were less happy than before. Young people, however, became happier because they got to spend more time with their parents and families after the finance crash.

“Those who enjoy meaningful relations have something that is stronger than whatever happens in society,” says Dóra.

The US Constitution says everyone has the right to the pursuit of happiness. There is nothing in the Icelandic constitution about the right to experience happiness. But if many people are unhappy, Dóra points out, you have to take a closer look at the unfair distribution of wealth in order to develop a system that leads to an increase in wellbeing. It is worrying if many consider themselves to be unhappy.

“At the Directorate we are interested in everybody’s wellbeing. We want to develop a society where everyone has it good. Despite occasional setbacks, you ought to be able to generally live a happy life,” she thinks.

Social contacts are important

Iceland is a small society where most family members live close to each other. Links between family and friends are usually strong. Dóra says it is easy for Icelanders to maintain good social contacts. She believes this is the main reason why Icelanders are so happy.

But loneliness is an increasing problem for public health, possibly also in Iceland. According to Dóra, loneliness is worse for our physical health than smoking. Loneliness is less of a problem in the Nordic region than in many other places in the world. The reason is the Nordic tradition of prioritising the family, not working too much and giving the family the opportunity to spend time together.

“That is the explanation for why young people became happier after the finance crisis here in Iceland. They got attention and more time together with their parents,” says Dóra.

In control of their own lives

Iceland is a peaceful nation with a high level of trust among the population. Icelandic children play freely in parks without parents being worried about kidnappings or other crime. Icelanders also feel they have many opportunities to develop and influence their own lives.



Most have access to education. The system supports all those who are interested in getting an education, so it is not the case that only certain families can get one. If someone chooses to change their lives in a major way, it is seen as positive and productive.

“Icelanders feel they have a good life in Iceland, and that they can be in control of their own lives,” says Dóra.

“Icelanders have every chance of being a happy people. They succeed in dealing with setbacks in a constructive way, and are close to the people they love and care for,” she continues.

Surveys show that income only represents 1 % of the reason for Icelanders' happiness. In Iceland it does not matter so much if you earn a lot – what matters is what you do with your money. Income levels naturally play an important role when it comes to leading a happy life, but it is real economic problems that have a direct negative impact on family happiness, according to happiness researcher Dóra Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir.



Sweden to strengthen preventative work against discrimination

Many employers are not aware that they must work on active measures to promote equal rights and opportunities for their employees. So says the Swedish government, which has appointed a commissioner tasked with coming up with proposals for how to make the monitoring of the discrimination act more effective.

THEME

18.10.2019

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, PHOTO TOMAS GUNNARSON

The discrimination act does not only prohibit discrimination. It also makes employers responsible for working on active measures in order to achieve equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. These rules have been fully implemented since 1 January 2017, which means employers are expected to work systematically to prevent such discrimination, just like they work to prevent ill health and accidents and to create a good working environment in line with the work environment act.

The Swedish Equality Ombudsman (DO) is responsible for making sure employers follow the letter of the law. If they fail to do so, the DO can force through measures with the threat of penalties.

It turns out employers are not familiar enough with the new rules, and that these have failed to lead to the expected new ways of working. A survey carried out by the DO showed less than half of employers were aware of the rules, and that just one in six believed they needed to work on active measures. Despite this, it is unusual for the DO to force through measures by using the threat of penalties.

In the wake of #metoo, many stories about sexual violence and harassment in the labour market and in schools also came to the fore, writes the government in its instructions to the commissioner. This illustrates the need for clearer sanctions for those who fail to follow the discrimination act's demands. An action plan for equal life income, passed by the government in that same year, also presupposes more efficient sanctions linked to the compliance of the rules on active measures, including pay surveys.

The government-appointed commissioner will therefore analyse whether the current rules on the monitoring of active measures are fit for purpose, and then propose any changes to the law deemed necessary.



How have the Nordic countries reacted to #metoo?

The Nordic countries have put the questions raised by the metoo-movement high on the agenda, not only for the ministers of gender equality, but for all ministers.

THEME

18.10.2019

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHLÖRN LINDAHL

“#Metoo was a Nordic wake-up call. Women and girls in all their diversity have broken the silence on the sexual harassment and violence that is taking place across all layers of society and in all parts of our community,” Paula Lehtomäki, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, told the #metoo conference in Reykjavik.

On an international level, the Nordic countries have supported the International Labour Organisation’s ground-breaking convention against sexual harassment and violence at work.

“Another important international legal instrument is the Council of Europe’s Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism adopted earlier this year,” said Paula Lehtomäki.

The Nordic countries have also strengthened their own legislation.

According to the Nordic Information on Gender, NIKK, these are some of the Nordic initiatives that have emerged in the wake of #metoo:

Denmark has amended its anti-discrimination act. The law now explicitly states that equal working conditions also means a ban on sexual harassment. The average level for victims of sexual harassment has been raised by one third.

Finland’s new government has stated that it is committed to act against harassment and threats. It has published a guidebook for workplaces on how to prevent and intervene in sex-

ual harassment, which has reached thousands of employers in the country. A special #metoo-report has been made, investigating the film industry.

Iceland has appointed an expert group on gender-based violence. A proposal now discussed is a ban on employing individuals convicted of sexual offences. A complete bill is anticipated in the autumn of 2020.

Norway has introduced a low threshold service for hearing cases of sexual harassment. The aim is to give individuals who have been victims of sexual harassments a cost-free alternative to court proceedings.

Sweden has tasked the Swedish National Agency for Education with reviewing changes in the curriculum to better support sex education. Awareness campaigns targeting young people have been launched and new sexual offences legislation states that voluntary consent must be given for sex.

These are only a few of the initiatives. A Nordic tour of events was organised in all eight countries. From Nuuk in Greenland to Helsinki in Finland, artists, writers, influencers and actors shared their experiences, bringing awareness and knowledge to our communities. But more knowledge is still needed.

“That is why we have decided to fund a Nordic Research Project on sexual harassment at work. The results will be crucial in the development of measures to eliminate all forms of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in our societies,” said Paula Lehtomäki.



Greenland needs new jobs and foreign labour

There is an urgent need to create new jobs in Greenland's mining and tourism industries. At the same time more foreign labour is needed, say the social partners.

NEWS

18.10.2019

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: NIKOLAJ BOCK/NORDEN.ORG

Cutters and trawlers in Northern Greenland are catching fish and prawns in such numbers that the Greenlandic economy is close to overheating. The fisheries fairytale has triggered a veritable construction boom in the capital Nuuk, where cranes and new builds shoot into the sky everywhere, while house prices do the same. It has become difficult to live in the capital unless you earn a lot of money. Meanwhile, Greenland's fish processing plants, construction sites and service companies struggle to find labour.



Construction workers in Nuuk, Greenland. Photo: Marie Preisler

The situation has caused serious concern both in Greenland's trade union movement and businesses, as well as in the of-

ofices of Erik Jensen, Greenland’s Minister of Mineral Resources and Labour.

“Greenland faces economic overheating, and we must prioritise wisely to prevent economic collapse. One of the things we must do is to find ways of importing more labour from non-European countries in order to solve the acute challenge of labour shortages in many sectors,” the minister says.

Many sectors are struggling to fill positions, including the construction, service and fisheries industries. Fish processing plants in Northern Greenland have started importing labour from as far away as China and the Philippines in order to clean, pack and freeze the large amounts of fish that are being landed.

“Many sectors are severely hit, so it is important that we think outside of the box in order to increase the import of foreign labour, especially from countries outside of Europe,” says Erik Jensen.

The fisheries sector lacks people

Greenlandic legislation allows for jobs to be filled by foreign labour if there is not enough qualified native workers available. Greenland’s health sector has so far routinely employed doctors and nurses from other Nordic countries for shorter or longer periods of time. But there are cheaper solutions, the minister says.

“Importing labour from Denmark and the rest of Europe will not solve the problem alone, and it is too expensive for us to for instance use Danish temporary workers on the scale we have been doing so far,” says Erik Jensen.



Jess G. Berthelsen, President of SIK. Photo Marie Preisler

The political recognition of the need to increase the import of labour from low-cost countries is being welcomed by Jess G. Berthelsen, who has been the President for Greenland’s largest trade union SIK for 29 years. Most of the members are unskilled workers, but the union also represents some skilled workers.

“Fish is by far Greenland’s most important export, and all of us [who don’t work in fishing] have jobs that are supported by the vast income generated by Greenland’s fisheries industry. That is why we cannot ignore the fisheries industry’s acute labour shortages. That problem must and shall be solved.”

He does not fear that Chinese labour, for instance, will take jobs from Greenlanders.

“The Chinese are human beings like everyone else and they are welcome in Greenland. We just have to secure the correct framework.”

A need for apprenticeships

To solve the labour shortages, effort must be made on several fronts, thinks Jess G. Berthelsen. Recruiting from abroad is only part of the solution. It is also necessary to make it more attractive for Greenlanders to work in fish processing plants. Fish processing workers are routinely sent home when there is no fish, making their income very unpredictable.

Jess G. Berthelsen also believes that Greenland will have to make some structural changes in order to stop rural depopulation, a problem which has existed for 40-50 years now. Greenland’s largest cities are growing, while the population in villages and smaller cities is falling. Some 60 % of Greenland’s population today live in the five largest cities Nuuk, Sisimiut, Ilulissat, Aasiaat and Qaqortoq. The SIK President is very worried about this trend.

“With no people in the northern cities there is no-one to make use of the fantastic fishing resources we now have access to in Northern Greenland. At the same time many skilled and unskilled workers cannot afford to live in Nuuk because of the housing bubble.”

He suggests turning 3-4 cities in Greenland into dynamos, where money will be invested to secure jobs and apprenticeships for young people who would like to take a vocational education. Many of Greenland’s cities used to have shipyards, but now only one is active. It is in Nuuk, which means young people from smaller cities have to go there to get an apprenticeship, and the city suffers from a severe lack of student accommodation.



This shipyard in Nuuk is the only one still operating in Greenland. Photo: Marie Preisler

“The fact that it is so hard for young people to get a vocational education is a huge obstacle for the kind of development Greenland needs. It forces many young people to stay at home instead of getting an education. We must and will solve this,” says Jess G. Berthelsen.

The trade union leader does see major employment opportunities if mining operations get going before the fisheries fairytale ends – and it will end, he predicts.

“Fishing has always been rising and falling in waves, and in a few years it will fall again. Before that happens we will have to have created new jobs, and one of my great dreams is to get the mining of raw materials up and running. Mining can create a lot of jobs, not only for Chinese mining companies but for Greenlanders too, if we manage to attract capital for the necessary investments and to provide the young generation with the necessary skills.”

Mining can create jobs

The Minister of Mineral Resources and Labour Erik Jensen also sees great opportunities in the mining and export of a range of sought-after raw materials which are plentiful in Greenland. This will benefit the Greenlandic economy and create major new job opportunities for Greenlanders in the future, he believes.



Erik Jensen, Minister of Mineral Resources and Labour, holds a rock containing one of the rare minerals that can be found in Greenland. Photo: Marie Preisler

“Mining has a lot of potential which we can exploit better than we have been doing since we took charge of all raw material explorations from Denmark in 2010. We have begun setting up the exploration framework, and the first mining jobs for Greenlanders have already been created. In the longer run there will be many more, if we do this the right way.”

Opening a mine is a high-risk investment which Greenland cannot afford to do alone. Foreign companies are needed, and some highly skilled jobs will have to be staffed by foreigners, the minister predicts. But he is convinced mining will also create many jobs for Greenlanders.

The Greenland Business Association, GE, the employers’ organisation for small and large private companies, also believes that raw material exploration can provide jobs and income for Greenland – as long as Greenland secures agreements that make foreign companies pay reasonable taxes and royalties to Greenland, says Lars Krogsgaard-Jensen, legal consultant at GE.

Better education for all

But it will take time before many people can find work in the mining industry. In the shorter term the most important thing for Greenlandic businesses is to solve the current major labour shortages, says Lars Krogsgaard-Jensen.

“Right now our members really need both skilled and unskilled labour, especially in the fisheries industry and in the cities of Nuuk and Ilulisaat, where the construction, cleaning, hotel and restaurant sectors all lack workers.

On top of that, the construction of three new airports in Greenland in the coming years will further exacerbate the labour shortages. The airports are being built to increase Greenland’s job opportunities in the long term, but in the shorter term it will only turn up the heat on Greenland’s economy and increase the labour shortage, while the actual construction will mainly be carried out by foreign labour, thinks Greenland’s Economic Council.

That is one of the reasons why GE wants easier access to foreign labour from for instance the Philippines and other countries in Asia, from where people have already been recruited. GE believes it is necessary to speed up the work permit process.

At the same time it is important to make sure more young Greenlanders get an education, so that as many jobs as possible can be filled with Greenlandic labour, points out Lars Krogsgaard-Jensen.

“Right now there is a general understanding for why our members hire Chinese workers to work in a fish processing plant in Northern Greenland where there is a labour shortage, but this can become controversial in a future economic downturn. Our businesses must be given a much better chance of hiring Greenlandic workers, and for that you need better education.”

He can well understand why some young Greenlanders are tempted to get jobs in the fisheries industry, because there is good money to be made in the short term. But future generations need an academic or vocational education to secure jobs, he says.

Start in primary school

One of the sectors young Greenlanders could aim for when studying is tourism, believe both GE, SIK and the Minister of Mineral Resources and Labour Erik Jensen. They all expect to see tourism grow, partly because climate change leads to a longer and warmer tourist season, and more tourists will want to visit the Greenland ice sheet before it melts.



It will take time, however, to create the educational lift needed if jobs in tourism and mining are to be filled by Greenlandic labour in future, believes Linn Rastad Bjørst, associate professor and Ph.D. in Arctic studies at the Aalborg University, and head of the Centre for Innovation and Research in Culture and Living in the Arctic.

"Young, unskilled Greenlanders drift towards the fisheries sector because that is Greenland's lifeline. They dream less about becoming nature guides or working in a mine, partly because you need language and technical skills for the kinds of jobs found in those sectors," says Linn Rastad Bjørst.

So there is some way to go before Greenlandic labour can fill the majority of the jobs in mining and tourism that are expected to be created, and the education needed should start as early as in primary school, believes Danmarks Nationalbank. In its 2018 analysis *The Greenland Economy* it wrote:

"The foundation for boosting the qualifications of the labour force must be laid in the schools. Greenland already spends many resources on its schools, so it is a question of ensuring a good return on the resources spent rather than increasing spending."

ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment - an issue of Decent Work?

In an op-ed the Council of Nordic Trade Unions and the leaders of the Baltic Trade Union Confederations urge the eight Nordic and Baltic countries to quickly ratify the latest ILO-convention, often called the Metoo-convention.

COMMENTS

07.10.2019

Every year on 7 October we celebrate the World Day of Decent Work. This year we also celebrate the creation of a new ILO Convention, one that has been long due.

After many years of struggle by the global unions, the ILO in June adopted a convention and a recommendation against violence and harassment in working life.

We now have international instruments that recognise the right of everyone to work free from violence and harassment! Moreover, violations against the Convention can constitute a human rights violation or abuse.

The definition of violence and harassment is broad and emphasises gender-based violence and harassment. Sexual harassment and bullying are included, among other things. It can be actions "face to face" or through digital media. The impact of domestic violence on the world of work is also included.

These instruments are valid in the world of work regardless of the business sector, in both the private and public sectors and in the formal and informal economy.

Workers and other people are covered, irrespective of the kind of employment contract or relationship, including people in training, platform workers in the gig economy and job applicants. The Convention also takes into account the involvement of third parties (e.g. clients, customers and patients), both in their capacity as perpetrators and victims.

These instruments are strong and practical and provide a clear framework for action and a sturdy way of responsibly dealing with violence and harassment. The instruments call for workplace risk assessments, training, attitude changes and awareness-raising measures. Obviously, these measures are best planned in cooperation between the employer and the trade union at the workplace level.

The Convention is a great historical achievement. The instruments are important but also require hard work to implement, even in the Nordic countries. It is about time to start planning together with national trade unions for ratification!

The Convention enters into force 12 months after two member states have ratified it. **We sincerely hope that the Baltic and Nordic governments will be among the first to ratify!**

Sonja Ýr Þorbergsdóttir, President, Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS) and the Federation of State and Municipal Employees (BSRB), Iceland

Magnus Gissler, General Secretary, Council of Nordic Trade Unions

Peep Peterson, President, The Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL), Estonia

Irena Liepina, Vice President, Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)

Inga Ruginienė, President, Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK)

Kristina Krupavičienė, President, Lithuanian Trade Union Solidarumas

Far more labour migrants to Poland than Poles to Norway

For the second year running, Poland has received more labour migrants than any other OECD country. Meanwhile, fewer Poles travel to other European countries to work. This could lead to challenges for low-pay sectors in Nordic countries.

NEWS

24.09.2019

TEXT: LARS BEVANGER

Among the newest EU member states, Poland still dominates when it comes to labour migration to Norway, Denmark and Iceland. But Poland itself tops the statistics for the number of labour immigrants in the OECD Migration Outlook 2019.

The report, published on 18 September, shows that Poland issued 1.1 million short-term permits to temporary and seasonal labour migrants from non-EU countries in 2017. In addition, 21 000 intra-EU postings were recorded in 2017, an increase of 16% compared to 2016.

248,000 Poles emigrated to other OECD countries in 2018. That is 5.7% fewer than in 2017. Most travel to Germany, followed by the UK and the Netherlands.

Only 28 «new» Poles to Norway

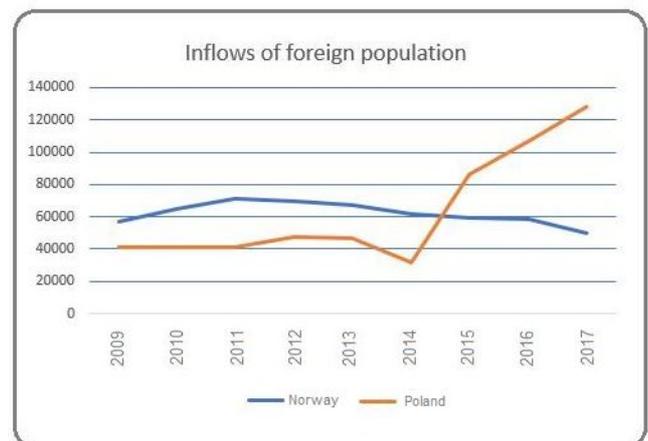
Poles still represent the largest group of immigrants to Norway (12%) and Denmark (7%), while immigrants from former USSR nations top statistics in Finland (15%) and Syrian immigrants are top of the list in Sweden (9%). According to Statistics Iceland, Polish workers make up 40% of immigrants there.

Figures from Statistics Norway show 98,200 Poles were living in Norway in 2017, yet only 3,600 of them were labour migrants. Polish workers have long been important to the Norwegian labour market, which for many years has struggled to recruit Norwegian workers for low-wage occupations – especially within heavy industry and the construction sector.

But many Polish workers have returned home to Poland in recent years, which led to record-low net immigration from Poland to Norway in 2018 of only 28 people, according to the Fafo research foundation.

Is the trend about to turn?

Since Poland joined the EU in 2004, more than 1.7 million Poles have travelled to other Western countries to find work, or as family members.



The graph compares the inflow of foreign population to Norway and Poland. For many years Norway accepted more foreigners than Poland, but shortly before 2015 Poland accepted more foreigners and by 2017 the number was three times as high as in Norway. Source: OECD

The construction sector and seasonal agriculture production in both Norway, Denmark and Iceland have benefited a lot from Polish labour for many years, but there are several signs the trend is about to turn.

The number of Polish migrants in other EU countries has started to fall, and Polish authorities have also taken action to stop new generations of young workers from emigrating. From 1 August this year, Polish workers under 26 can earn up to €20,000 a year at home without paying any income tax. Nearly two million people come within this category, and the

FAR MORE LABOUR MIGRANTS TO POLAND THAN POLES TO NORWAY

Polish government hopes this will make it less attractive for them to travel to other EU countries in order to look for work.