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**Editorial**

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Nov 11, 2020

# Theme: A sustainable integration

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# Towards happier times?

A Covid-19 vaccine with a 90% success rate was a longed-for piece of news as the Nordic region is facing the second wave of the pandemic. This crisis also impacts on the integration of newly-arrived immigrants.

EDITORIAL

11.11.2020

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Will this be a lost year for those who now have fewer opportunities to learn a language or do work training? New, digital ways of meeting cannot provide the social contacts that are so important to settle in a new country.

“How many Nordic citizens will include immigrants in their circle of friends when, like in Norway, authorities are limiting people’s contacts to five people?” wondered Vilde Hernes, a researcher at the Norwegian university OsloMet, during the Nordic Council of Ministers’ annual integration conference.

The conference heard how some trends are the same across the region – like how housing costs are rising in a time of record-high unemployment. Other trends differ – unemployment in Finland rose less among immigrants than for native workers for instance.

The OECD is also warning that migration to industrialised nations has halved and that immigrants are the ones hardest hit by the corona pandemic.

“Talking about integration it should not be us and them. They were on the frontline during the pandemic and they will be an important part of recovering,” said EU Commissioner Ylva Johansson in a comment to the OECD Migration Outlook 2020.

Migrants are needed now and will be needed for welfare societies to function. The MIPEX index, which looks at integration in different countries, says citizenship policies can send strong signals and have an impact on integration. Norway goes against the grain in this year’s index, dropping out of the top ten countries with the most generous policies.

There are, however, sunshine stories, like Rafet Adem Daban who fled to Norway from Turkey and now has an internship as a photographer.

We are facing a time where dramatic decisions must be made quickly, like when Denmark’s government decided to kill 17

million mink because of the risk of them spreading a mutated version of covid-19.

Tens of thousands of jobs will disappear as a result of the pandemic, not least in restaurants. In Denmark and Norway, where work Christmas parties represent an important tradition, this is a particular blow to the industry.

It is also during some of these parties that too much alcohol is consumed and some people do things they regret – or they feel hurt but do not dare tell anyone since the boss was the one behind the harassment.

The work Christmas party is the common denominator for two of the most talked-about Metoo stories in Denmark in recent months. A party leader and a deputy party leader have felt the consequences of a Denmark that no longer covers up sexual harassment.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven has so far had to manoeuvre through two potential government crisis – one about migration policies and one about rules covering the labour market, where his Social Democratic Party and LO faced off. The last word has not yet been had in either case.

Not everything was better before the pandemic. But as tourists have disappeared from Iceland, some have started to hark back to the time of “overtourism”.

“The overtourism debate is only a bubble which will pop and disappear,” says Þór Skúlason, managing director at the Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF).

The corona pandemic is also a time for new ideas.

“We control this development. Tourism is no natural catastrophe, it is something we can control ourselves,” points out Professor Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson at the University of Iceland.

## TOWARDS HAPPIER TIMES?

That is why it also gives hope that places like Vaasa in Finland set themselves new, ambitious goals: “We will become the happiest city in the world.”



## A lost year for integration?

Will 2020 and perhaps even 2021 be lost years for integration of immigrants who have recently arrived in the Nordics? Will the consequences of the corona pandemic turn everything on its head?

IN FOCUS

11.11.2020

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

These issues were on the agenda during the Nordic Council of Ministers' conference on integration in early November, called Sustainable integration in the Nordic countries in the face of Covid-19. The conference was held online and focused on how the newly-arrived have been impacted by the pandemic across three areas: work, accommodation and health.

Vilde Hernes, a researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research at Oslo Metropolitan University, opened up the plenary session by asking how many Norwegian citizens will include immigrants in their circle of friends when, like in Norway, authorities are limiting people's contacts to five people?

"Will they get jobs when society closes down? Will any employees take on foreign-born trainees?" she asked rhetorically.

### Reinforces differences

Research made before the pandemic hit shows how a national crisis often reinforces existing differences in a society. Several of the conference speakers therefore said this is not a totally new situation but rather the amplification of existing tendencies.

Immigrants, and in particular the newly-arrived:

- Work in sectors that are harder hit than most
- Face greater infection risks due to cramped living conditions

- Have faced harder challenges during the pandemic when it comes to learning a language, getting work training and establishing social contacts

Those who want to look for a silver lining could take note of the fact that the need for cleaning services have increased, pointed out Astrid Vin Løntoft at the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI). This has created more jobs in the cleaning sector.

“We have started a course in how to disinfect and clean a workplace since there is an increasing need for this. More assistant nurses and home carers are also needed,” she said.

But it is hard to find examples of how the situation for newly-arrived immigrants has improved. The consequences of this situation will be felt for a long time since in most Nordic countries you now need to prove you are self-sufficient and can speak the country’s language before getting permanent residence.

There are some differences in how the corona pandemic has influenced immigrants in the different Nordic countries, however.

### **Finland’s immigrants not so hard hit**

In Finland, for instance, unemployment among immigrants did not increase more than among the native labour force, said Anttio Kaihovaara, Senior Specialist in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland.

“On the contrary, the numbers from September shows unemployment increasing by 40% both among immigrants and the native labour force. In May, unemployment had risen by 95% for native workers, while it rose by 63% for immigrants.

“Before the pandemic hit Iceland, the employment rate among immigrants was a full 94%, and only 79% for native Icelanders, explained Ásdís Guðmundsdóttir, from the Directorate of Labour in Iceland. The starting point as the pandemic hit was therefore different compared to the rest of the Nordics, where employment among immigrants is now lower than among the native labour force.

### **Increase in housing costs**

There are changes across the Nordics too, including rising housing costs.

“At the beginning as the pandemic hit, it was not unusual to hear “we’re all in this together”. But it was not true. The poorest households are facing the worst consequences,” said Martin Grander, a researcher at the Malmö University who has studied Sweden’s housing market.

“The crisis is not so much about living quarters as it is about people’s homes,” he pointed out.

“The authorities’ answer to the crisis has first and foremost been to keep our distance. The home has become particularly

important during this crisis since we are also expected to work from home. Cramped conditions have become a bigger problem, and the segregation of the housing market will deepen even faster,” said Martin Grander.

Numbers for the Swedish housing market are clear:

So far this year	Property price
Northern Sweden	18.3% increase
Middle Sweden	12.8% increase
Southern Sweden	16.8% increase

“We have not seen a boom like this for a long time. People who have money invest in property and holiday homes.”

So far, not much research has been done, but Hanne Kavli from the Norwegian Fafo Foundation, presented a survey of how municipalities have adapted to the pandemic. The online survey was sent to “the person responsible for the introduction programme” in all Norwegian municipalities and districts housing at least five refugees – a total of 228 municipalities or city districts. The survey covered the period from lockdown in Norway on 12 March until 1 June.

“Few were prepared, but many stepped up. New digital solutions were brought in to try to maintain training and contact with the refugees,” said Hanne Kavli.

According to the survey, 89% of municipalities used digital tools in their language training of immigrants, while only 32% used digital tools in work training – the part of the integration effort which has been worst hit.

### **Language courses provide a social network**

Language courses for newly-arrived immigrants are also important for establishing social contacts. Herbert Brücker, who is head of the department for International Comparisons and European Integration at the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) in Nuremberg, Germany, pointed out that the ethnic networks are very important to get a job as an immigrant.

“Companies run by immigrants who share the same ethnicity have no language problems. Research also shows that immigrants’ wages are higher and their jobs more stable when they find them through that type of network.”

Morten Sodeman, Clinical Professor at the University of Southern Denmark, also provided examples of how the language can be an obstacle to accessing healthcare.

“We are better patients when we can speak our own language.

“When contact during the pandemic became more dependent on phone calls, those who prefer not to talk over the telephone in a different language were hit.

“Even people who normally speak fluent Danish could benefit from having an interpreter because they are not used to talking about feelings.”

Information about a pandemic must be issued in many languages across many channels, it must be adjusted to make sure the target audience understands it and it must be repeated, repeated, repeated, underlined Morten Sodeman.

### **Trust is key**

Rina Mariann Hansen, Vice Mayor of the Department of Employment, Integration and Social Services in Oslo also pointed out that trust is key – both between people and for authorities.

“The fact that we benefit from a high level of trust explains why there have been fewer protests against the anti-corona measures in the Nordics compared to other countries,” she believed.

“But trust must go both ways. Authorities must also be able to trust the citizens. When we started our dialogue meetings with Somalis, a group that was hit by corona early on, we gained valuable information. By daring to give Somali “ambassadors” the responsibility, we noticed that the information they provided reached far more people in that group of immigrants than the City of Oslo’s own information.”

Just what the consequences of the corona pandemic will be for integration in the Nordics will also depend on how we handle the second wave which we are facing right now. The conference participants were asked to provide some rays of hope.

“We are witnessing a digital revolution. But this cannot be our only tool, since social contact is so important,” pointed out Vilde Hernes.

“It is not necessary for all municipalities to reinvent the wheel. Digital tools put in place by larger municipalities can be spread to smaller municipalities,” said Hanne Kavli.

“We should not focus too much on getting immigrants into work as fast as possible. The most important thing is that it happens in the best and most efficient manner. Focus more on education,” said Antti Kaihovaara.





## Internship crucial for learning language and culture

Rafet Adem Daban (24) arrived in Norway a couple of years ago after fleeing Turkey. He believes an introduction programme has been of great help and is very happy to have had the chance to get an internship in a newspaper.

### NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN

Daban works for the Ytringen newspaper in the Norwegian city of Kolvereid. The two days he spends there each week have become crucial to him – as a photographer and colleague, and as a learner of the language and culture.

“My family and I lived in an integration centre for one and a half years. After waiting there for our residency permit, we were sent to Rørvik. As I see it, each municipality has different opportunities and offers. The municipality’s main focus is to teach Norwegian and help you find a job. The refugee service also always tries to help us refugees with things that are



unfamiliar to us,” he says. His experience of how the municipality welcomed him has been good.

“In my experience, they try to be helpful and efficient. This is important to all refugees,” says Daban.

He thinks Norwegians are more open and positive to refugees and immigrants than people in other European countries.

“There are of course people in all countries who don’t like immigrants, but I think there are fewer of them in Norway. This is very important for not feeling rejected,” he says.

### Challenging dialects

“The hardest thing in Norway is that nearly everyone speaks a dialect. For Norwegians, this means diversity, but it is a big problem for refugees. Dialects make communication far more difficult,” he says.

“Integration is harder when we learn bokmål [Norwegian as spoken in Oslo] in adult education but hear dialect everywhere else. Many will start a conversation speaking bokmål, but soon drift back into their dialect. This makes it hard to learn Norwegian because it is important to understand the entire sentence.”



*Editor Lillian Lyngstad and her colleagues in the Ytringen newspaper praise 24-year-old Rafet Adem Daban.*

*Rafat Daban and newspaper editor Lillian Lyngstad.*

### Internship at a newspaper

Daban is very happy with his internship at the Ytringen newspaper in Kolvereid, Norway’s smallest city. He works two days a week and takes pictures that are used in the print and online version of the paper. He shoots all kinds of settings where the paper sends its journalists.

“It is very useful and I learn about the Norwegian workplace. Everyone at the Ytringen newspaper is helpful. I do my best to solve all the tasks. I also love taking pictures, so I am happy,” he says proudly.

Pride and status are important things for many across different cultures. Finding a good place and getting experience counts for a lot.

“My family are content because I am content. Some of them want to know what it is that I do at the paper. My father was a journalist in Turkey. So my family is used to this kind of job, but my friends wonder what I am doing at the paper,” he says. The newspaper is his first experience of working in Norway.

“I get to know different people and I am building a network. That’s why this internship is important to me.”

### A plus for the newspaper

Synnøve Hanssen, Ytringen’s managing director, says they had been looking for someone interested in photography and contacted the employment training provider Ytre Namdal Vekst (YNV).

“A journalist in the field can concentrate better on writing if a photographer is also there. Our newspaper is a so-called inclusive employer, and Rafet is here to practice his language. He will start studying in Norway after a while and wants to learn more Norwegian. He is good at taking pictures, and we are very happy with the help that he gives us,” says Hanssen.

### Language leads to employment

YNV runs employment targeted measures on behalf of Norway’s Labour and Welfare Administration NAV, the municipality and other public authorities. Tor Einar Neerland, deputy manager at YNV, says some people find the demands they face in the labour market are challenging. Language training helps when looking for a job.

“People who have finished the integration programme come to us. We use the same methods to help people from non-western countries into employment as we do for native Norwegians. We map their skills and opportunities, and try to find them a relevant job.”

# Migration to the OECD nearly halved during Corona pandemic

As a result of the Corona pandemic, the number of migrants being granted visas and residence permits for an OECD country has fallen dramatically. During the first six months of 2020, the number fell by 46% compared to the same period last year, according to the OECD's International Migration Outlook 2020.

## NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The report was presented on 19 October by OECD's Secretary-General Angel Gurría, who had also invited Ylva Johansson, the EU Commissioner responsible for migration issues, to comment on the report. She started by saying that the migration issue had for a long time been overly dramatised.

"We should stay more sober and then we need facts and figures. Migration is normal, it is nothing to be afraid of. It will always be there. But we need to manage it. Out of the three million people who were granted a visa or permission to stay in the EU in 2019, only 10% were refugees."

### Three important areas

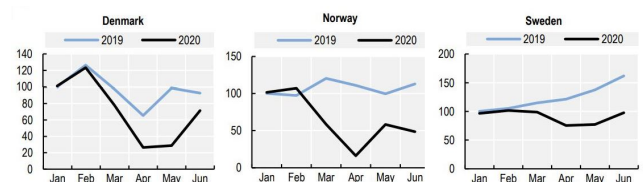
Angel Gurría said the report highlighted three particularly important areas when it comes to understanding how the pandemic has influenced migration.

1. The migrants have been on the front line during the pandemic. 1 in 4 medical doctors and 1 in 6 nurses are migrants. They have also worked in transport, warehouses, cleaning, food industry, security and IT.
2. Migrants are facing worse consequences than the ordinary population. Earlier improvements have in part been wiped out. The unemployment rate has risen more for the immigrants. Almost 60% of the initial surge in unemployment were immigrants.
3. Immigrants have been highly exposed to the pandemic, because of their employment, but also through housing and poverty. In countries like Denmark, Norway and Sweden immigrants have been twice as likely to test positive for covid-19.

Ylva Johansson commented:

"Talking about integration it should not be us and them. They were on the frontline during the pandemic and they will be an important part of recovering."

Sweden chose a different approach to most OECD member states by not closing its borders. The OECD has looked at the number of visas and resident permits awarded in Denmark, Norway and Sweden in the first six months of this year, and compared to the same period last year the figures look like this:



In these index graphs, January 2019 = 100. So the graphs show the changes in resident permits from that level during the first six months of the year.

The scales differ somewhat, but the fall was biggest in Denmark where the number of permits grew during January and February before falling sharply to a quarter of January 2020 levels. By June the level was at 70% of January 2020 levels.

Norway did not see similar growth in January and February, but fell to the same low level as Denmark. By June, the level was nevertheless still around half of it had been at the beginning of the year.

Sweden's graph is much more level, and the number of permits never fell below 75% of what it had been in January 2020.

### **Big fall during the second semester**

Within the OECD, the fall was smaller in European member states than in countries like the USA, Canada and Australia.

Overall, in OECD countries, issuances of new visa/permits plummeted by 46% in the first semester of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. The decline was even sharper when looking only at the second quarter of 2020: 72% lower than the same period in 2019.

On average, the drop was smaller in European OECD countries: a 35% decrease from the first semester 2019 to the same period in 2020 and a 59% decline comparing second quarter 2019 and 2020.

Even if migration flows are expected to bounce back as the economy reopens, there are strong signs that they will not reach previous levels for some time because of weaker labour demand, ongoing travel restrictions and alternatives to mobility linked, for example, to the widespread use of teleworking among high-skilled workers and remote learning by students.

Migration, on the other hand, will continue to have an important impact on origin countries. Remittances are expected to decline and employment opportunities to become scarcer.

### **Risk erasing progress**

“Today, there is a risk that some of the progress in migration and integration outcomes may actually be erased by the pandemic and its economic fallout. The pandemic has created many public policy challenges and public opinion and policy attention may be focused more on other key domestic issues.

“Public spending for integration, which should be considered as a long-term investment, may become scarcer in some countries at a time when it needs to be reinforced in the face of the looming overall employment crisis,” writes the OECD’s Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Stefano Scarpetta, in the report’s preface.



## Norway falling on integration index – or is it?

Over the past five years, Norway has lost its position among the top ten countries with the most inclusive and generous migration policy, according to MIPEX 2020. But what does that really mean?

### NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The report from MIPEX – an international tool measuring the integration policies of 52 countries – might read like a dramatic fall for Norway. The figure is for 2019, when Norway got an index number of 69, down from 72 five years earlier. The index goes up to 100.

MIPEX presents a report approximately every five years. Right now the results from the 2020 report are being rolled out. To increase the suspense and keep people's attention, this happens one country at a time. The countries that have been presented so far are the Czech Republic, Portugal, Norway, Estonia, India, Japan and China. So we still do not know which ten countries have better integration policies than Norway.

We will not know this until 9 December when the entire report will be launched. The only other Nordic country besides Norway that gets its own presentation for its index numbers is Iceland. That happens on 27 November.

So what does the index number say about Norway?

“The number does not show how well-integrated immigrants in Norway are,” underlines researcher Jan-Paul Brekke at the Institute for Social Affairs, ISF.

That is because there is no direct correlation between the nature of the migration policy and how well immigrants are integrated. Migration researches have pointed out that a country with very strict policies, where only migrants with high education levels are allowed to settle, will see better integra-

tion than a country with more open borders. MIPEX also does not measure asylum seekers, only labour immigrants and their families.

“But the numbers are interesting and allow us to discuss the changes that have been made to integration policies in recent years,” says Jan-Paul Brekke.

ISF researchers have provided MIPEX with information on Norway, and the institute recently hosted a webinar about the new results.

### The Norwegian middle way

“Norway has chosen a middle way compared to its Nordic neighbours. The country is behind the more inclusive Finland and Sweden, but somewhat ahead of its more restrictive neighbours Denmark and Iceland,” says Thomas Huddleston, director of MIPEX.

MIPEX is partly financed by the EU and studies integration policy across eight areas. One is whether migrants and equally treated in the labour market, others look at access to nationality, anti-discrimination measures and immigrants’ access to education and health.

Each area is given an index number. The average across the eight areas is used as the final “grade” for a country’s policy.

“Norway scores high on labour mobility, where they are joint fourth with Canada, Germany and the other Nordic countries,” says Thomas Huddleston.

“But family reunion policies are more problematic, since Norway has introduced decisive obstacles to the reunification of families,” he points out.

“Norway’s current position encourages citizens to treat immigrants as their neighbours, but not necessarily as their equals or fellow citizens,” the report on Norway from MIPEX 2020 says.

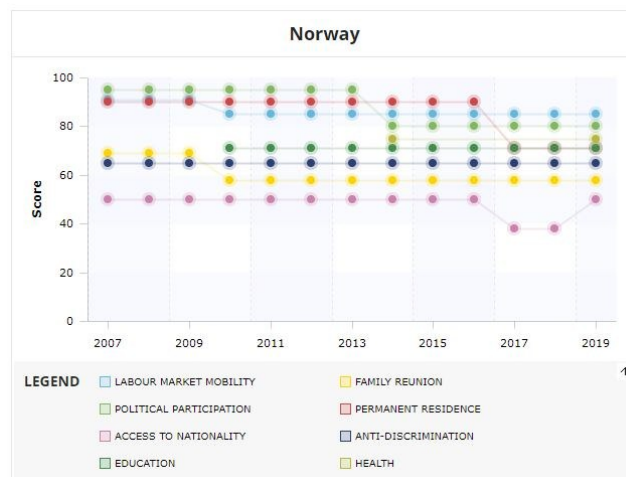
According to MIPEX’ website, the index is the most comprehensive, reliable and commonly used tool to compare what governments do to improve the integration of migrants in Europe and the rest of the world.

The link between policies and integration might be less than crystal clear. Yet the MIPEX researchers still argue that political decisions – like how long people must have lived in a country to become eligible for citizenship – send signals about how welcome migrants are.

Indexes are important tools to measure changes over time. The one we perhaps most often hear about is the index measuring inflation – the consumer price index, or CPI. It measures what different goods and services cost year on year. Sweden’s CPI has been measured for every year since 1830. It is also clear that what we consume changes over time – we

do not buy the same things now as we did in 1830. The “consumer basket” has gradually changed.

The MIPEX index has changed over time too, although it might not seem that way when you look at the time series 2007 to 2020 presented in the latest report:



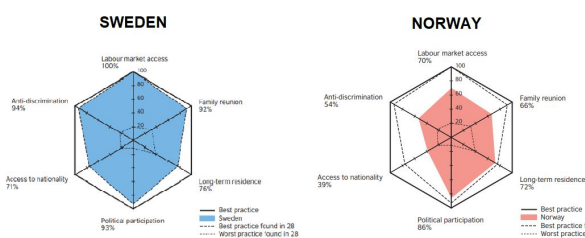
It might seem like the exact same question has been posed all these years. In reality, major changes have been made since the first report was published in 2004, under a different name and covering far fewer countries and areas. This is how it has developed:

	2004	2007	2011	2015	2020
Countries	15	28	36	38	52
Policy areas	5	6	7	8	8
Indicators	99	142	148	167	58

The aim of the first MIPEX report in 2004, (then called the European Civic Citizenship and Inclusion Index) was to create a tool that did not exist in the EU yet. The lack of reliable, comparable statistics “makes it impossible to tell whether Member States are achieving their own targets and whether they are living up to the commitments they have made. Whilst countries systematically collect data on every cow and chicken in the EU as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), migration is apparently too politically sensitive, and Member States too different, for systematic, comprehensible data to be collected” the first report noted.

At first, the idea behind the MIPEX reports was indeed for them to be an instrument to help the EU make decisions. Using spindle diagrams it was possible to compare different countries policies, like in this one looking at Sweden and Norway from the 2007 report:





The more an area is coloured in, the more generous the migration policy. The outlines show best practice vs worst practice within the EU. Norway was compared in the same way, even though the country is not a member state. At the time, Sweden had the best practice of all the EU countries.

The gathering of data gradually grew more challenging as the number of countries in the MIPEX reports grew from 15 to 52, new aspects like health and education were included and the number of questions increased from 99 to 167 by 2015.

In this year's report, the number of questions has been dropped to 58. MIPEX says it has been possible to do this without changing the countries' ranking or dropping any of the index's measurements. According to the MIPEX home page:

*In the fifth edition (MIPEX 2020), we created a core set of indicators that have been updated for the period 2014-2019. MIPEX now covers the period 2007-2019.*

*The research process started with the revision of MIPEX indicators. In order to ensure MIPEX sustainability over time, we decided to select a core set of indicators from the original list of 167 indicators from MIPEX 2015.*

*In other words, all MIPEX indicators are simply not necessary—if a country has Policy A, it's highly likely to have Policy B, C, D and E, which means that MIPEX only needs an Indicator of A and not 4 additional indicators on B, C, D and E.*

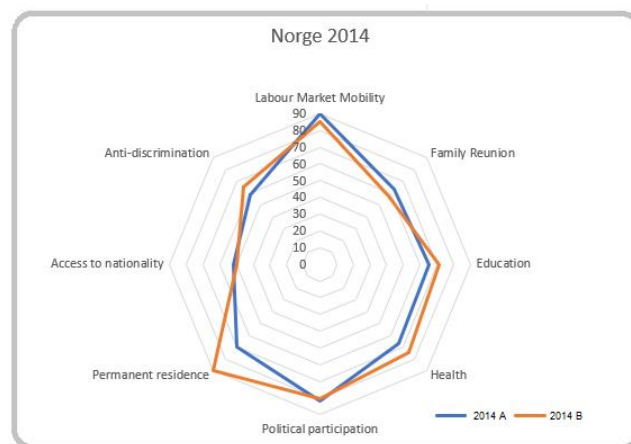
In the CPI comparison, it would have been like if the national statistics had cut the number of products and services measured by approximately two thirds. The argument could have been that those who bought nappies also bought baby food (if these goods were part of CPI), and that it was sufficient to include the price for just one of those products. The researchers behind MIPEX, however, claims that the similar reduction of policy questions from 167 to 58 doesn't affect the index very much:

*The scores produced by the core set of indicators are consistent with the scores from the MIPEX' full set of indicators and reproduces the same national rankings and trends.*

The reason the Index for Norway changes was that the country 2017 introduced a minimum earning threshold for res-

idency permits, as well as language and civic studies tests for those who wanted to become Norwegian citizens. On the positive side, from 2020 it has been possible for immigrants to have dual citizenship.

So the message could have been: Norway climbs in the MIPEX index from 68 to 69 if you look at the period from 2018 to 2019. The country no longer features in the top ten countries with the best integration policies, but on the other hand, it is now number 11 out of 52 countries rather than 38. It is also possible to compare the new index with the old one:



The spindle diagram above – created by the NLJ – shows Norway's spindle position from the 2015 report compared to what the 2020 report shows for the same year. The answers in both refer to the year 2014. As can be seen the fit is not perfect.



## Swedish employment law – a drama with many acts

The rules covering the labour market still create heated debate in Swedish politics. Time and again, this issue has challenged the government's survival. It also highlights disagreements between the governing Social Democrats and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation LO.

### NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: FREDRIK SANDBERG/TT

After much toing and froing, on 1 November Prime Minister Stefan Löfven announced that he wished to further review the country's labour market rules. This came after the PTK union, representing salaried employees in the private sector, and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise agreed on 16 October on how the rules should function in the Swedish labour market.

By then, LO had left the so-called LAS (Employment Protection Act) negotiations and refused to sign the final offer. The disagreement centred on proposed priority rules ("last in, first out") during labour shortages as well as new rules for making people redundant because of personal behaviour.

"We asked for negotiations because we wanted to improve job security in a modern labour market, but in the end it was, sadly, not enough," LO President Susanna Gideonsson told Swedish Radio.

It is the agreement between PTK and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise which will now be further reviewed and turned into legislation. Stefan Löfven has also invited LO to take part in this, even though the confederation could not reach an agreement with the other parties this autumn.

"When the government starts a review, we will not refuse one party to speak their mind, that is not the way to do things," Löfven told the Agenda news programme.

The review that Löfven is talking about is a ministry memorandum, i.e. a simpler review which can be dealt with at the Ministry of Employment, before being used in a proposition and later legislation. The agreement between PTK and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise should form the basis for this review. In a comment to the TT news agency, Minister for Employment Eva Nordmark underlined that it was important that the review was referred for consultation and that all consultation bodies should be listened to because it “represents the greatest changes since the introduction of LAS, the Employment Protection Act.”

“What the government has now said is that we will move forward and table a proposal in line with the parties’ agreement, rather than carry on with the so-called LAS inquiry,” Nordmark told TT.

### **Many disagreements**

The arguments over which rules should shape the Swedish labour market have split political parties as well as the social partners in their view of the matter. Legislation or agreement? How far can the Social Democrats go in their quest to honour the so-called January agreement, which includes the conditions the Centre Party and the Liberals set in order to lend their support to a Social Democrat government?

That agreement left it in no doubt that the labour market rules needed changing, especially in terms of excluding more employees from the “last in, first out” rule during redundancies. The Left Party has also been a strong voice in the debate, repeatedly threatening with a vote of no confidence in the government if they went too far in their interpretation of the rules covering employment security.

### **Proposed legislation waiting in the wings**

The social partners were given the opportunity to agree on the issues surrounding the rules regulating the labour market, with the knowledge that without an agreement the government would legislate. Negotiations between PTK, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and LO began back in 2017 but were intensified from mid-August this year.

Last September a deal was ready to be struck. Many held their breath. If the parties could not agree, the labour market rules might become legislation, which trade unions and most employers saw as an attack on the Swedish model. The social partners wanted to regulate wages and conditions through agreements, not legislation, like in other Nordic countries.

### **A short-lived public inquiry**

The so-called LAS inquiry, a public enquiry into modernised labour market rules, was already presented in the spring, while wage negotiations were taking place.

In April 2019, special commissioner Gudmund Toijer was tasked with investigating how to modernise labour market rules while maintaining a basic balance between the social partners. His mandate included introducing a clear increase

in the number of exceptions from the priority rules and to increase employers’ responsibility for skills development and improve employees’ ability to retrain.

He also pointed out the importance of making it easier for smaller companies to make use of redundancies. But the inquiry did not fare well in consultation rounds and has since been abandoned. So instead the government now wants to introduce legislation based on the agreement between PTK and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise.

### **Stronger skills development**

PTK describes the agreement as “a new and more proactive system for security in the labour market.” In addition to job security, safety should also mean people have the chance to develop their skills for the job they have or will have in the future. Skills development opportunities will be improved partly by giving individuals economic support for shorter or longer-term training.

This could happen on the job, or in-between jobs. “The agreement rests on four pillars,” writes PTK. These are job protection, support for retraining, the right to skills development and economic security during periods of unemployment. Part-time employees and those working for companies not covered by collective agreements will also be covered by the agreement.

The question is whether LO will want to take part in a continued inquiry built on an agreement reached after negotiations between PTK and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise – negotiations LO left because they could not agree. And will PTK and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise welcome LO as a party to the continued inquiry?

In an interview with the Arbetet magazine, PTK’s negotiator ruled out allowing LO to change the agreement.

“LO cannot be allowed greater influence than other consultation bodies,” he said.

Martin Wästfelt also told Arbetet that when the agreement is to be turned into legislation and deals, politicians can only influence how this happens – they cannot change the content. This is particularly true for the law on job safety and the guiding texts that trade unions and employers agreed on. Here, politicians must follow the agreement pretty much to the letter, he believes.

This means that wording like needing “a sufficiently serious breach of the employment contract” in order to fire an employee, is non-negotiable. On the other hand, the provisions on retraining and skills development need not be equally strictly interpreted.

“Politicians have the opportunity to use our agreement, but they don’t have to. Yet if they do want to use it, they must re-

spect it. They cannot pick and choose from it,” says Martin Wästfelt.

Deputy CEO Mattias Dahl at the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise underlines on the organisation's website that it supports the agreement and that any changes are out of the question.

The fight over Swedish labour market rules is far from over. Will the Centre Party and the Liberals be content that the changes to the rules are sufficient? What will the Left Party say? Will they continue to threaten a vote of no confidence in the government if the last in, first out rules and employment protection is weakened? The drama looks set to continue.



## Danish drive against sexual harassment at work

Sexual harassment in the workplace must end, say the government and the social partners. Clearer rules for psychological work environments came into force on 1 November 2020.

### NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: MARTIN SYLVEST AND PHILIP DAVOLI, RITZAU SCANPIX

Nearly every week there is a new scandal involving Danish workers who have been sexually harassed at work. Several prominent decision-makers have lost their jobs over this, the latest being Frank Jensen – a leading member of the governing Social Democrats and the Lord Mayor of Denmark's largest municipality, Copenhagen.

Frank Jensen chose to step down after new allegations emerged from female coworkers and political colleagues who said they had been harassed at several Christmas parties.

The allegations against the former Mayor got massive attention in Danish media, where the debate about sexual harassment really got off the ground when Danish TV presenter Sofie Linde, from the stage during a gala show in August

2020, shared her experiences of sexual harassment at her job at Danmark's Radio.

"I was 18 years old and had just started working at Danmark's Radio. We were going to a Christmas party and I had been looking forward to it. This big TV personality comes up to me, takes me by the arm and says: 'If you don't come outside to suck my dick, I will fucking ruin your career. Then I will ruin you'," recalled Sofie Linde.

### **The trade union movement also hit**

Not long before Frank Jensen stepped down, the metoo movement also disclosed another top politician, Morten Østergaard. He had to step down from the Danish Social Liberal Party. Since then, the trade union has also been hit.



284 trade union workers and volunteers have written a joint protest letter to the Politiken broadsheet newspaper in which they disclose how there is a harassment culture in parts of the trade union movement too.

21 of the signatories have anonymously talked about sexual harassment from top leaders and colleagues in the trade union movement, the Politiken wrote. The newspaper published the complaints without investigating them further.



The letter of protest came just a few days after the trade union movement had sent an open letter about how it would lead the fight against sexual harassment in the workplace. The open letter was signed by the heads of 53 trade unions under the Danish Trade Union Confederation FH.

“Of course we should be able to have fun at work and have an informal tone, this is part of a good work environment. But it should be absolutely clear to everyone that we will not tolerate harassment of any kind in our workplaces,” said the FH President Lizette Risgaard in a comment to the open letter.

FH looks at prevention as a crucial tool to stop harassment in the workplace and Risgaard says employers carry the main responsibility. She has suggested introducing “an indirect objective employer’s responsibility” so that employers will be held responsible in cases where they are found not to have taken appropriate action to prevent harassment.

Employees and employee representatives are also responsible for creating an environment where it is easy to speak up straight away if a line is being crossed, argues Lizette Risgaard.

“We must dare to take responsibility for each other and not hang colleagues or others out to dry.”

In an important landmark in the middle of the metoo storm, all central Danish rules on psychological work environments have for the first time ever been gathered in one executive or-

der which came into force on 1 November 2020. The new order was passed by a large majority in the Danish parliament as part of an agreement on work environments back in 2019, aimed at clarifying rules for employers and employees, making it easier to work systematically to prevent bad psychological work environments.

Since coming into force, the new order has been welcomed by all the social partners. The order does not come with any new legal bindings. Nevertheless, trade unions have said it is “historic” and “a landmark” that Denmark now has gathered all rules on psychological work environments in one place.

The Confederation of Danish Employers DA expects it will also help clarify relevant rules and hope that the order can also help put in place shared terminology in the dialogue about psychological work environments.

Minister of Employment Peter Hummelgaard sees the new order as an important first step towards better psychological work environments.

“It makes me very happy that we now have an order which all parties support. It is important to have a shared platform and this is an important step in the right direction. The government will continue to focus on the psychological work environment,” the Minister said in a press release.

### A demand for clear leadership

The order comes with comprehensive guides which describe in great detail what employers and employees should do to prevent bad psychological work environments and how to solve challenges. One order addresses actions which are considered to be harassment, and here sexual harassment in the workplace is defined as “all kinds of unwanted sexual attention”.

The guide also provides the following examples of harassment of a sexual kind:

- Unwanted touching
- Unwanted verbal encouragement to sexual intercourse
- Crude jokes and comments
- Un-called for questions about sexual issues
- Showing of pornographic material

The guide also says employers have a duty to make sure no work leads to a risk of physical or psychological ill-health as a result of harassment, and that management should have a clear policy when it comes to harassment.

The workplace can for instance formulate a clear policy on prevention and action, including clear guidelines for what employees should do if they suspect harassment in the workplace.

### **Young women hardest hit**

So do management act clearly and consistently when workplace harassment is brought to light? No, says one of Denmark's leading work environment experts, Tage Søndergaard Kristensen. In an interview with the trade magazine *Magisteren*, published by the DM trade union, he said he wished leaders would act decisively against those behind workplace harassment. When they do not, it can appear harassment is accepted, he argues.

Tage Søndergaard Kristen is a work environment consultant and a former Professor at the National Research Centre for Work Environment NFA, which for years has documented the scale of sexual harassment in the Danish labour market. The latest survey from 2016 showed that 3.7% of workers in Denmark had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the last year. The number was even higher among young women.



## Iceland starting to miss "overtourism"

Few countries have seen a more rapid tourism growth than Iceland. For many years, the number of tourists rose by 20 to 25% every year. This led to a debate over whether Iceland was a victim of “overtourism” like Barcelona and Venice.

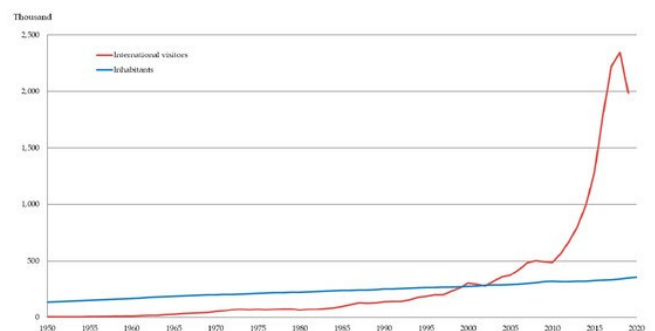
### NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR FOTO: PRIVAT

Now, Covid-19 has toppled what had become Iceland's biggest industry, and the debate has become more nuanced.

A graph used by three Icelandic researchers in an article for the magazine Environment shows that, from a long-term perspective, the rise in the number of tourists has been spectacular.



The blue line represents the number of citizens in Iceland, the red represents foreign visitors. In the 50 years until the year 2000, tourists (the largest group of foreign visitors) made up a small fraction of the total number of people on

the island. But that year the number of visitors overtook the number of citizens for the first time ever. After 2010 the numbers started shooting up, and by 2018 the number of tourists and other visitors reached nearly 2.5 million people – eight times more than the population of Iceland.

### Overtourism or not?

Then the increase stopped. In 2019, the airline Wow went bust. In 2020 the coronavirus arrived. This has led to a collapse in tourism but is not part of the graph. People had started using the term overtourism in Iceland, but was there actually overtourism there?

Jóhannes Þór Skúlason, the managing director at the Icelandic Travel Industry Association (SAF), is sceptical.

“There has hardly been overtourism in Iceland. But we have had the same problem as other tourist destinations often have, what is known as overcrowding. Most tourists visit the same destinations at the same time – for instance the Eiffel Tower in Paris. In Iceland it’s the Golden Circle,” he says.



*The Strokkur geyser is one of Iceland’s main tourist attractions. It is situated in the thermal area Geysir, which has given its name to this kind of erupting water holes in most languages.*

The Golden Circle is a 250 kilometre long tourist road leading to three of the largest attractions: the Gullfoss waterfall, the Geysir thermal area and Þingvellir, where you can see the continental plates move apart. It was also the seat of the first political meetings in Iceland.

The term overtourism is a limited one since it simplifies things a lot, according to Professor Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson at the University of Iceland. Academics warn against simplifications like this, and want to delve deeper to see what is really going on. Jóhannesson believes it is a gross simplification to say that Iceland is a victim of overtourism.

“We have to look at the context in order to determine whether or not we have a problem, and what we should do if that is the case,” he says.

### A worse situation statistically speaking

Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson points out that if you look at the number of foreign visitors versus the number of citizens, Iceland – like other islands and city-states – are in a worse situation statistically speaking because the population is very small. Iceland is almost always high on lists over places with many tourists per population, alongside other smaller entities like Monaco and Macao.

“But this does not present a realistic picture of how things really are,” says Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson.

Tourism in Iceland reached a peak already in 2018, before Covid-19 hit. It is not entirely clear why, since no research has been done around this. We also do not know whether the market had been saturated or if Iceland simply had fallen on people’s lists over interesting destinations. There is simply no research or analysis which could provide more knowledge of what has been behind this.

“Tourism is very sensitive to external influence,” points out Jóhannes Þór Skúlason at SAF.

### Expensive flights

The collapse of the Wow airline could be one major reason why tourism peaked. This made Iceland less accessible as a destination. Economic developments in several markets like the USA and the UK could also have played a role. Fewer Americans arrived in Iceland in 2019 than earlier, for instance. Iceland’s currency was volatile. Flights had been cheap, but now became more expensive. Boeing’s MAX aircraft were grounded after two crashes, oil prices rose and more airlines faced economic problems.

“This too had an effect on what happened in Iceland,” says Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson.

“We could also speculate whether tourism in Iceland is undergoing a change. There is a change in who wants to travel to Iceland, but those with the greatest purchasing power will always remain top.

“Then there’s the corona pandemic which completely skewers the picture. You cannot compare it to anything else. We don’t know what would have happened had we not been hit by Covid-19,” says Jóhannes Þór Skúlason.





*Northern lights at Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon, South-East Iceland.*

Northern Norway, northern Finland and the northern parts of Sweden are popular destinations alongside Iceland. These regions have all seen a large growth in tourism. Many now also travel in winter to experience the northern lights, both to Iceland and to elsewhere in the Nordics. All these regions are easily accessible by plane and that helps, according to Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson.

### **Overcrowding calls for investment**

Iceland struggled with its infrastructure at the start of the tourism boom, but had focused on improving its infrastructure in recent years. The so-called overcrowding effect is the reason. Tourists visit the same destination at the same time, so Iceland's government and private investors poured money into infrastructure.

But tourism has not been problematic across the board. It has created more than one in three jobs in recent years and given Iceland an enormous economic boom. There are plenty of examples of gold diggers, as they say in Iceland – people who only want to make as much money in as short a time as possible. Then you have other businesses who have invested in knowledge and infrastructure. These are the ones Jóhannes Þór Skúlason believes will survive the current crisis.

"The overtourism debate is only a bubble which will pop and disappear," he says.

Iceland now has the opportunity to continue developing its infrastructure, carry out research and keep an eye on overcrowding at certain tourist destinations. Jóhannes Þór points out that Iceland can limit the number of tourists if it wants to. It does not have to welcome even more tourists.

"We control this development. We must decide what kind of tourism we want in the future. But that means the state and the destinations must be prepared to make unpopular decisions. Tourism is no natural catastrophe, it is something we can control ourselves," he says.





## Vaasa wants to attract more people by making them the world's happiest

The Finnish city of Vaasa was at the very start of a campaign to make it the happiest city on Earth. Then corona hit. Now it remains to be seen whether the city and its inhabitants can create greater happiness in the depths of a crisis and a pandemic.

### NEWS

11.11.2020

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

Finland was named the happiest country in the world for the third time last March. As usual, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland were also featuring near the top of the list.

The World Happiness Report is published by the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network. More than 150 countries are ranked depending on how happy their citizens consider themselves to be. People's subjective well-being is the most important parameter.

When the UN ranks happy cities around the world, most often the larger ones are in the running. Now Vaasa wants to beat places like Helsinki, Copenhagen, Oslo and Århus. High up are also Bergen, Stockholm and Reykjavik.

Based on the Gallup survey mapping happiness in 186 cities you can also find the least happy. Bottom three are Gaza, Sanaa and Kabul.

### **Not only hard values**

Vaasa's city council politicians and civil servants were in the middle of reevaluating the city's strategy when they realised the happiest citizens do not necessarily live in the capital Helsinki. Previous surveys have shown many happy people live in the surrounding Ostrobothnia region. Vaasa decided to follow up locally.



*The City of Vaasa's Head of Communication Leena Forsén. In this NLJ montage, the background is Vaasa in autumn colours.*

"We had pretty hard targets for population growth and for balancing the city economy," says Head of Communications at the City of Vaasa, Leena Forsén. Making Vaasa "the Nordic hub for energy technology" is also an aim.

They also wanted to include some softer values. The city aimed high: to have Finland's happiest citizens.

Improving happiness and well-being can be done through the city's existing services, says Leena Forsén. She mentions some sectors that all contribute: culture, sport, leisure activities, social services, health care and education. All this can help people feel good and be happy.

### **A happy city attracts new people**

The Vaasa City Head of Communications is well aware that a happy city can tempt more people to move there. The aim is to increase Vaasa's population. Experts and highly skilled people for the city's energy sector are particularly desirable.

"That is obvious. Who would not want to live in a city where we really care about our citizens, not just for economic reasons. This is part of our message," says Leena Forsén.

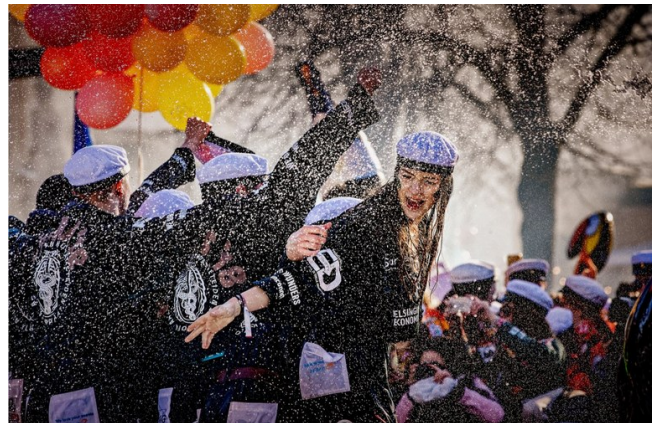
Most cities and municipalities probably want to make their citizens happy. Well-being is important and it is part of the city's responsibilities to aim for it. But Leena Forsén has not heard of any other place that has had an expressed aim of making their citizens the happiest in the world.

The city's "customer service promise" undertakes to deliver an international and multilingual city, a safe and easy life with good welfare and a rich cultural life. Vaasa also wants to be a "logistical flagship" and "Europe's energy locomotive" thanks to its technology industry. Closeness to nature and the archipelago is also mentioned.

Apart from having Finland's happiest citizens, the city strives for population growth, more jobs, improved economy and in the long term to become a carbon-neutral city on the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia.

### **The pandemic interfered**

The new strategy was adopted in the autumn of 2019. A major campaign was due to be launched in March. This has now been scuppered by the corona pandemic.



*Happiness can have a dark side. In October, Vaasa got the nickname "The involuntary corona capital of Finland". Covid-19 is mainly spread through student parties at the city's universities and colleges. The photo above is from Helsinki.*

It was decided to lie low and wait for the pandemic to ease off, and then try again this autumn.

"We have put some breaks on the campaign. The message of making everyone happy is perhaps not as easy to get through during the corona pandemic," says Leena Forsén.

This autumn, Vaasa became the involuntary corona capital of Finland as the second wave of the pandemic arrived. The city had Finland's highest rate of Covid-19 cases. Strict quarantine rules have since helped stop the rapid spread.

At the start of November, the city region had recorded just over one thousand cases of Covid-19. The cases are still not increasing exponentially. Finland has had around 350 deaths from Covid-19, and a handful has occurred in the Vaasa area. Yet the happiness aim remains and the city continues to work towards it.

"Right now people are perhaps less happy. Yet we must also show that the City of Vaasa cares about people's happiness. It is important to measure this now and later too so that we have something to compare this with," says Leena Forsén.

Being the happiest city in the world is an ambitious goal, agrees the city's Head of Communication. But during the exceptional corona period with people working from home and voluntary isolation, many have discovered that happiness is close at hand, in their own city.

### **Nordics often in the lead**

The UN report notes that the Nordic countries often rank top both when it comes to happiness and other issues. This



includes democracy, political rights, low corruption, gender and economic equality – as well as human rights.

The question is whether the tax-funded welfare state keeps crime low or whether people's trust in authorities and each other is key.

The UN survey tries to explain which factors lead to happiness or unhappiness. In the Nordics, rough weather, small-scale societies and long distances, a homogenous population and relatively high suicide rates might challenge the image of the Nordics – or Finland – being the happiest place in the world.



*Happiness can mean different things in different countries. An ice bath after a sauna does not necessarily give you the same feeling of happiness as the Finns get.*

Not everyone in Finland believes the statistics showing Finland to be the world's happiest country.

Unemployment, alcohol abuse and domestic economic challenges during the corona pandemic have hardly made pessimistic thinking less prevalent. The largest cause of early retirement due to ill health is now said to be caused by mental health issues. It is easy to find ways in which Finland could become even happier. The City of Vaasa is exploring these too.

### **Happiness professor will teach Vaasa's citizens**

The City of Vaasa has hired their own "happiness researcher" in Professor Emeritus Markku Ojanen. He has spent decades researching happiness as a professor of psychology at the University of Tampere. Now, he is going to help the people of Vaasa find happiness.

He points out what people can do themselves, and the plan is to help Vaasa citizens find out how they can influence their own happiness. This will happen as soon as the corona pandemic eases off.

One of Vaasa's projects has been to plant trees together in what is known in Finland as "talko". Sometimes small measures are enough, and some have been possible to carry out

while keeping a safe corona distance. Leena Forsén quotes happiness professor Markku Ojanen several times during our short interview.

"Happiness is not to long for the past. Nor can you simply wait for things to get better. The point is to enjoy, be grateful, and to be happy with what you have right now. This is the message that will be spread among Vaasa's population.

"This idea is actually very suitable during the corona crisis. It is hard to plan for the future, as you don't know how it will pan out."

### **Choirs also bring happiness**

Different people enjoy different things – be it being able to enjoy and be thankful for family, nature, hobbies or leisure time. But it is all-important these days.

Leena Forsén admits that the project has come in for some criticism.

"A successful marketing campaign creates emotions, and this one is no exception. You get both positive and negative emotions. But if you create no emotions at all, the message has failed."

Happiness as a term has also been discussed in Vaasa. Some say happiness can be linked to language. There is a large Swedish-speaking minority in the region.

Finland-Swedes are said to have a bigger network and they sing in choirs – two factors which have improved psychological well-being in addition to being economically comfortable.

The conclusion is that happiness is not some American version based on owning a big house with many things in it. Nor is it being so content that you stop working to improve society or demand your rights.

The second corona wave makes for a sad situation. It makes it hard to talk about happiness right now in the way that the City of Vaasa had planned.

But the project has not faced a lot of criticism. Quite the contrary, says Leena Forsén. A city that cares about its citizens is exactly what is needed.

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