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Jul 13, 2019

# The Future of Work seen from Reykjavik

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# Nordic region leading by example

The most important thing the Nordics can do to contribute to the ILO is to lead by example. That was the message from the Director-General Guy Ryder during the fourth and final conference on the Future of Work, held in Reykjavik.

EDITORIAL

12.04.2019

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, ACTING EDITOR

The conferences and a major research program on the Nordic labour market models are financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and lead up to the ILO's centenary celebrations.

You do not often meet people who heads organisations with 187 member countries, and who knows the Nordic model as well as Guy Ryder does. He knows how it performs differently in different countries and also at different points in time.

The Nordic models are in fact models for how to handle change. That is how Iceland could pull through its crisis as fast as it did, and that is also why the Nordic countries top different welfare rankings, pointed out Guy Ryder.

The ILO is a tripartite organisation where both governments and employers' and employees' organisations are members. Denmark, Norway and Sweden were founding members. Finland joined a year later and Iceland after the country gained independence in 1944.

When the ILO established an international commission to come up with suggestions for how the organisation could develop, it thought it natural to ask a Nordic prime minister to lead the commission. Stefan Löfven, together with South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, was given the task. The commission presented its report in February, which contained ten very concrete proposals.

The conference and the annual meeting of the Nordic labour ministers is the theme for this edition of the NLJ. The ministers' meeting decided to launch a research project to find out why so few girls chose to study the subjects which are important when going into a future where digitalisation, artificial intelligence and bioscience will be increasingly important.

We have also been looking at some of the political reforms that Iceland has been praised for, and at how they work in practice.

The equal pay standard is a certification process where companies with more than 25 employees must document how

they set their wages. This is a comprehensive process which forces management to consider why there is still a wage gap between men and women when this cannot be explained by education, working tasks, part-time work or other objective differences between employees.

The NLJ has visited the Regional Development Institute Byggðastofnun in Sauðárkrúkur, one of the first businesses to introduce the equal pay standard. Some criticise it for being too rigid. Individual efforts cannot be rewarded, everyone who performs a certain type of tasks is paid exactly the same. Byggðastofnun employees are organised in The Confederation of Icelandic Bank and Finance Employees, whose leader Friðbert Traustason goes as far as calling the equal pay standard "the employers' best weapon".

Perhaps the equal pay standard need some more time to function without such consequences. This does not mean there is no need to use resources to narrow the gender pay gap, which in Norway stands at 13 % after adjustment for education, trades, part-time work and other factors, according to the Work Research Institute.

There is a lot of support in Iceland for the extension of parental leave to 12 months, with five months each for the mother and father, and two months which they can share as they see fit. Yet one big obstacle for improved gender equality at home still remains – overtime work. In Iceland this makes up a major part of the salary, and it is men who mostly work extra.

But being a parent and working does not always clash, pointed out Ingólfur Gíslason, Iceland's leading researcher on the topic.

"People who have fun at work and good colleagues are also better parents."



## ILO and the Nordics: At the frontline in fight for the future of work

There was a positive atmosphere as the ILO Director-General and representatives from the Nordic ministries of labour gathered in Iceland to discuss the challenges around the future of work. The Nordic model has proved to be adaptable to rapid and major change before, and the development of new technology is something people can actually control.

THEME

12.04.2019

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“I have learned that the Nordic model is not static. It has some basic building blocks, but is adaptable to change,” said the ILO’s Guy Ryder in his speech to “The Nordic Conference on Future of work – Towards the ILO Centenary”.

The ILO will celebrate 100 years this June. As part of the run-up to the centenary, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the ILO have been organising four conferences on the future

of work and gender equality. The conference venues have moved according to who has been holding the Nordic Council of Ministers Presidency, and have included Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm and now Reykjavik. This time, the theme was the future of work with special focus on gender equality.



### International expert commission

The annual Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour was held ahead of the conference. The social partners and Guy Ryder were invited as guests. He gave a short presentation of the report “Work for a brighter future,” produced for the ILO by the Global Commission on the Future of Work. The commission, which was set up in 2017, has been led by Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa – both men with trade union backgrounds.



*Guy Ryder, Director-General of the ILO, and Heinz Koller, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia at the ILO, during the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour.*

The commission’s mandate has been to identify challenges posed by rapid technological change in the labour market, and to create strategies for how to deal with this. The commission has met four times and has been a broad gathering of experts from different sectors and different parts of the world.

### A human-centred economic agenda

The commission has summed up its work in a report which identifies three main pillars of action. The main idea is to develop a human-centred economic agenda, placing people at the centre of everything.

“We are convinced that if everyone is aware of the changes, if everyone is included and works together to find solutions, there is a brighter future to our world of work,” write Stefan Löfven and Cyril Ramaphosa in their preface.

In his address to the meeting of labour ministers, Guy Ryder also underlined the importance of a human-centred economic agenda. He highlighted three parts from the report; the first being the universal right to life-long learning, with an emphasis on *right*.

“It is no secret that this was the easiest area to agree on. Everyone agrees that life-long learning is a necessity in the face of current rapid and fundamental changes. People can no longer expect to go to school, get a job and stay there for 40 years before retiring,” said Guy Ryder.

### The higher educated get more

Yet even though everyone seems to agree about the need for and right to life-long learning, a range of questions remain. Who will pay, and who’s responsibility is it? The individual, the company or the state?

“We need a combination of all three,” said Guy Ryder.

Life-long learning also raises questions about how to create the best systems for it to happen. Where and how should the learning take place? At work? In school? Or in other ways? Many countries are already looking at this, but there is one serious problem, said Guy Ryder.

“People with higher education get access to more further education than people with lower education. The gap between the privileged and non-privileged increases, and this is serious.”

### Gender equality still topical

Guy Ryder also addressed the need for gender equality, and reminded everyone that the issue has been on the ILO’s radar since the beginning in 1919. 60 years ago the organisation also included equal pay for equal work and non-discrimination in its charter. This has been ratified by all member countries, but in reality we are far from those goals still.

“So why has this not been implemented? There are still many hidden obstacles in the labour market, like the fact that women take on more care responsibilities and that parental leave is mainly taken by women,” said Guy Ryder. He praised the host country Iceland for finding new, creative solutions for dealing with the invisible obstacles.

The third priority highlighted by Guy Ryder is the right to control your own time. Working hour issues are as old as ILO’s 100 years old charter. Back then the average working week was 60 hours, and the aim was to reduce this to 48 hours. Since then, it has fallen to 40 hours in many places in the world.



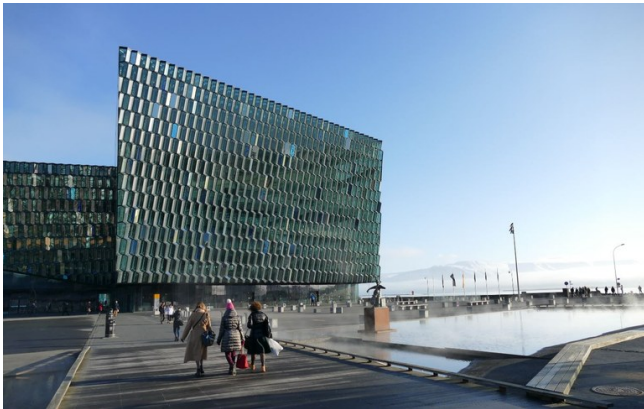
*Paula Lehtomäki, the new Secretary General for the Nordic Council of Ministers, also participated during the labour ministers' meeting. This was her second public engagement.*

The working hours issue is again the focus for debate, as new technology creates opportunities – for better or worse – to be more or less constantly available. As a result, we have the issue of creating a work-life balance.

### **A double-edged sword**

“The borders are being erased, and we can work anywhere, anytime. This might give us freedom, but it is a double-edged sword. It creates issues around how we organise our work. There is also a growing tendency for more part-time solutions and so-called zero hours contracts, which contributes to the increasing polarisation too,” said Guy Ryder.

“The question is how people gain more control over their working hours, while also combining this with the company’s needs for flexibility. We have to look at working hours from many different angles.”



Guy Ryder also addressed the main conference which was held over the following two days at the now nearly legendary conference venue Harpa in Reykjavik’s harbour.

The building was only half built when the economic crisis hit Iceland ten years ago, and there was talk about abandoning the whole project. An expensive and spectacular building was not necessarily a top priority as many Icelanders struggled with lost savings and falling pensions. But the construction continued and today it is a popular space for culture and conferences, with its glass facades which mirror the shifting light from the sea, the city and the mountains in ever changing patterns.

### **The necessary cooperation**

More than 300 people from the Nordics and many other countries had travelled to Iceland to take part in the conversation about the future of work. Iceland’s President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson welcomed them all. He explained that working life was not his area of expertise. Yet he does live in a country whose people are among the hardest-working in the world.

“The labour market is run with an ‘I can do it’-attitude. You work as much as you can right now, because you don’t know how things will be looking next season.

“There is still much to do when it comes to gender equality, and this can only happen if we cooperate,” he said, and praised the good work which has already been carried out by the ILO, OECD and UN Women.



*Iceland's President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson willingly poses for photos holding one of the Nordic Council of Ministers' bags which he got from head of information Anna Rosenberg. Photographer Birgir Ísleifur Gunnarsson checks the picture came out well.*

The Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers Paula Lehtomäki also congratulated the ILO with the centenary. She underlined the close links between the Nordic countries and the ILO when it comes to the importance of tripartite cooperation and the drive for gender equality in the labour market.

“You played an important role after the First World War when there was a great need for improving and regulating labour market conditions. The ILO took on that responsibility, and still does in its work for decent jobs, social conditions and gender equality,” she said.

### **The Nordic model sets an example and gives results**

Guy Ryder took a quick look back over 100 years of ILO, and the inspiration the organisation has found in the Nordic countries from the start.

“The Nordic countries have been key players, and have contributed with energy, resources and hard work, but to be honest the most important contribution has been the good examples. What you do at home has turned out to give fantastic results.”

Referring to the Icelandic Hávamál, he talked about the importance of traveling in friendly company to find the right way, and not to get stuck in history and lose momentum. The ILO also uses its centenary to look to the future together with its 187 member countries, instead of only celebrating past victories.

“It has been said that you cannot escape the future, and I can only agree. 50 years ago the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and my predecessor then said that the ILO can never be seen to maintain the status quo.”

He quoted Hávamál once more, telling the tale of the cowardly warrior who survived by standing at the back during battle. And yes, he grew old, but his soul never found rest.

“We will not stand back and avoid that which scares us. We will move towards the future and its challenges,” said Guy Ryder.





## Equal pay: a fight between genders or between the rich and poor?

Society treasures resources and power more than anything. If we do not deal with economic inequality we will get nowhere, said the leader of the Icelandic trade union Efling, Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir, during a panel debate at the Nordic conference The Future of Work, held in Reykjavik between 4th-5th April.

THEME

12.04.2019

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: BIG

“We must not be passive observers. We must not only focus on powerful women with high incomes. We must start to focus on low income women and increase their wages,” said the newly elected trade union leader Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir.

She has been working as a low-paid nursery teacher in Reykjavik for several years, and knows many women who cannot make enough money to support themselves and their families without taking on second jobs. She said the job is poorly paid, and that there is no economic justice to how childcare is rewarded. In her opinion it is all about money – the rich and powerful do not want to do anything about the injustice.

This is class war with the aim of securing low salary women a wage which will support their family.

### **Start at the top**

Researcher Kjersti Misje Østbakken at the Oslo Institute for Social Research showed how the global pay gap is 23 %. The gap varies between different countries, and also within countries, both per year, month and hour. According to her numbers, the wage gap in Norway stood at 12 % per hour in 2014 – men were paid 100 kroner while women were paid 88 kroner.

Østbakken explained that nearly half of the wage gap can be explained by the type of jobs people do. The gap is widest between men and women in high salary jobs – 20%. It is narrowest among low paid public sector workers and widest among high earners in the private sector. Women in the public sector are the most poorly paid, while men in top private sector positions earn the most, regardless of which sector they are in. Male leaders are the best paid.

Østbakken thinks the pay gap cannot be eliminated without addressing the gap within top private sector jobs, where it is widest.

### **Making care attractive to men**

British journalist Femi Oke opened the panel debate. She asked whether low paid women should have their wages increased in order to attract more men to their kind of jobs. The head of The Federation of State and Municipal Employees Sonja Ýr Þorbergsdóttir explained how middle-aged men started to work in nurseries during the financial crisis in Iceland. Most reasoned that they had never had the chance to do this because it was so poorly paid. When they lost their day job they would chose to work in a nursery over being unemployed. Sonja Ýr supported the idea of paying better for traditional female occupations. That would make these jobs more attractive for men.



*Sonja Ýr Þorbergsdóttir and Þorsteinn Víglundsson.*

The MP Þorsteinn Víglundsson believed the wage gap should be solved through collective agreements and legislation. The future is knowledge-based, and for that you need education. Teachers are among the most poorly paid in Iceland. The care sector is becoming increasingly important as Iceland's population is ageing. He believed supply and demand could not explain the gender pay gap.

"Gender pay gaps must be prioritised, not just discussed. We have to act," he said.

### **Men's overtime shortens women's working hours**

Nearly three quarters of all women in the Nordic countries are in paid employment. Women's work contributes to a better economy. But the Nordics have yet to achieve full gender

equality in the labour market. More women than men work part-time, and women do more unpaid domestic work. More women than men leave the labour market and rely on care, rehabilitation or disability benefits.

This is especially true for women who work in the care and education sectors in Iceland. Their jobs are both emotionally difficult and challenging. This has a negative impact on women's pay, their career development and future pensions, according to Iceland's Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir. Care sector jobs are not going to be taken over by robots, so there is a need for both men and women to work there.



Women do not strive to work as long hours as men. But the imbalance in working hours between the sexes also has a negative impact on women's working conditions. When men work overtime, women's working hours are shortened and their unpaid efforts increase.

There is a need to address the gender segregation in the labour market and the undervaluing of women's work. Katrín Jakobsdóttir has said that Iceland will eradicate gender pay gaps by 2022 through the equal pay standard. Employers will be responsible for making sure there is equal pay for equal work.





## Parental leave in Iceland gives dad a strong position

Since Iceland introduced nine months parental leave with three months earmarked fathers, their participation in childcare has changed radically – in a good way. Mothers return to work earlier, and get back to working ordinary hours faster. Daddy leave has been the main driver in this development.

THEME

12.04.2019

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: BIG AND BJÖRN LINDAHL

“The new legislation works excellently,” says researcher Ingólfur V. Gíslason, Associate Professor at the University of Iceland.

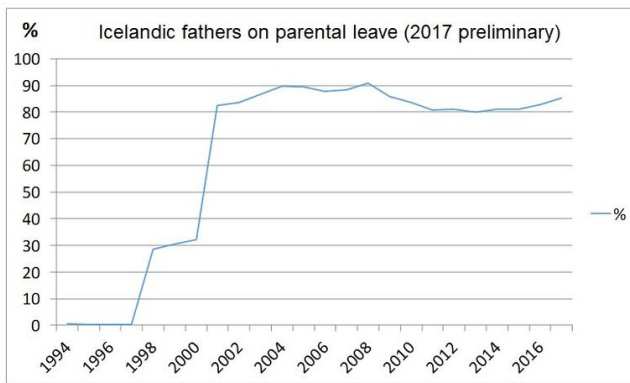
“Both parents are now active with childcare. The law has had a positive effect on gender equality in the labour market,” he continues.

Iceland’s new parental leave legislation came into effect in the year 2000. Nine months of leave would be divided between the parents, with three months earmarked the mother, three months for the father and the remaining three months

open for both to share between them. The parents were free to decide exactly how to organise their leave.

Iceland’s new system was revolutionary when it was implemented. Both Norway and Sweden had introduced daddy leave, but it was not as long as in Iceland. If the father does not take all his due leave, it is lost for both parents.





Source: Háskoli Íslands

“Surveys show there has been a radical change to childcare since the new legislation was introduced. More and more share childcare evenly,” says Ingólfur.

### Does what mummy says

The rules say mothers must stay at home during the first two weeks after birth and fathers must take three months, but beyond that the parents can decide how to divide up the leave themselves. They can stay at home together for the duration of the leave if they so wish.

Surveys in Nordic countries show that the father often ends up simply assisting the mother if he never gets to be alone with the baby. The same is the case in Iceland.



“Daddy does what mummy says. From a gender equality perspective it is desirable for the father to have the chance to be alone with the baby for a few months,” says Ingólfur.

He and other researchers have been interviewing young families. These interviews show that when a father spends time alone at home with his children, his independence and position when it comes to childcare improves. There are many advantages with fathers staying at home together with the mother too.

“I think we might be missing a group of fathers who won’t take paternal leave if they are forced to stay at home on their own,” says Ingólfur.

“The mother is usually in charge of care when both are at home. But it is good for a father to see just how much work it is to take care of a baby,” he says.

### The world’s strongest daddies

WHO research shows that Icelandic daddies enjoy the strongest position as fathers in the world. The organisation asked how easy it is for the child to go to its father with a problem. Compared to earlier generations, today’s Icelandic children answer to a much larger degree that it is easy to discuss problems with daddy. Icelandic mothers have always enjoyed a strong position, according to the WHO. The fathers’ improved position has not impacted negatively on mothers, even though the fathers’ opportunities have increased many times over.

“The Icelandic parental leave act is an unusually good example of how a piece of legislation can change one group’s position and change the way people act. But this also stems from the fact that fathers really want to take time off with their children,” points out Ingólfur.

Icelandic fathers are active caregivers and contribute in that way to more gender equality in the labour market. But Iceland has a shortage of nursery spaces. Children do not get a space until they are around 14 to 16 months old, and mothers stay at home until their children get into nursery.



This could be about to change, however. Iceland’s government has decided that parental leave should be extended to 12 months. The change is planned to be introduced between 2020 and 2021, but details are still to be sorted out.

“It would be fantastic if there was to be five months for the mother, five months for the father and two months to share, or a 4 – 4 – 4 months’ division. The latter would be good, but not quite as good as 5 – 5 – 2. It will be exciting to see how this pans out,” says Ingólfur.

### **Enormous social pressure**

Globally, the mother usually takes the parental leave which can be divided freely between the parents. There are reasons for this, for instance breast feeding. There is enormous social pressure on Icelandic mothers to stay at home for at least six months or as long as possible. Icelandic mothers who only take three months while the fathers take six months, have experienced prejudice from their surroundings.

“They have been told they are not good mothers if they don’t stay at home. It is not that people don’t trust the fathers, it is just the prevailing social attitude that mothers should stay at home,” explains Ingólfur.

### **Attitudes are rapidly changing**

He is optimistic about the future. If there is an increase in parental leave to 12 months and if children get nursery spaces earlier, he thinks Iceland will have come as far as it can when it comes to legislation and social change. All that remains is a change of mentality. He believes attitudes will change rapidly.

One of the PhD students at the University of Iceland interviewed young Icelandic men about masculinity and femininity. Ingólfur found it interesting that the young men, who were not yet fathers, talked about paternal leave and child-care participation as being a natural part of masculinity.

“I think attitudes will change rapidly. But I don’t think parental leave will be equally divided between the parents during the first months after birth. The women are pregnant, give birth and breastfeed and they need some rest. I am convinced that women will take the first months off, while the leave will be more equally divided between the parents after that.”



## ILO's DG Guy Ryder finds inspiration from problem-solving Iceland

Why does the Director-General of ILO choose Iceland as one of his last stops before the organisation's centenary celebrations kick off? Why Reykjavík and not Paris or Rome?

THEME

12.04.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The Nordic Labour Journal has taken Guy Ryder outside for a photograph. Since he is staying at the sumptuous Hotel Borg, it is only a short walk to the Alþingi.

"It's my first visit to Iceland, but I know that is the parliament! To answer your question: I come here because this is where the Nordic tripartite family has decided to hold their conference this year," says Guy Ryder.

Even if it is beautiful and the sun is bright, the wind is really cold and we retreat to the hotel and the Art Deco armchairs in the lobby. The elevator door could have been designed for the Empire State Building. Guy Ryder seems not to notice, he is concentrating on the question again:

"Ever since ILO started preparing its centenary and its Future of Work initiative, the Nordic group has held a series of conferences. It began in Helsinki in 2016, moved on to Oslo in 2017, to Stockholm last year and it will culminate here in Iceland.

"So we are here because this is where the Nordic family is gathering and obviously, in our organisation, the Nordic countries have a very special place and a very special relationship with ILO," says Guy Ryder.

### **Members from the start**

"It has to do, of course, with history. Most of the countries have been with the ILO from the very beginning in 1919."

(1920 in the case of Finland, and Iceland came a little bit later).

"The Nordic Labour model and the way the Nordics handle labour issues also fits very naturally and very strongly with the ILO's work methods and objectives. So this is a very important hour in our centenary year."

The feeling of importance is reciprocal. The plan for Guy Ryder to be driven straight from the airport to a meeting with the Icelandic Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

But internal labour issues in Iceland made her presence indispensable and the meeting was postponed for a day. The largest confederation of unions and the employers' organisation were on the verge of agreeing on a deal but needed some extra support for the it to go through. Not an unusual situation in the Nordic countries, where the social partners are left to their own when negotiating wage deals, but where the government can provide support through tax changes or through other kinds of measures. The tripartite cooperation and mutual respect are often quoted as reasons for why the Nordic countries often top international lists of which countries are best to live in.

### **Not only one Nordic Model**

Guy Ryder is careful to use the expression "The Nordic Model" as if it exists in a fixed state.

"My experience with our Nordic partners is that they never seem to think that they have found the magic solution or the solution that will last for ever. I think that what is coming out clearly when we discuss the future of work together, is that the Nordic Model is undergoing constant renewal. It doesn't stand still. It requires constant vigilance and constant updating."

***How much of the Nordic Model can be exported to other countries, who do not share the same history of cooperation, where neither the workers nor the employees are organised in the same way?***

"I don't believe that the ILO should be in the business of exporting models, nor do I believe that we can transplant them, like a heart transplant.

"What we try to do is to learn from the positives – and there is a lot of that to be had from the Nordic experience – explain how things work here and draw from all this elements that other countries can apply."

### **Strong social consensus**

"I think Nordic countries have constructed – because it wasn't automatic – and maintained a very strong social consensus around the value of cooperation between government, employers and workers. They have maintained a high level of union membership and a growing number of employers'

membership. And I think that it is seen as being good for the whole country, not just for the workers."

***What about Iceland – is it easier to try out new models in a small country, than in a big one?***

"It's an interesting question. Is it easier to do things on a smaller scale first? I think some times that is the case. You can take advantage of this, and make very important differences with policy initiatives in societies which are relatively small and cohesive.

"The first thing which comes to my mind is the disaster which fell upon Iceland when the banking system went crazy and the whole financial system came down, back in 2008. I think that was a very good lesson, not just for Iceland, but anywhere in the world. Who would have imagined, I think it came as an enormous surprise that in a country so well organised, so cohesive, so democratically transparent as Iceland, that a catastrophe on this scale could take place. It just seemed impossible."

### **"You pay the price"**

"But the fact is that if you don't regulate your financial sector properly, you will pay the price. That is what happened in Iceland. But what is remarkable has been the speed of recovery. I'm not suggesting that this was automatic or easy. It entailed some difficult and very painful policy decisions, but if you look at the state of the labour market, you see that this recovery process has been extraordinary.

"The Icelandic Model did not insulate them from disaster, but Iceland took the right decisions to get out and move forward again. This constant idea that you have to think and you have to find solutions.

"The one preeminent thing about the Nordic Model is that it is fundamentally a problem-solving model. You confront a problem, as the Labour Minister of Iceland said, we are not running away from the future. We are looking the future straight in the eyes and we are finding answers to the problems."

### **Gender certification process**

"I think the work Iceland has done on equality is also fantastic, like the gender certification process. I'm an unambiguous fan of it. In itself it is a remarkable initiative and it shows something which is really important. We have been talking about gender equality, and the ILO is invested here, and has been for a very long time. Equal pay for equal value is in our constitution from 100 years ago. We adopted the key ILO conventions on equality 60 years ago. And yet we still have these problems like gender pay gaps and lower work participation.

"It is clear to me that just adopting laws, just doing the obvious good things – important as they are – is not enough.

"We need new, creative transformation policies. And the Icelandic certification process is a fantastic example of these innovative, creative processes. So we will see how it works out. It is still at a relatively early stage. Let's see what the results will be, but I know there are very many other countries looking at it!"

Guy Ryder will get ample opportunity to talk to the Nordic tripartite family during his stay in Iceland. On 3rd April he meets many of them in connection with the yearly meeting of the Nordic Ministers of Labour, before the Future of Work conference in Reykjavík is held on 4th and 5th April.





## Nordic project: why do so few girls want to become engineers?

Many future jobs will be centred around digitalisation, the development of artificial intelligence and robots, and biotechnology. But far too few girls chose to study the subjects that are relevant to these areas. The Nordic labour ministers want to know why.

NEWS

12.04.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“I am a maths and physics teacher myself. I know that many girls are interested in these subjects. Yet many young people have a far too narrow understanding of what the subjects can lead to, and what you might actually end up working with,” says Sweden’s Minister for Employment Ylva Johansson.

“Being an engineer or working with new technology means you can be part of shaping tomorrow’s climate solutions, tomorrow’s social solutions and tomorrow’s welfare solutions,” she points out.

“We have to broaden the image so that you know how many different jobs you could do if you carry on studying these subjects. This is important in order not to lose all the capacity

and competence which we are actually missing among the female population.”

### **What is behind this distortion?**

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour meeting in Reykjavik on 3rd April decided to grant money to a project which will study the education institutions and the labour market.

Where does the distortion stem from? Should teaching be changed so that it suits girls better? The NLJ visited one course organised by Google, where women were taught how to code. Cat videos were used as an example of what they could do.



“I don’t for a second believe in that kind of stuff! It’s just ridiculous, actually. Don’t try to turn mathematics or physics pink! Girls enjoy maths and natural science and they are good at it. The problem is that they do not go down that professional path. I think this is because they, as most young people, don’t know enough about what the occupations actually entail.”

### **What happens in the labour market?**

But even those who do chose an occupation like that can be faced with a culture where women feel unwelcome.

The research project will therefore focus on how the labour market promotes sustainability and gender equality within STEM jobs (short for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Do the social partners promote inclusive working environments? What are the career paths? And can you combine the occupations with family life?

### **Not enough knowledge**

Ylva Johansson believes the most important issue is to improve the information about working life. The education in itself does not need changing.

“No, what is important is to showcase the occupations this actually leads to. Young people do not have enough general knowledge about working life. We see that many young people, not least girls, want a job where you can make a difference, and where you can take responsibility for how society develops and tackle environmental problems,” she says.

“People want a well-paid job, of course, and good working conditions, but they also want to contribute to how society develops. And you do that by training to be an engineer for instance. You will not be left navel-gazing at some obscure research project, you will actually take part in shaping the future.

The project will be run by the Nordic Council of Ministers’ co-operative body NIKK (Nordic information for knowledge about gender). It is expected to be finished by the end of 2020. The project also includes a comparative study within the Nordic region and beyond – how do countries outside of the Nordic region approach the recruitment bias within the STEM area?

# Norway: Gender pay gap remains, but influence is slightly up

The gender pay gap among full-time employees in Norway remains at 20 %. After adjusting for age, education, sector and several other factors, there is still a 13 % gender difference.

## NEWS

12.04.2019

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Those are some of the figures from the Norwegian Work Research Institute's 2019 barometer measuring joint decision-making. The barometer is published annually in cooperation with six trade unions, to show how much say employees have in the workplace, and how they see their own working situation.

The barometer looks at a representative selection from the working population. A total of 3,049 people took part in this year's survey. They were asked about their 2017 gross earnings. The average annual wage for full-time employed men was 711,000 kroner (€ 74,160). For women it was only 582,000 kroner (€60,700).

There is also a difference between how much influence the respondees felt they had over their own work situation.

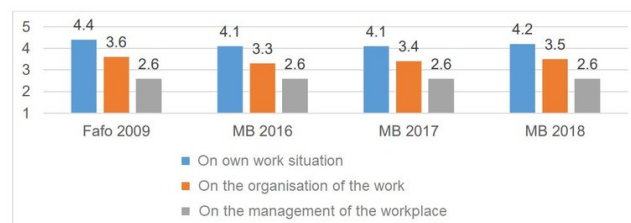
47 % of the men said they had a lot of influence, while 42 % of the women said the same.

Asked whether they felt they could control how their organised their own work, the difference was considerably larger. While 63 % of the men put themselves on 4 to 5 on a scale to five, where 1 was no influence at all and 5 was a lot of influence, only 45 percent of the women did the same.

"This is where the different trades might be part of the explanation. A larger proportion of women work within the care and health sectors and in the public sector. This work is more standardised and less flexible when it comes to how the work is organised; your own influence over working hours, tempo, who you work with and the access to resources needed to carry out tasks," write researchers Eivind Falkum and Ida Drange, who were in charge of this part of the survey.

So what is the general position of joint decision-making in the Nordic labour market? Compared to the decade from 2009 to 2019, the respondees said it had fallen, but that there was a slight increase during 2018. The joint decision-making

barometer asks the same question as a Fafo survey in 2009. The results are compared below:



*The graph shows an index in the barometer with a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no influence at all and 5 is a lot of influence. The results were slightly higher for two of the questions in 2018 than in 2017.*

The Work Research Institute researchers have also examined whether there are any differences between organised and non-organised employees in how they experience opportunities for joint decision-making.

"When we compare 2009 figures for people's perceived influence on their own work situations with 2018 figures, all employees (non-organised, organised, employees with no collective agreement and employees with collective agreements) have got less influence over their work situation in the past decade.

"But the average number falls further for those who are not organised in a trade union, and those with no collective agreement, compared with those who are organised and those who have a collective agreement," writes Eivind Falkum.



## A shift in work-related crime – or just prettier facades?

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority has uncovered less work-related crime in 2018, even though more controls have been carried out compared to in previous years. Some point to improved cross-sector cooperation, while critics say inspections are of little use if they are not unannounced.

NEWS

12.04.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN, PHOTO: RONJA EDELSTEEN ANDREASSEN

The Labour Inspection Authority's recently published annual report shows that the number of inspections has increased – from 2,300 in 2017 to 3,200 in 2018. There has been a clear decrease in identified breaches of labour law.

### **The construction industry**

1,760 of the 2018 controls were carried out in the construction industry, up from 1,282 in 2017. The labour inspection authority found 2,277 breaches within that sector in 2018, and 2,344 in 2017. So last year the number of inspections rose by 478, while 67 fewer breaches were identified.

The Director at the Labour Inspection Authority Trude Vollheim says the numbers prove that their efforts have paid off.



“This is positive, but it is too early to celebrate. We must learn from the good experiences. We know that work-related crime is a complex issue where creative players move geographically and between trades, while also changing the nature of their criminal activities,” she says. She cannot yet say whether the falling numbers represent a trend.

The number of inspections carried out by the Labour Inspection Authority has fallen by nearly 25 % over the past six years. Vollheim says cooperation with other authorities and improved methods have helped in the fight against work-related crime. Serious players also need to use serious sub-contractors.

#### **Cheap to go private?**

“Ordinary consumers have a lot of responsibility when they buy services. They are responsible for depriving criminal players of a market. Consumers must think that if the price is so low it is too good to be true, it probably isn’t true.”

Vollheim believes there is increased awareness of work-related crime today.

“Authorities, organisations and the social partners must continue to work together on construction sites. Everyone points to Eastern Norway as a particularly challenging area. But work-related crime can be found everywhere.”

#### **More unannounced inspections**

Critics say the Labour Inspection Authority should carry out more unannounced inspections. But Vollheim feels that is simplifying things somewhat.

“We have had instances of workers fleeing construction sites even when we carry out unannounced inspections. So that is a problem we see whether or not we come unannounced.”

#### ***Could you carry out more unannounced inspections?***

“We carry out inspections based on an evaluation of risk and an evaluation of what kind of inspections are appropriate. We do this out of respect for the serious players in the labour

market. When we announce our visit, they get time to prepare and make time for talking to us,” she says.

“Announced inspections are used when help and instruction forms an important part of the visit, and when we want to assess the psycho-social or physical working environment for instance. In those instances, we often want to meet the management and safety representatives. If we arrive unannounced, we never know whether we will get what we want.”

The Labour Inspection Authority’s own figures show they carry out far more unannounced inspections than announced ones in the construction industry.

“We never announce our inspections when it comes to work-related crime in the construction industry. We always arrive unannounced.”

Vollheim is full of praise for the cooperation with the social partners, and also with the construction industry’s “*uropatrulje*” (disruption patrol) in Trondheim and Fair Play in Oslo.

#### **Hiding their tracks**

Torbjørn Graneggen heads the second-largest construction department at the Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions, representing 1,300 construction workers in Trondheim.

“Some of those operating in the market have become better at hiding their tracks. It is easy to draw up contracts and plans, but you don’t have to follow them up. We believe many publish numbers that do not reflect reality. When they are told the Labour Inspection Authority will be paying them a visit in three days’ time, they get ready. Sanctions are not sufficiently severe, and the fall in the number of companies getting caught does not tell the full story,” says Graneggen.

#### **More unannounced visits**

Are Sjøpstad is the managing director at the Builders’ service office (Byggmestrenes servicekontor) at Trondhjems builders’ guild.



“I think you will always have players in the market who find loopholes and commit criminal acts. There should be more disruption patrols like we have here in Trondheim, or Fair Play in Oslo. They help push the authorities turn their words into action. More control measures on construction sites would have helped the Labour Inspection Authority to act. The disruption patrols are financed by the construction industry itself, so we are in effect taking on the authorities’ responsibility,” he says.

“The Labour Inspection Authority should carry out more unannounced inspections. When you announce them in advance, all the criminals quickly disappear. But we can but hope the reduction in disclosed work-related crime turns out to be a trend,” says Sjøpstad.

### **New loopholes**

Vidar Sagmyr at the Construction industry’s disruption control in Trondheim has spent around three years working to unveil and report illegal activity on construction sites.

“We believe some of the reduction is a result of the criminals’ capacity to find new loopholes. We think the use of double contacts and so-called pay-back helps to cut work-related crime,” he concluded.

“We don’t think the falling numbers represent a trend. It can only last if both public and private procurers face ever stricter demands. We also need increasingly sharper inspections. And, sadly, the criminals have become better at keeping up their facades. Scaffolding and other visible signs now look better than before,” says Sagmyr.

“As a result, inspection authorities get fooled easier. When the facade looks decent, they drive on by.”

Sagmyr praises Norway’s work-related crime centres which have mapped the construction industry.

“But the penalty for cheating in the construction industry does not reflect the criminals’ potential gains.”





## Iceland's equal pay standard – the employer's best weapon?

From Reykjavík in the south to Sauðárkrókur in the north – companies across Iceland are introducing the equal pay standard which aims to eradicate gender pay gaps. But the reform also faces criticism from some who say it restricts employees' opportunities to secure pay increases and bonuses.

THEME

12.04.2019

TEXT GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: FRÍÐRIK FRÍÐRIKSSON

Right now, Iceland's largest businesses are introducing the equal pay standard. Nearly 80 companies have already introduced the standard, and more will do so later this year. The first ones have started to learn about what means in practice. Critics say the standard limits people's chances to get pay rises or bonuses.

"The only thing we learned is that there are very narrow pay gaps between people performing the same job. All secretaries are on the same wage, all specialists are paid the same and all managers are paid the same," says specialist Anna Lea Gestsdóttir.





Anna Lea works at the Icelandic Regional Development Institute Byggðastofnun in Sauðárkrókur in Northern Iceland. She is also the trade union representative there, and knows what staff think about the equal pay standard and how it benefits them. She wants more openness around how wages are set on different levels, and would also like to see more information about the equal pay standard and how it affects employees.

Anna Lea says workers feel they are stuck at certain wage levels, and that they do not know how to go about getting a pay rise, or whether it is at all possible to get one because the equal pay standard limits their opportunities. Anna Lea wants to know whether the equal pay standard makes it impossible for individual workers to secure a pay rise after getting further education for instance, or whether one workers' pay rise automatically leads to other workers on the same wage level getting the same rise.

Byggðastofnun is based in Sauðárkrókur in North-Western Iceland. The town's population is growing and has reached around 3,000 people. The economy is largely based around agriculture, but also fisheries. With a staff of 28, Byggðastofnun is one of the main employers in Sauðárkrókur. The town is best known among Icelanders for the country's sole remaining cooperative shop. Byggðastofnun's staff are all members of the medium-sized finance cooperation SFF – The Icelandic Financial Services Association, which counts 4,000 members in total.

### **A sceptical finance confederation**

“The equal pay standard is the best weapon employers have been handed for many decades,” says Friðbert Traustason, Chairman of The Confederation of Icelandic Bank and Finance Employees.

The equal pay standard is accepted in Iceland as a useful measure for securing equal pay between men and women. The trade unions have been positive to it, but sceptical voices exist in the finance confederation. The Chairman is one of them. He wonders whether the equal pay standard in fact benefits employers. All staff at Byggðastofnun are members of the finance confederation.

Friðbert points out that the certification legislation only certifies what different companies decide themselves, without any negotiations with employees. Companies are free to apply their own criteria and decide just how valuable jobs are. Should an economist working with customer service be paid differently from an economist working with stocks and shares? wonders Friðbert, and points out that when companies decide on how different roles should be rewarded, they might create an imbalance.

### **A break on private initiative**

Friðbert also believes the equal pay standard reduces people's private initiative at work. The standard means everyone should be paid the same for the same type of work. This might make it impossible to reward a good employee through a pay rise, or to pay a bonus to someone who shows initiative and works independently. Why should anyone work more and show enthusiasm if she or he stands no chance of getting rewarded for their extra effort?

“I think companies should be able to reward staff who show initiative and skills. The equal pay standard makes this impossible,” says Friðbert.

### **Will carry on developing the standard**

You would be excused for believing the equal pay standard means women get more pay, but that is not the case at the Regional Development Institute Byggðastofnun. Sigurður Árnason has worked there for 11 years as a specialist. A few years ago he had a small pay rise as a result of the equal pay standard.



*Sigurður Árnason got a pay raise thanks to the equal pay standard.*

The salary system is simple; all secretaries are paid the same, as are all specialists and all heads of departments. Byggðastofnun staff never discuss their wages, but Sigurður thinks the equal pay standard is a good thing. To maintain gender equality and equal pay, you measure how much should be paid for different jobs. If there are some faults in the system, you carry on developing the standard until it is perfect, he thinks.

### **Regional imbalance**

Gender pay gaps always represent a problem for society. Aðalsteinn Þorsteinsson, the Director General for Byggðastofnun, explains that regions become vulnerable and that there is a risk of more social problems if there is an imbalance between the genders. That is why it was natural for Byggðastofnun to become one of the first public offices to introduce the equal pay standard in Iceland.

They started back in 2012, and quickly realised that introducing the standard would be a quick job; there were hardly any pay differences between the genders at all within the organisation. The most difficult task was to classify the different roles, and to establish rankings.

### **Putting the wages in a system**

Aðalsteinn argues the equal pay standard puts the wages into a system where all procedures are documented and all salary decisions are justified. This gives the wage system a certain discipline. Staff can be safe in the knowledge that nobody will see the boss and get a random rise without it benefiting them too. But the system needs to be flexible enough to reward individual workers who do a good job.



*Aðalsteinn Þorsteinsson, Director General for Byggðastofnun*

Aðalsteinn has heard that employees generally wonder whether the equal pay standard will threaten their freedom to negotiate their pay.

“The wage system is based on stability and equality. This creates positivity and trust, but sadly, in practice salaries are still secret in Iceland. As long as this is the case, a certain level of distrust will remain,” he says.

Friðbert Traustason from The Confederation of Icelandic Bank and Finance Employees is not certain that the equal pay standard will close Iceland's pay gaps. Companies and state organisations that have been certified must be able to show there is no more than 3 % differences in wages. Yet all surveys have so far shown the same number – a difference of 10-15 %. This has yet to change.



## Digitalisation and new forms of employment: what's happening under the surface?

We have yet to see dramatic change to the way people are employed in the Nordic region as a result of digitalisation and new ways of organising work. But the nature of work will change nevertheless. This could lead to conflicts of interests and friction between different work groups, says Fafo researcher Jon Erik Dølvik. He heads a major research project which will inform Nordic governments and the ILO.

THEME

12.04.2019

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

On the surface it might look like the Nordic labour markets are enjoying a period of stability. 70 percent of people in work still have full-time jobs. Employment keeps growing. There is a lot of debate surrounding new forms of employment, exemplified by Uber, Foodora and other new service providers, yet these make up a small part of the total labour market.

“Our project is mainly concerned with examining what is happening in the largest, traditional part of the labour market – where most people work,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

He is one of the main authors behind the largest research project on the Nordic labour market model for many years. It was launched in 2017, and is financed by the Nordic Council



of Ministers. More than 30 researchers from universities and research institutions across five countries are taking part. The project is also part of the Nordics' contribution to the ILO's centenary celebrations in June this year.

The project will conclude in 2020 with a final report, but studies will be presented as they are ready. These will be summed up in shorter Policy Briefs and Working Papers aimed at decision makers in all countries.

### Many unpredictable forces

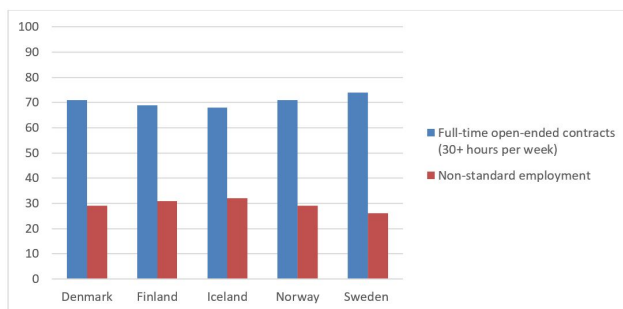
The labour market is impacted by many and unpredictable forces, however.

“What does Brexit really mean, or the dispute over whether Chinese Huawei should be allowed to develop 5G networks in Western countries? A further growth in globalisation and international trade or another protectionist set-back will have profound effects on the Nordic labour market,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

The researchers have focused their work around what they call seven pillars, ranging from digitalisation to labour law. Dølvik is one of the keynote speakers at the Future of Work conference in Reykjavik on 4th and 5th April. He will present preliminary results from three of the pillars.

The first one focuses on employment models. Anna Ilsøe and Trine P. Larsen from FAOS/University of Copenhagen have been looking at “Atypical labour markets in the Nordics: Troubled waters under the still surface”.

“They found that not much has changed since 2008 regarding the number of people in less permanent and stable employment, like those working part-time, for temping agencies or on digital platforms like Uber, on zero-hours contracts or as self-employed. On average, 70 % of the workers in the Nordic countries still have permanent full-time contracts. The number is slightly higher in Sweden and slightly lower in Iceland.”



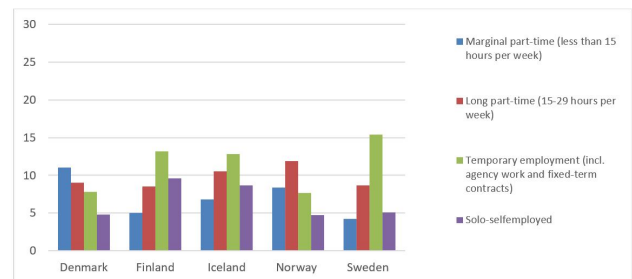
*The graph shows the distribution between standard work contracts and atypical work contracts in the Nordic countries. Source: FAOS/AKU*

Other types of employment make up 30 % of the labour market, including part-time work which is often considered to be normal in the Nordics.

The greatest difference is that fixed-term contracts – when the employer hire someone for a set amount of time or for a certain task – are far more common in Sweden. More than 15 % of that country's total labour force work on fixed-term contracts. The number is lower in the other Nordic countries. In Denmark and Norway only 8 % have fixed-term contracts.

Part-term contracts is more common in those two countries, however. One in five employees work less than 15 hours a week. Temping agency workers make up only one to two percent of the labour market.

“The self-employed are mostly found within three groups: farmers, fishermen and artists.”



*The different kinds of atypical work contracts and their distribution in the Nordic countries. Source: Fafo/AKU*

One of the other pillars is called “New Labour market agents”. Fafo's Kristin Jesnes coordinates the research related to this.

“Platform companies employ only a few people, and have not seen growth since 2017. The taxi service Uber has not exactly had an easy ride in the Nordic countries,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

Finland will soon introduce new legislation for taxi services, and the same is expected to happen in Norway before next year. The legislation is not coordinated across the Nordic countries, so conditions will vary between them.

### Collective agreements

“It is interesting to note that certain platform companies have signed collective agreements, including Danish cleaning firm Hilfr which has signed an agreement with 3F, the United Federation of Danish Workers.”

The agreement is narrow and covers people working for more than 100 hours on commission from the platform company. This will allow them to become employees of Hilfr, who then assumes the duty to provide wages, pensions and holiday pay.

“Whether platform workers can demand protection through a collective agreement has been an important legal issue. Some have argued this would amount to a cartel, which would be illegal under EU law.

“But a couple of recent legal cases have concluded that self-employed people under certain conditions can be part of collective negotiations under EU law. This is the case if they do not have any control over their working day because the platform company decides what work must be done, at what price and at what time.”

### **Upgrading or polarization?**

Jon Erik Dølvik has himself taken part in a study led by Tomas Berglund at the University of Gothenburg, called “Changes in the occupational structure of Nordic employment: Upgrading or polarization?”

“We look at whether we are seeing upgrading, with more high-skilled jobs and fewer low-skilled jobs in the labour market in total, or whether there is polarization, where medium-skilled jobs are disappearing while there is an increase in both high-skilled and low-skilled jobs.”

It turns out that the development can be described as polarized in Denmark, while Norway sees the highest degree of upgrading among the Nordic countries.

“Sweden is somewhere in the middle. There is upgrading within the public sector, and polarization in the private sector.”

The research group is coordinated by Bertil Rolandsson at the University of Gothenburg. It is also currently interviewing trade unions and leaders of companies manufacturing advanced machinery in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

“In this trade you find a positive attitude to new technology, where the thinking is that ‘there is no alternative to the introduction of new technology anyway’. These industries have already been investing heavily since the 80s and 90s in digitally controlled milling machines, automation and ITC-based processes.”

### **Transition period**

Digitalisation is meant to increase production and lower employment costs, yet it does not look like the latest wave of digitalisation has led to an employment reduction in this sector. Jon Erik Dølvik points out that the number of workers in Germany’s car industry has also grown, despite all the robots. The number is also stable in Sweden.

“This shows us that production is increasing. Yet we do not know how much of this is because you will have parallel production using different methods during a transition period, and whether employment will fall when the new technology has taken over fully.

“One thing is certain; the partners in the machine industry agree that you cannot introduce production-boosting changes without including the factory floor workers. Here, the micro-level of the Nordic model is very important. The clear, mutual respect between employees and employers is crucial if you want to succeed with restructuring that results in real increased productivity. When you introduce advanced welding robots, you also demand more from the industry workers tasked with looking after them.”

“In the past, engineers would come down to the factory floor and key in the instructions. Now the workers themselves are responsible for the programming, while the company leadership wants engineers to concentrate on research and innovation.

“Digitalisation of production is more than just replacing manpower with machines. It also means transitioning to a more team-based work process, where factory floor workers are given more responsibility, further education becomes key and the separation between workers and engineers is often erased,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

The Nordic labour markets might look calm on the surface, but changes that could create conflicts between different work groups are afoot. We are still waiting to see the effect of these changes, because this process is not yet fully realised.

“The consequences of technological change are always impacted by political decisions, institutional and other conditions which slow down the spread of the technology to the many smaller Nordic companies. The major machine manufacturers represent a small and very advanced part of the industry after all, and most companies have yet to invest on a similar scale,” concludes Jon Erik Dølvik.



## Outgoing Secretary General: keep the Nordic focus

The Nordic region and Nordic cooperation is held in high regard at home and abroad, so keep up the high levels of ambitions. That was the parting message for Nordic parliaments and governments from the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers Dagfinn Høybråten, as he stepped down after six years today.

### NEWS

15.03.2019

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: NORDEN.ORG

Dagfinn Høybråten from Norway left the Secretary General's office in Copenhagen for the last time on Friday afternoon with a smile. He leaves behind a renewed and vitalised cooperation between the Nordic countries, and can consider his main mission as accomplished.

"The Nordic governments have set the bar high for Nordic cooperation in recent years. The aim is for it to be the world's most integrated region, and that ambition has been followed up with concrete measures. The Nordic Council of Ministers has been run more efficiently, and we have seen a range of important initiatives for even closer Nordic operation," says Dagfinn Høybråten.



*The Nordics cooperate on many things, including a seed vault in Svalbard*



### His main achievement

As Secretary General he has taken the initiative to thoroughly analyse central Nordic areas of cooperation in order to bring to light any potential for even closer cooperation between the Nordics. This has resulted in more joint political agendas and more binding cooperation within both old and new areas.

He does not want to take all the credit for this success, but considers one of his main achievements to be the effort he put into producing thorough analysis of where and how the Nordic countries could cooperate closer and better.

“We found inspiration in the Nordic defence cooperation’s methodology, and looked at areas including health, working life, environment, social and working environments to identify unfulfilled potential for Nordic cooperation. This has helped us clear the way for political agreements and cooperation.”

Cooperation within the health sector and labour markets has been analysed, and later intensified. One new area for cooperation is digitalisation. Dagfinn Høybråten sees great potential here.

“We have set up a new council of ministers for digitalisation to help remove digital barriers and to leverage the Nordics’ leadership position in order to lead the realisation of a digital single market and a joint digital infrastructure. This has gigantic potential.”



### Keep the momentum going

The Nordic countries must be willing to invest in cooperation if the momentum in this and other areas of cooperation is to be kept up. Nordic cooperation needs to remain a political priority, points out Dagfinn Høybråten.

His parting advice to the Nordic countries’ governments and parliaments is “to keep the momentum going”

“Maintain the high levels of ambitions for Nordic cooperation which we have seen in recent years. Nordic citizens want this, and the rest of the world is also looking to the Nordics

for good solutions. So there is clearly a need to invest in Nordic cooperation.”

He does not want to say exactly where the Nordic cooperation goes from here, since he himself is on his way out. But one task must be to carry on highlighting the values of Nordic cooperation both inside and outside of the Nordic region, he believes.

“During my time as Secretary General we gave the branding of the Nordic region and Nordic cooperation a higher priority, because internationally there is a great thirst for all things Nordic – from food and TV series to paternal leave and the entire Nordic welfare model. Sadly, Nordic media do not share that curiosity.”

Nordic media showed little interest, for instance, when the Nordic Council of Ministers published a report which showed that the Nordic region might be the world’s happiest place, but that the joy is unevenly distributed. International media made it a big story, and only as a result of that did the story take off in Nordic media, he says.

It is difficult to highlight the good things about Nordic cooperation within the Nordics themselves, and Dagfinn Høybråten admits that the Nordic Council of Ministers has failed to find a good solution to this problem also during his time at the helm. But the Nordic Council of Ministers cannot solve this alone.

“Only political leadership can change the fact that Nordic cooperation does not make headlines in the Nordic region. Politicians in their respective countries must show that they take Nordic cooperation seriously by committing themselves to real, common policy developments,” says Dagfinn Høybråten.

Some critics claim Nordic cooperation suffers under a lot of expensive bureaucracy, but during Dagfinn Høybråten’s time, the Nordic Council of Ministers as an organisation has been streamlined and made more efficient. Decision-making and working methods have been simplified, there has been an improvement in performance management and administrative costs have been cut. He sees room for further improvement, but believes the process to be well underway. He thinks Nordic citizens are getting good value for money.

“Nordic cooperation costs each citizen on average 40 kroner (€4.10) a year – the price of a visit to the baker’s. I believe Nordic citizens are getting a lot of value for their money.”



### **An important leadership task**

During his time at the helm of the Nordic Council of Ministers, his biggest personal satisfaction has come from the work to develop and renew the organisation. This has been a source of joy and has helped him mature as a leader, he thinks.

“For me, the greatest joy has been to work together with such skilled and engaged people. This has helped me develop as a leader, and it has developed the organisation and the people within it.”

He will also get the chance to put his organisation leadership skills to good use when he enters into a new secretary general position on the 1st of April. This time it is in his home country of Norway, as leader for the humanitarian organisation Norwegian Church Aid. The organisation hopes Dagfinn Høybråten will help strengthen its position and reputation in the face of big demands for change and flexibility.

Before taking his position as Secretary General for the Nordic Council of Ministers, Dagfinn Høybråten was active in Norwegian politics for more than 30 years. He has been Minister for Health, Minister for Labour and Minister for Social Affairs, representing the Christian Democrats.

He is replaced as Secretary General for the Nordic Council of Ministers by Finland's Paula Lehtomäki.