

# From Equal Rights to Equal Possibilities

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Report from the Second Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability  
(Oslo, 19 April 2017)



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välfärdscenter

## **From Equal Rights to Equal Possibilities**

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## About the report

This report has been prepared by the Nordic Welfare Centre (NVC), based on the Second Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability (Oslo, 19 April 2017). The seminar was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers Committee of Senior Officials' for Labour (EK-A), and was organised by NVC in cooperation with the Competence Centre for Work Inclusion (KAI) at the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences.

The primary objective of the seminar was to contribute with a professionally and scientifically-based perspective on disability issues to the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers Programme for Cooperation on Labour and Employment Issues 2018-2021. The programme for cooperation is to describe the Nordic countries' principal challenges in the field of employment, and establish goals in the sub-areas: the labour market, working environment and labour law. The programme is scheduled to be adopted in the autumn of 2017.

This report presents recommendations concerning priorities within the programme, and recommendations concerning specific concrete measures within the framework of the programme. The measures will also be able to be included as part of a possible new Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability.

# Introduction

High employment is the cornerstone of the Nordic social welfare model. In the coming decades, an ageing population in all the Nordic countries will lead to a lower proportion of the population being engaged in gainful employment. Thus, the sustainability of the Nordic model is challenged. There is broad consensus that gainful employment in the groups with weaker ties to the labour market must be increased.

Today, people with disabilities, chronic illnesses and poor mental health have a significantly lower rate of employment than the population as a whole. This phenomenon has been stable over time. None of the Nordic social welfare states have been able to “resolve” this challenge. At the same time, there are a number of examples of successful practices in some areas or groups. The jointly building up of knowledge that is shared, along with the sharing of knowledge and exchange of information concerning Nordic experiences, not the least among employers, will provide the countries and individual parties with more tools and a broader knowledge base in the development of policies.

Strengthened inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market and the Nordic societies in general, emphasising the individual’s abilities and possibilities, is in line with the Nordic countries’ common values regarding equality, equal opportunity and equal treatment, and that everyone should be able to make their contribution to the society. Increased employment in this group will increase value creation in the individual countries, and strengthen the Nordic region’s overall level of expertise and competitiveness. The Nordic countries are working with both inclusive employment and disabilities in venues such as the Council of Europe, the EU’s institutions, and the ILO. A successful commitment to increased inclusion in the labour market and inclusive employment will help to strengthen the Nordic region’s international influence in this field.

All five Nordic countries and the three self-governing regions have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Article 27 of the Convention states that persons with disabilities have the right to work on an equal basis with others and that the parties must safeguard and promote that this right is realised in practice. Within two years after ratification,

and every four years thereafter, the countries are to report to the UN on the transposition and implementation of the Convention. This makes UNCRPD a natural starting point and a tool for Nordic cooperation in this field.

It is important to see new initiatives and projects in the context of Nordic efforts and initiatives related to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the UN's sustainability goals (especially no. 8 on full employment, and productive employment and decent work for all), as well as the EU's Accessibility Directive. Cooperation with other Nordic actors and projects in the business, education and social services sectors will also be relevant, for instance such matters relating to continuing education and lifelong learning. Thus, potential synergies could be exploited and duplication of work avoided.

Knowledge-based policy development requires access to expertise and user competence. The Committee of Senior Officials and the Nordic Council of Ministers' secretariats and institutions (such as the NVC) themselves have a vast amount of experience in the field of the employment and the labour market, but this should be supplemented by the knowledge and experience of the parties in the labour market, user organisations, local municipal federations and academic researchers. Dialogue over time will contribute to a stronger Nordic perspective in the work of these target groups.

The Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability , which is composed of a total of 16 governmental and civil society representatives from all the Nordic countries and self-governing regions, shall have advisory functions and be available for consultations for all sectors of Nordic cooperation, including the labour sector. Thus, the Council is a natural and central partner in the development of Nordic cooperation in the field and covers several of the above-mentioned groups, but not all.

# The Second Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability

The Second Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability, gathered in excess of 50 Nordic experts on employment and disability: Employers in the private and public sector who presented various successful inclusion models, officials of the Nordic and the national level, members of the Council for Nordic Cooperation on Disability, researchers in the field and representatives from NGOs. Among the lecturers, there was also a representative to present the ILO's work with [the ILO Global Business and Disability Network](#), as one successful example of concrete, international cooperation on this topic.

In addition to the primary objective of: 1) contributing with disability perspectives to the work of the new Nordic programme for cooperation for the labour sector, the seminar should 2) highlight concrete examples of inter-sectoral cooperation for an inclusive labour market; 3) highlight concrete examples of employers as change agents, and 4) contribute to the building up of Nordic networking in this area.

Based on this, the seminar was composed of plenary presentations and group work divided into two workshop sessions. In the plenary session, employers from the Nordic countries and Latvia presented their models for inclusion of people with disabilities in general or individual groups, such as young people with autism. The workshop groups were asked to identify actions or projects *at the Nordic level*, which can most effectively contribute to: a) inter-sectoral cooperation at the national level, and b) that several employers in the Nordic region active working with recruiting employees with disabilities.

Employers as change actors and inter-sectoral cooperation were topics that were highlighted by the participants at the First Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability, Employment and Disability – How do we make it work?, which was arranged in Helsinki on 19 May 2016. This seminar was organised by the NVC in cooperation with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

(THL) and the Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Approximately 20 of the participants at the seminar in 2016 also participated in the seminar held in 2017. The [Seminar Report](#) from the first seminar was transmitted to the Committee of Senior Officials in the autumn of 2016, and five concrete proposals for new initiatives in Nordic cooperation on employment and people with disabilities were presented. Some of the proposals have been developed further and made more specific in this report.



# Recommendations for a new Nordic programme for cooperation on Labour and Employment Issues

Based on the Second Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability, the NVC recommends:

1. that increased participation in the labour market and reduced unemployment among persons with disabilities is defined as one of the *principal challenges* in the new programme for cooperation.
2. that increased participation in the labour market and reduced unemployment among persons with disabilities is defined as one of the *objectives* in the *labour market* field, or alternatively as a *transverse objective*.
3. that the compilation and sharing of knowledge about methods and measures, as well as evaluations and implementation of these, will be a priority instrument.
4. that a disability perspective, in the same way as for sustainability, children and adolescents, as well as gender equality, is to be included in all initiatives and projects undertaken in connection with the programme.
5. that objectives and priorities in the programme are seen in the context of the Nordic countries' implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the associated reporting procedures.
6. that the objectives and priorities of the programme are linked to Agenda 2030 and the UN's Sustainability Goals, as well as the EU's Accessibility Directive.
7. that the programme for cooperation establishes that cooperation with the business enterprise sector is crucial for achieving the goal of increasing inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, and outlines how it can be facilitated at the Nordic level in the implementation of the programme.

8. that the programme for cooperation indicates that the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability will be an important partner and knowledge resource in the development of measures related to employment and disability, but that the implementation responsibility lies with the Nordic Council of Ministers.
9. that the programme outlines goals and measures for how the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council of Ministers' institutions as employers can work for increased hiring of persons with disabilities.

The recommendations assume that the programme for cooperation is structured in the same manner as the current programme, with primary challenges, principal priorities and objectives.

# Recommendations for specific Nordic projects

The recommendations have been prepared on the basis of the First Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability held in Helsinki on 19 May 2016, and the Second Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability in Oslo, 19 April 2017.

## Regular Venue

Among the proposals from the first report was a continuation of the expert seminars as a regular venue for governmental agencies (ministries and agencies in the labour, social and educational field, members of the EK-A and EK-S), employers' organisations, researchers (Nordic Network for Disability Research - NNDR), umbrella organisations for disability organisations (including youth organisations), the national associations of local and regional authorities, and trade union movement, as well as and the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability, coordinated by NVC. Such a venue brings these partners closer to the Nordic cooperation and efforts in general, and contributes to a clearer linkage between research, actual practice and the policy level. The first two Nordic Expert Seminars on employment and disability have been very well received by the target group. The combination of disseminating current research and allowing individual employers to present their successful, concrete models has worked very well.

The evaluations show that there is a desire to continue "a venue that genuinely works." In 2016, 95 percent of the participants who participated in the evaluation responded that *the Nordic perspective was relevant* for them, in 2017 the figure was 100 (!) percent. Likewise, a 95 percent (2016) and 96 percent (2017) of the participants responded that they would benefit greatly or somewhat benefit in their work due to their participation in the seminar. The participation of the business community and ILO in 2017 may be the reason why 96 percent of the respondents answered this year that they met people at the expert seminar that are or may be important contacts for further work in the field. This was an increase from 76 percent in 2016.

- The NVC recommends that the expert seminars be further developed into a regular venue for key parties in the field, possibly with a subsequent high-level meeting based on UNCRPD's Article 27 and the countries' efforts in implementing and monitoring this.

## Overviews of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge

Both expert seminars have highlighted a number of examples of successful Nordic practice. Most are linked to local initiatives and local projects. The participants in the expert seminars have highlighted the need for knowledge and targeted dissemination of knowledge in a number of areas. "The dissemination of solution knowledge," also to the individual employer, was a topic that was prioritised by the experts at the seminar in 2017. Several also expressed the wish for an open Nordic database with information about the methods, measures and projects developed and used in the field in different Nordic countries, regions and municipalities.

Some of the current topics for Nordic collections of knowledge that were highlighted in the expert seminars included:

- Local implementation and organisation of Individual Placement and Support (IPS)
- Trainee schemes for persons with disabilities, under the auspices of public and private employers
- Experiences from large multinational corporations working actively with the inclusion of persons with disabilities: How can the experiences and lessons learned be applied to the public sector in the countries?
- "Flex Job": Targeted efforts aimed at people with reduced working capacity, which vary over time
- Social entrepreneurs and the voluntary sector as employers, and an experience venue for people with disabilities

It may be beneficial the NVC and other institutions at the Nordic level coordinates gathering of knowledge, and a regular venue can be used to highlight current reports or collections of knowledge or experiences. Dissemination of knowledge to individual stakeholders and decision-makers in the countries is

nevertheless dependent upon existing national channels being used. The participants in the existing cooperation structures for national authorities and governments, and any new networks in the field, will thus become key parties and cooperation partners for the institutions that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge.

- The NVC recommends that resources be provided for regular collections of knowledge concerning a particular topic related to the inclusion of disabled people in the workplace and to distribute this with the assistance of relevant public authorities' and the employers' organisations existing channels at the national level. The collections of knowledge and experiences can be published in printed format or digitally.
- The NVC recommends that resources be provided to prepare a preliminary study that discusses whether it is possible to build an open Nordic database of methods, measures and projects related to participation in the labour market and disability. This should be done in dialogue with Nordregio and NordForsk.

## Initiate and facilitate networking

Seminars under the auspices of Nordic cooperation or its institutions can be a good starting point for investigating the interest in establishing networks. The establishment of networks to strengthen the exchange of research, experience and successful practice is a commonly used method of Nordic cooperation, also under the aegis of the NVC. Many networks focus on the sharing of experiences between similar actors in different Nordic countries, while others consist of researchers or practitioners and work on developing new knowledge and joint Nordic raising of the levels of competence. Nordic employers' networks for inclusion of people with disabilities should be able to have both of these functions.

The input from the two expert seminars indicates that there may be grounds for networks for sharing experiences concerning inter-sectoral collaboration, for the development of knowledge concerning inclusive leadership and recruitment, and for the development of knowledge concerning concrete habilitation and rehabilitation models such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS).

A prerequisite for sustainable networks is that the working form and the professional content are relevant to the members' tasks and responsibilities at the national level. At the same time, facilitation resources are often required at the Nordic level. The agenda should be set by the network members themselves, while the role of the NVC and corresponding actors will be facilitators.

At the second Nordic Expert Seminar, there was great interest in the ILO's presentation of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, which is "a unique worldwide network of multinational enterprises, national employers' organizations, business networks and disabled person's organizations (DPOs) working in collaboration to promote disability inclusion in the workplace."

This network currently has a European regional section which meets annually. Telenor is the only Nordic representative, other than two disability organisations. The expert seminars have shown that there are a number of similar initiatives under the auspices of major Nordic employers, with little or no knowledge of each other. The Nordic model of tripartite cooperation on matters concerning employment and the Nordic countries' similar systems for support for inclusion in the individual workplace is a natural background for a separate Nordic regional section of the network.

- The NVC recommends that a Nordic meeting for stakeholders be held to investigate the interest in networking for various topics related to employment and people with disabilities.
- The NVC recommends that the possibilities for a Nordic regional section of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network be investigated, in cooperation with the ILO. An annual meeting could be scheduled in connection with the European regional meeting, and facilitated by the NVC.

## Measures for a joint Nordic statistical basis

A proposal in the report from the first expert seminar was that efforts be made to improve the joint Nordic statistical basis. An outline for a cooperative effort between the NVC, NOSOSKO and possibly NordForsk, Nordregio and the national statistical agencies was prepared.

The Nordic Network for Disability Research (NNDR) was mentioned as a current cooperative partner outside the official Nordic cooperative work.

In Norway in 2016, Statistics Norway (SSB) published the report *Disabled people on the labour market in Norway and Sweden in 2015 – Causes for the different proportion of employed persons*. The report examines possible real differences in the labour market and possible inequalities in the way that employment among persons with impaired ability to work is measured. An expansion of the survey to the other Nordic countries would be of great value for further research and policy development. Not to mention, all Nordic countries will benefit from having access to this kind of statistics as background material for reporting to the UN Committee on the implementation of Article 27 of the UNCRPD. A possible further development could be a comparison of how the social insurance systems in the various countries stimulate work for people who need facilitation or some form of assistance.

In April 2017, NVC coordinated a Nordic meeting on indicators related to UNCRPD, where representatives of national authorities and the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability participated. The meeting was partly funded by NOSOSKO and NOMESKO. Nordic co-operation in the field of statistics was also the theme of a side event at the Conference of States Parties held in June 2017, organised by the Norwegian presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Thus, there already exists a certain cooperative structure, in addition to parties such as NordForsk and NOSOSKO, which can form the basis for further prioritisations and efforts for better joint Nordic statistical basis.

- The NVC recommends that funding be provided for a preliminary study on the establishment of a comparable Nordic statistical basis related to labour market participation among people with disabilities.
- The NVC recommends that funds be used for a project to identify and map out how the Nordic social welfare systems stimulate work for people with disabilities and/or reduced working capacity.

## Research on inter-sectoral cooperation

The Nordic Council of Ministers has initiated a three-year (2017-20) project on inter-sectoral interaction for vulnerable children and young people up to 24 years old. The project will contribute to the sharing of experiences and learning about how different levels of administration and sectors can best implement their efforts, and consists of national cases that will be developed and tested in practice. The follow-up research will take the form of an evaluation that describes the cases and inter-sectoral cooperation in each case, challenges and strengths, as well as the user's perspective. The evaluation will present some overall conclusions about organisation and working methods. The model could be used for a similar project related to local inter-sectoral cooperation for inclusion in the labour market of persons with disabilities.

The Finnish initiative on inter-sectoral measures for people with reduced working capacity, where coordinators follow up the individual participants in the project, includes a website ([tietyoelamaan.fi](http://tietyoelamaan.fi)) with continuously updated information by and for the coordinators. A research project as outlined above could be followed up with a similar Nordic knowledge bank.

- The NVC recommends funding for a project on inter-sectoral cooperation related to the employment inclusion of persons with disabilities, similar to the project on inter-sectoral interaction for vulnerable children and young people.

## Nordic prize for the promotion of inclusive employment

In 1995, the Nordic Council established an environmental award of distinction, in order to strengthen awareness for environmental and nature protection initiatives in the Nordic region, the Nordic Council Environment Prize. The prize is awarded to a Nordic organisation, company, or individual "for exemplary efforts to integrate respect for nature and the environment in their business or activities, or for some other form of an extraordinary initiative on behalf of nature and the environment." A similar prize for the promotion of inclusive employment could assist in putting this issue on the agenda, building up prestige concerning this field, and make it more attractive for Nordic businesses to work actively with inclusion and inclusive employment.



- The NVC recommends that the Nordic Council be encouraged to assess the establishment of a Nordic prize for the promotion of inclusive employment, modelled on the Nordic Council Environment Prize.

# Literature

[Employment and Disability – How do we make it work? Seminarrapport fra Det første nordiske ekspertseminaret om arbeidsliv og funksjonshinder \(Helsinki, 19 May 2016\) \[Norwegian version\]](#)

[Employment and Disability – How do we make it work? Seminar report from The First Nordic Expert Seminar on Employment and Disability \(Helsinki, 19 May 2016\) \[English version\]](#)

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