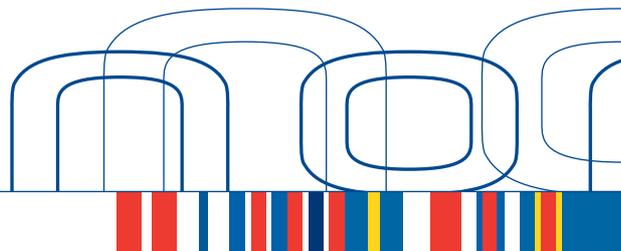




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Nordic Council of Ministers

FACTS ON NORDIC CO-OPERATION



The Nordic labour market and international developments

The primary objectives of Nordic co-operation in the labour market and the working environment in 2005–2008 are to accelerate the process of change and act as a forum for debate about developments outside the region.

Nordic co-operation can be divided into two main areas: labour policy in the Nordic region; and the Nordic region's interaction with the EU and other international bodies.

At Nordic level, the main activities around labour policy are the mutual exchange of information, and discussions on how to increase the size of the workforce in order to counteract demographic trends. A further important theme is the question of how to achieve full employment in the Nordic region during the process of globalisation. The workforce needs to be better qualified, sick leave needs to be reduced, sustainable working-environment strategies defined, and new ways of working devised.

Outside the Nordic region, the most important issue is the ability of the Nordic countries to exert influence within the EU, for example, at councils of ministers. MR-A (the Council of Ministers for the Labour Market and Working Environment) provides a forum within which to work on policy implementation, and the Baltic States have also been invited to take part in this forum. MR-A also coordinates Nordic co-operation in other international forums, such as the ILO, the OECD and Baltic bodies.

Activities

There is a long tradition of joint Nordic policies on the labour market and working environment. The 1954 Nordic Labour Market Agreement entitles Nordic citizens to live and work in other Nordic countries. This was followed in 1989 by an agreement that reinforces and redefines co-operation, and which focuses on continuous improvements to the working environment in all the Nordic countries.

Three central principles have characterised the Nordic model for the labour market and working environment over the years:

- the widespread use of collective bargaining instead of legislation so that decisions are taken as closely as possible to those directly involved; this approach requires close co-operation between management, labour and government
- an active labour market policy, based on the concept that the unemployed have duties as well as rights; elements of this active policy include job centres, vocational training and job training
- the guarantee of a safe and healthy working environment for all.

Organisation and budget

MR-A has an annual budget of approximately DKK 12 million. Half of this is earmarked for political initiatives laid down by the Programme for Co-operation 2005-2008 and for the priorities of the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Council of Ministers has set up a committee of senior officials to co-ordinate work in the sector. Practical policy implementation is the remit of five permanent expert sub-committees, which draw up submissions for the ministers and launch projects based on political priorities. As well as these permanent structures, interdisciplinary working parties or contact groups may also be set up to study areas of common interest. Co-operation with management and labour is one of the Council of Ministers' top priorities.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat in Copenhagen helps organise a number of annual meetings and conferences to help maintain contacts with management and labour in the Nordic Region. To aid it in this work, the labour market unit in the Council of Ministers' Secretariat has appointed six secretaries in the Nordic countries.

The Council of Ministers also supports the Nordic mobility programme on the labour market, Nordjobb, and publishes the journals *Arbejdsliv i Norden* (Working Life in the Nordic Region) and *Nordic Labour Journal*.

Nordic Institute for Advanced Training in Occupational Health (www.niva.org) is based in Helsinki. NIVA's main job is to promote Nordic occupational health qualifications, and devise further and continuing education courses for researchers and other experts in the working environment and labour market.



Further information

Further information about the Nordic labour market and working environment is available on the Council of Ministers' website www.norden.org.

Many topical issues relating to the labour market and working environment are also covered in the journals *Arbejdsliv i Norden* and *Nordic Labour Journal*.

Addresses & information

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