



The future of work – Technology for people

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There is nothing new to the fact that technological developments mean that old jobs change or disappear while at the same time new ones come into existence. **What is new is the pace of structural change.** Artificial Intelligence, Internet platforms, advanced robots and Big Data are lurking around the corner. These are only some examples of innovations and technologies that are becoming increasingly sophisticated and which have a huge potential to change working life and society. New technology, digitalisation, automation and robotisation will affect both the public and the private sectors, service industries as well as retail trade and industrial production, irrespective of skills or educational qualifications.

In the Nordic trade union movement we have a positive view of new technology and structural change. One explanation for this is that the Nordic model with its strong autonomous social partners contributes through collective agreements and retraining programmes to the fair distribution of the gains throughout society while at the same time increased productivity helps to enhance competitiveness. New technology together with the Nordic model can help to attain the goals of sustainable development and the 'green shift'.

Our societies have undergone major changes in the past, changes from which we have emerged with even greater strength. The introduction of new technology in the Nordic labour market has made it possible to improve the working environment, raise wages and enhance welfare. What is decisive – today as in the past – is that wage earners are part of this development and that the gains from new technologies are shared fairly and equitably – that technology is for people and inspires confidence in the future.

We believe that the focus of the Council of Nordic Ministers on working life in the future is important, not least because of the pace of structural change. The vision of “The Nordic-Baltic region: a digital frontrunner”, the Nordic conferences on the theme of “the Future of Work” and the contribution to the ILO’s centenary celebrations that the Council of Ministers intends to record will promote a sustainable labour market and the fair and equitable distribution of the gains and benefits of new technology. To attain this it is important for the Nordic contribution to focus on decent jobs and welfare, regulations and investment.

Decent jobs and welfare

- The foundation for a competitive and economically just society is a sustainable, inclusive and equitable labour market with respect for trade union democratic rights and freedom. Social dialogue and a fair labour market is decisive if the gains from new technology are to be distributed fairly and equitably. All the work around the current and future labour market should therefore enhance and stimulate social dialogue and the cooperation of the social partners.
- Employment policies must be dynamic and active in relation to all groups in the labour market. Needs for education and skill enhancement will increasingly arise when periods of unemployment occur because of cuts, changes and adaptations in the labour market. Fundamental labour market security must be assured and enhanced through sound unemployment benefit schemes.
- The risks of increasing inequality must be taken into account. Digitalisation must not be allowed to mean that productivity gains are concentrated in fewer and fewer hands and that new jobs are so badly paid or offer so few working hours that workers cannot live on them. In a digitalised labour market the consequences for taxation revenues and welfare, such as social and unemployment benefit schemes, must always be taken into account. Sound pay and employment conditions are decisive for the entire community – now and in the future.
- New technology must contribute to improved working environments. Greater flexibility and efficiency must be supplemented by effective measures to reduce stress and physical wear and tear. The psychological work environment is just as important as the physical one.

The Council of Nordic Trade Unions is an umbrella organisation for the Nordic trade union movement with almost 9 million affiliated trade union members. The Council has sixteen member organisations consisting of blue-collar, white-collar and academic organisations in the Nordic countries. The Council's task is to ensure close cooperation between its members, cooperation intended to advance the interests of trade union members in a broad sense through the exchange of experience, lobbying and collaboration around shared objectives. The members of the Council are *LO*, *FTF* and *Akademikerne* in Denmark; *SAK* and *STTK* in Finland; *Samtak* on the Faroe Islands; *SiK* on Greenland; *ASÍ*, *BSRB* and *BHM* on Iceland; *LO*, *YS* and *Unio* in Norway and *LO*, *TCO* and *Saco* in Sweden.

- New technology must not involve compromise with a sound labour market. It must add to it. New technology must create better lives for people and better working conditions for employees..

Regulations

- Consistent and sustainable structures for new technology must be in place. There has to be scope for new technology in legislation – but we must also ensure compliance with laws in force and that tax is paid. In the EU and Europe the Nordic countries must be at the cutting edge when it comes to sensible and modern legislation in a digital world.
- Sustainable structures also mean well-defined and predictable working conditions. Here it is important for the Nordic countries to speak resolutely about the taxation of new business models and working conditions for those who work in them. Those forced against their will to be self-employed – “false self-employment” – and employees in the platform economy must not be obliged to work in a grey area of labour law, and national and international regulations have to be drawn up so that international companies – and digital platforms as well – contribute to society. Social fraud is a problem for the entire social economy as it leads to reduced tax revenues and unfair competition for businesses.
- IT security and Big Data are becoming increasingly important in the labour market. New technology must be developed that focuses on providing individuals with control of their own personal data. Ethical principles, data security, “Privacy by design” and citizens’ control of the data that is collected is decisive.

Investments

- Invest in new technology. New technology is the path to increased productivity that at the same time offers an improved labour market. It increases competitiveness, fills order books and creates new companies while established ones can continue to develop.
- The public sector should invest in new technology and new solutions that help the Nordic welfare states to continue to be sustainable and inclusive.
- Invest in education – for our children and young people, for those who have lost their jobs and for those who are already in the labour market. To enable the development of our skills throughout our working lives, even when we are adults, lifelong learning is required with continuing education that lives up to its name. This requires better, flexible programmes at all levels and more professional development and further education for those whose jobs once required human hands but have now been replaced or supplemented by machines.
- According to the OECD and the IMF, economies with a long tradition of social dialogue, a high level of trade union organisation and extensive collective agreement coverage are characterised by high productivity, great competitiveness and a great capacity to act as buffers in times of economic turbulence. The arguments for stimulating social dialogue and cooperation between the social partners are manifold. For this reason the Nordic countries should advocate the introduction by the EU within the framework of the impending long-term budget (from 2021) of a completely new fund for social partner cooperation. The purpose of this fund should be to encourage the creation, increase the capacity and development of a sturdy, independent and effective system for social dialogue in the EU states where this is needed.
- For the same reasons as above the Nordic countries should support and advocate implementation of the “Global Deal – Together for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth” initiative, nationally, regionally and globally. This will create favourable conditions between employers, employees and governments and can contribute to labour markets that are peaceful and attractive to investors and also encourage competitiveness and improve economic stability.