



NORDENS FACKLIGA SAMORGANISATION
POHJOLAN AMMATILLINEN YHTEISJÄRJESTÖ
COUNCIL OF NORDIC TRADE UNIONS

ACTION PLAN FOR BALTIC-NORDIC COOPERATION 2018-2021



The Nordic commitment to collaboration and strengthening trade unions in the Baltic States stays firm since the Baltic independence 1991 and many lessons have been learned from joint projects. NFS and the Baltic Trade Union Confederations have during 2016-2018 had a close cooperation focused on fundamental labour rights based on the NFS project on “Workers’ rights in the Baltics”. This action plan has been based on the findings and conclusions in the project publication “An analysis of the Baltics - Determining whether any given legislation or practice complies with the ILO Core Conventions and Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation”. It has been prepared by a special Nordic–Baltic task force with the purpose of creating a time-bound action plan for the further development of cooperation in the region and its suggestions are now subject for discussion in NFS and the Baltic trade unions.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The conclusions of the NFS project on Workers’ rights in the Baltics shows that there is still a lot of work to be done to improve fundamental workers’ rights in the Baltic Countries. Theoretically compliance in legislation with fundamental workers’ rights, as defined by the ILO, is generally good but in practice there is a problem of compliance and enforcement in many areas. Specific problems in the different countries, as well as common issues.

Some of the common problems identified in the project include restrictions on what can be negotiated through collective bargaining in public sector and the apparent lack of dispute-settlement mechanisms – Two observations that warrant further discussion and evaluation by experts.

Other problems raised in the project are problems of access to justice and enforcement of law also exist in the Baltics, even though they look different in the countries. Estonia has no arbitration body in case of strike ban and lacks an effective and substantive law for protection of union representatives. Latvia experiences challenges regarding sectoral collective bargaining and in Lithuania legal procedures concerning labour law have in some cases been complicated to the extent that they have been rendered useless. The newly established double representation system of employees complicates the situation even more.

All countries also have examples of cases that could most probably be submitted to the ILO supervisory machinery.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

The aim of this action plan is to present concrete measures for improving workers' rights through international cooperation in the region and reaching the goal of a fair working life where fundamental rights are respected and upheld throughout the region, both regarding legislation, but also effective in practice. This goal requires functioning social dialogue, cooperation and access to justice.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

The plan includes several concrete actions that aim at improving the regional cooperation to support and strengthen Baltic trade unions and their work for fundamental rights. It has been divided into four subareas focusing on improved cooperation between leadership, general support for capacity building and cooperation at expert level, Improved cooperation on cross-border-issues and intensified international cooperation. The plan also identifies the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network as a significant forum for developed cooperation in all areas.

IMPROVED COOPERATION BETWEEN NORDIC AND BALTIC LEADERSHIP

Strengthening the ties between Nordic and Baltic Trade Union leadership will improve mutual understanding, information exchange and enable development of common strategies for the region. To improve the dialogue NFS and the Baltic Unions will:

- ✓ Arrange an annual meeting for Nordic and Baltic leadership in connection to one of the NFS board meetings
- ✓ NFS board will have cooperation with the Baltics as a permanent agenda item in their meetings
- ✓ NFS and Baltic Unions will arrange an annual activity in connection to the World Day for Decent Work
- ✓ NFS will invite Baltic leaders to the NFS congress that is arranged every 4 years
- ✓ NFS and its member organisations can also give support, cooperate and help coordinate Nordic contacts and mentors at request from Baltic Unions
- ✓ Continued prioritizing of BASTUN-Meetings, especially the High Level meetings that are arranged every 3-4 years

GENERAL SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AND IMPROVED COOPERATION BETWEEN NORDIC AND BALTIC TRADE UNION EXPERTS

The NFS and Nordic trade unions will support capacity building in Baltic Trade Unions through a number of different measures.

- ✓ NFS gives support, cooperates and helps coordinate Nordic contacts and mentors at request from Baltic Unions for lawyers and trade union employees.
- ✓ NFS helps coordinate support and contacts for Baltic study trips or short-term expert-exchanges to the Nordics and vice versa.
- ✓ Nordic expert groups will invite Baltic experts to Nordic meetings
- ✓ The Nordic ILO-meeting in the autumn 2018 will be arranged in Riga to enable participation from Baltic trade unions.
- ✓ The Nordic Geneva Highschool board will discuss the possibility to include a Baltic participant in the annual program.
- ✓ Baltic and Nordic Youth Committee presidents will be invited to the Decent Work Conference
- ✓ The Baltic Youth Committee will invite Nordic youth representatives to annual Baltic trade union youth forum.
- ✓ Baltic trade unions will invite leaders, trainers or experts from the Nordics to trade union activities and trainings. NFS can help coordinate contacts.

IMPROVED COOPERATION ON CROSS-BORDER-ISSUES

The regional dialogue regarding prioritized cross-border issues has been identified as an area for development.

- ✓ The secretariats of NFS and Nordic Branch Unions can assist in finding contacts in Nordic trade unions and multinational enterprises when problems arise or need to be discussed.
- ✓ NFS and Baltic Unions will discuss cross-border collective agreements as part of the BASTUN-agenda
- ✓ NFS, Baltic Trade Unions and Nordic Branch federations will discuss a method for developing better cross-border connections in Nordic transnational companies active in the Baltics. For example, in transportation, banking, media, telecommunications, food and wood processing industries and commerce.

STRATEGIC COOPERATION ON INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS WITH DIFFERENT INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Strategic cooperation with different international organisations that are active in the region has a big potential in developing a fairer working life and balancing trade union and business interests. International organisations such as ILO/Actrav and OECD/TUAC as well as Global, European and Nordic trade union federations can all play different and strategic roles in spreading information and creating pressure for change. The supervisory machinery of the ILO and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Companies are also strategic tools that can be used in this work.

- ✓ NFS will make a translation into Baltic national languages of a basic ILO-information brochure
- ✓ NFS and the Baltic trade unions will continue cooperation with ACTRAV/ILO on improving international labour standards
- ✓ NFS and the Baltic trade unions will work to keep International labour standards and fundamental rights on the BASTUN agenda
- ✓ Nordic and Baltic Unions will arrange a joint training for the strategic use of OECD guidelines for multinational companies and company due diligence obligations
- ✓ Nordic and Baltic unions take part in the trade union exchange network on due diligence and the Guidelines coordinated by TUAC.¹
- ✓ NFS and Baltic trade unions will discuss organising Nordic-Baltic common capacity trainings through ETUI Baltic trade unions will discuss the possibility of engaging in the ITUC Global Organising Academy

THE WAY FORWARD

This cooperation plan is active in the years 2018-2021 and will then be discussed and reviewed in a joint conference in the autumn 2021. A mid-way meeting will be arranged in 1,5 years, for example as a Nordic-Baltic meeting back-to-back with the BASTUN spring meeting 2020.

¹ The two suggestions involving cooperation with TUAC are still awaiting final approval from the TUAC secretariat