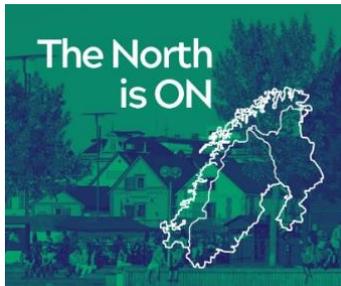


ACADEMIC NORTH CALL FOR ACTION 10.9.2020 - a joint initiative of the summit participants

ACADEMIC NORTH SUMMIT

AUGUST 27, 2020
OULU, FINLAND



Advancing Cross-border Labor-based Mobility of Academically Educated People and Equal Recruiting Practices in the Arctic North

ACADEMIC NORTH CALL FOR ACTION

The Nordic Passport Union was established among Nordic countries in the early 1950s, and since then, citizens of any Nordic country have been able to reside or work in any other Nordic country without having a residence or work permit. Yet, moving to another country or working across a border still burdens people with multiple problems. For example, getting a work contract usually requires a national social security number, which takes weeks or even months to acquire. Moreover, international taxation is complicated, and finding the right information is challenging. The same applies to issues related to social security, such as parental leave and healthcare. Even decades later, the consequences of working in other countries can create issues with people's national pensions.

Meanwhile, modern information technology has introduced new flexibility to working life. Remote work has become increasingly popular, and in many cases, physically going to an office every day is no longer necessary. However, taxation and social security laws and regulations have not kept pace with this development. Working from home when one's employer is in another country has complex repercussions in multiple sectors. This has become painfully clear in the border regions during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people have been ordered to stay home if possible and have been advised to avoid unnecessary border crossings. The pandemic has made borders visible once again, though paradoxically, the situation may lead to an even more borderless North due to increases in remote work and study.

Northern areas in Finland, Norway and Sweden face various challenges: the population is ageing rapidly, some areas suffer from negative net inflow and others lack a skilled workforce; still others have a surplus of highly educated people, which leads to unemployment and increases migration from the areas. Some of these problems could be alleviated by increasing cross-border mobility and strengthening the pan-national Northern job market.

Cross-border mobility is not equally accessible to all genders, as was made visible in recent study by Kagnissoupke (2019). However, recruitment practices can be developed to decrease gender segregation and promote equal opportunities. The information and communication technology sector, ICT and various applied ICT sectors are of particular importance and offer employment opportunities for the North; 'at the same time, gender inequality manifested as gender segregation is more visible in these sectors than in others. There is a pressing need to address the issue of gender equality in order to create equal opportunities, diversity and future prospects for a flourishing meaningful life in North.

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This call is a message from participants of the Academic North Summit, which was organised by the University of Oulu, the Luleå University of Technology and the Arctic University of Norway. The summit is also associated with the Academic (un)employment and mobility in the Arctic North – a joint socially responsible approach –project (2018-2020), which is funded by Interreg NORD program. The message is directed at the Nordic Council and Nordic countries, the Arctic Five universities and other higher education institutions in the region as well as the public sector, private companies and other stakeholders. This message is also meant to inspire future Nordic Council presidents to take forward action on cross-border, labour-based mobility as it pertains to academics.

Main Message

Discouraging and unjust conditions exist in the borderless North. Therefore, we Academic North Summit participants should voice our common experience. The Academic North Call for Action is one of the outcomes of the Academic North project and a means of generating awareness of the issues below.

1- Regional development

A Joint Interreg Nord regional plan is needed to initiate joint activities and bring cohesion to increasingly systematic mutual communication and collaboration among the Arctic Five universities, private companies, public services and other stakeholders. The regional role of the Arctic Five universities is that of an important research, development and innovation umbrella organisation and should be appropriately recognised. The Arctic Five universities' Virtual HR Resources Initiative would facilitate a supply of highly skilled academics to meet the needs of the work life and contribute to the region. Furthermore, the Arctic Five universities, private companies, public services and stakeholders in the region should strive for equalitarian and equitable recruitment principles. Gender equality, particularly in the ICT sector and other more applied technology intensive fields, should be pursued more strongly.

2- Socially sustainable development

Gender equality should be the priority in regional development plans. Employers in the Interreg Nord region should revise their recruitment practices according to gender equality and diversity perspectives. They should systematically strive for gender equality and proactively promote it, including through more equal distribution of parental leave between men and women and more equal distribution of costs between both parents' employers. Gender disaggregated HR statistics, gender equality and diversity plans are also needed, including the development of gender responsible recruitment practices, the monitoring of their execution and the co-designing of further actions. The Arctic Five universities, private companies and employment services in the region should announce all the vacancies they have on one joint platform. The 'North is ON' online social media initiative could be utilised to this end.

3- Cross-border, labour-based mobility

The Nordic Council and national Nordic parliaments should strive to diminish border-related bureaucracy and other practical obstacles that prevent or discourage people from cross-border work, and it should find new and creative ways of making cross-border mobility easier. The current situation is bureaucratic, and it is difficult for individuals to find the right information on the rules and regulations that apply to their situation. Information needs to be clear, easily accessible and

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available in multiple languages, including English. We need new, ambitious and creative ways of defining the region, its population and their rights by diminishing the border-related bureaucracies of Nordic countries (permissions, taxation, social security, etc.). One example of such creative solutions is the so-called borderland passport idea which could be expanded to cover the people who are working cross-border. Regional authorities should initiate new and creative ways of resolving issues that arise from cross-border mobility, such as taxation, pensions, social security, insurance and trade union memberships. Regional authorities and actors play a significant role in making the challenges visible on a national and international level.

4- E-development

Utilising e-affordances, e-working, e-learning and e-living has led to a beyond-borderless North. However, working remotely for a foreign employer can cause immense difficulties in terms of taxation, social security and insurance. Since remote work will likely become more common, these challenges need to be quickly resolved. The Nordic Council and national Nordic parliaments should find new and creative ways of making cross-border labour easier by quickly enacting innovations like e-ID. Covid-19 has made borders visible once more, as people are restricted from crossing them. Physical distancing has led people to work and study remotely, and this development will likely continue no matter how the pandemic evolves. By resolving these problems and lifting up the existing affordances and possibilities drafted in the North Appeal initiative too, we can make the northernmost North a more appealing place to live, work and study, which will lead to increased vitality in the area and a better quality of life for locals.

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