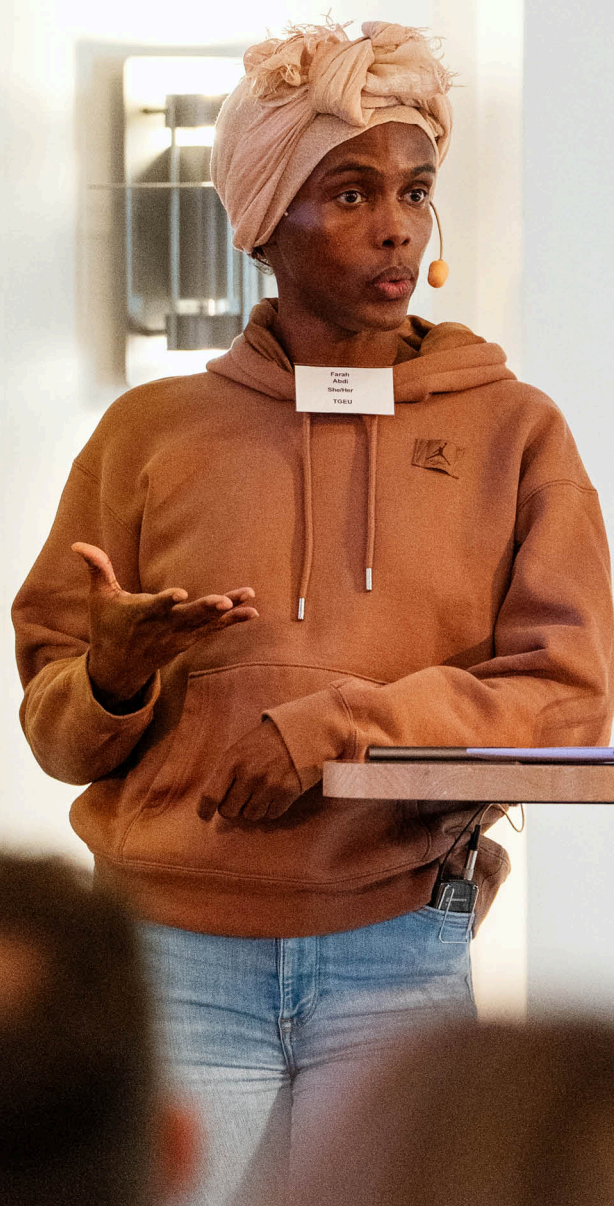


A BETTER WORKING LIFE FOR TRANS PEOPLE

Key messages from the Nordic Conference Improving
Working Life for Trans People on 23 October 2024



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Introduction: 'Work is a trans issue'

This publication summarises the main messages from a conference on working life conditions for trans people, held in Stockholm on 23 October 2024. A trans person is someone whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.

The conference was based on the knowledge review '[Trans People's Working Life Conditions in the Nordic Region\[F1\]](#) ', published in spring 2024 by Nordic Information on Gender (NIKK[F2]). The knowledge review compiles results from previous Nordic studies and provides an overall picture that shows that trans people face particular obstacles in their working lives. Prejudice and poor treatment affect recruitment processes as well as work environments and opportunities for career development, which has concrete impacts, not least on transgender people's finances.

The conference highlighted the responsibility of employers and trade unions in particular. Several experts also emphasised the need to tackle disinformation and negative stereotypes about trans people that find their way into the workplace.

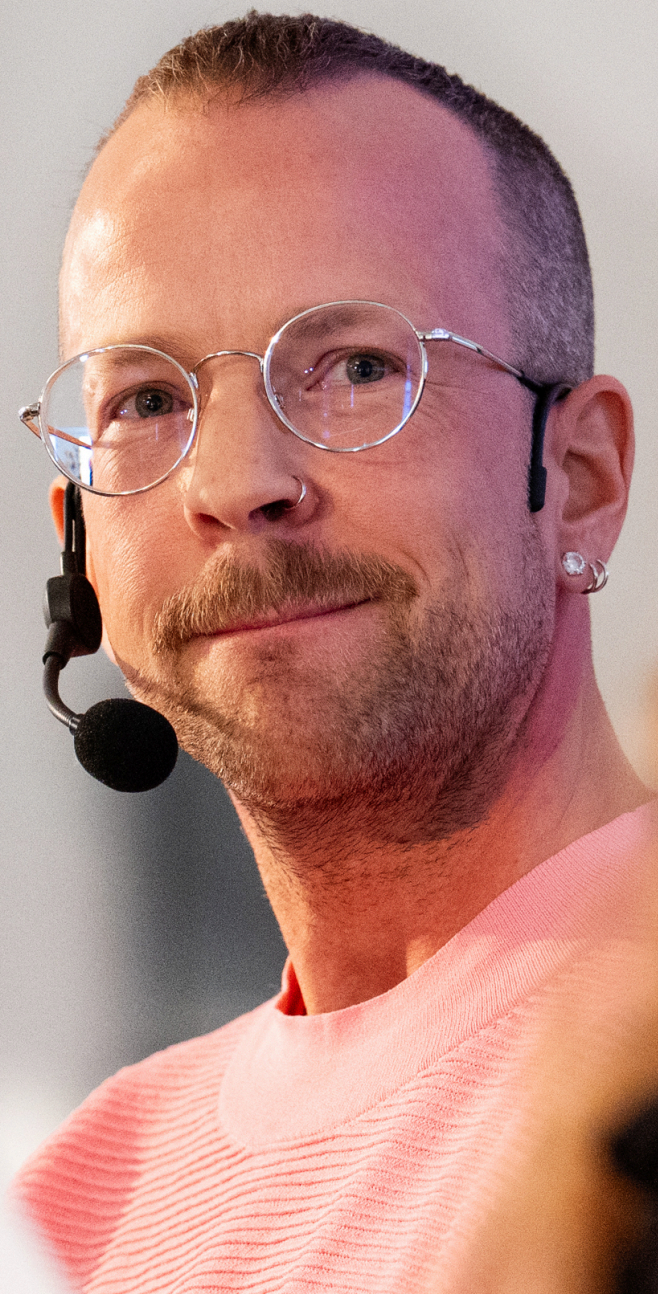
– Working life does not take place in a vacuum but is of course influenced by what happens in the surrounding society, noted conference moderators El Häkkinen (SE) and Uglá Stefanía Kristjónudóttir (IS) in their opening speech.

They also offered a reminder of the diversity of experiences within the transgender community, and that some within the community face multiple types of oppression:

– Some of us are trans people facing homo- and biphobia, ableism, racism, sexism – made-up borders with fatal outcomes. Some of us belong to indigenous peoples, living under the rule and domination of colonial powers. Some of us do not conform with the gender binary and are not legally recognised by the Nordic states, with Iceland as the only exception. Some of us live long lives; some of us die far too young. Some of us are extremely rich; some of us live in poverty.

"One thing that has a big impact on everyone's lives is work – to have one or not, if and how much you get paid for it, and how the work environment is."

El Häkkinen & Uglá Stefanía Kristjónudóttir



In recruitment: Discrimination

Several studies highlighted in the Nordic knowledge review 'Trans People's Working Life Conditions in the Nordic Region' indicate that unemployment is about twice as high among trans people as in the rest of the population. The review also shows that trans people often do not work in their field of education. Insecure employment is also more common than for cis people, i.e. people whose gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned to them at birth.

Discrimination against trans people is prohibited in all Nordic countries, but it still persists. This is shown, for example, in a study presented at the conference in Stockholm: '[Hiring Discrimination Against Transgender People: Evidence from a Field Experiment](#)'. In the study, the researchers conducted an experiment in which they responded to job adverts with identical CVs, except that some of the CVs indicated that the applicants were cisgender and others that they were transgender. The results showed that the trans applicants were less likely to be contacted for an interview.

Several of the conference speakers emphasised the need for action in the Nordic countries to ensure compliance with discrimination laws. For example, the need for training for recruiters on how to avoid discrimination was highlighted.

At the same time, the conference stressed that access to gender-affirming treatment and the possibility to change one's correct legal gender are important for facilitating trans people's access to the labour market. Several participants emphasised that this must also apply to non-binary people, i.e. people who do not perceive themselves as either women or men.

"We need to recognise that transgender people's circumstances in general affect their opportunities in the workplace. Take access to gender-affirming care, for example. It matters because many people put their lives on hold waiting for it. Waiting times are often about three-four years to begin assessment and treatment of gender dysphoria. As an asylum seeker, you do not have access to gender-affirming treatment until you are granted a residence permit, which means you have to wait a long time before starting your life in Sweden."

Edward Summanen (SE), expert at the organisation Transamman.

The conference also highlighted the importance of targeted support measures for trans people outside the labour market. In particular, there was a call for more measures for young people. According to the knowledge review 'Trans People's Working Life Conditions in the Nordic Region,' many trans people are excluded from the labour market from an early age. Some drop out of education due to discrimination and narrow gender norms. During the conference, experiences were shared from the TransDuuni! project, which aims to empower young, job-seeking transgender people in Tampere.

"I believe it's crucial to conduct outreach work directed specifically towards young transgender individuals to reach this group with support."

Tanja von Knorring (FI), Executive Director of the organisation Transfeminines, which runs the TransDuuni! project.



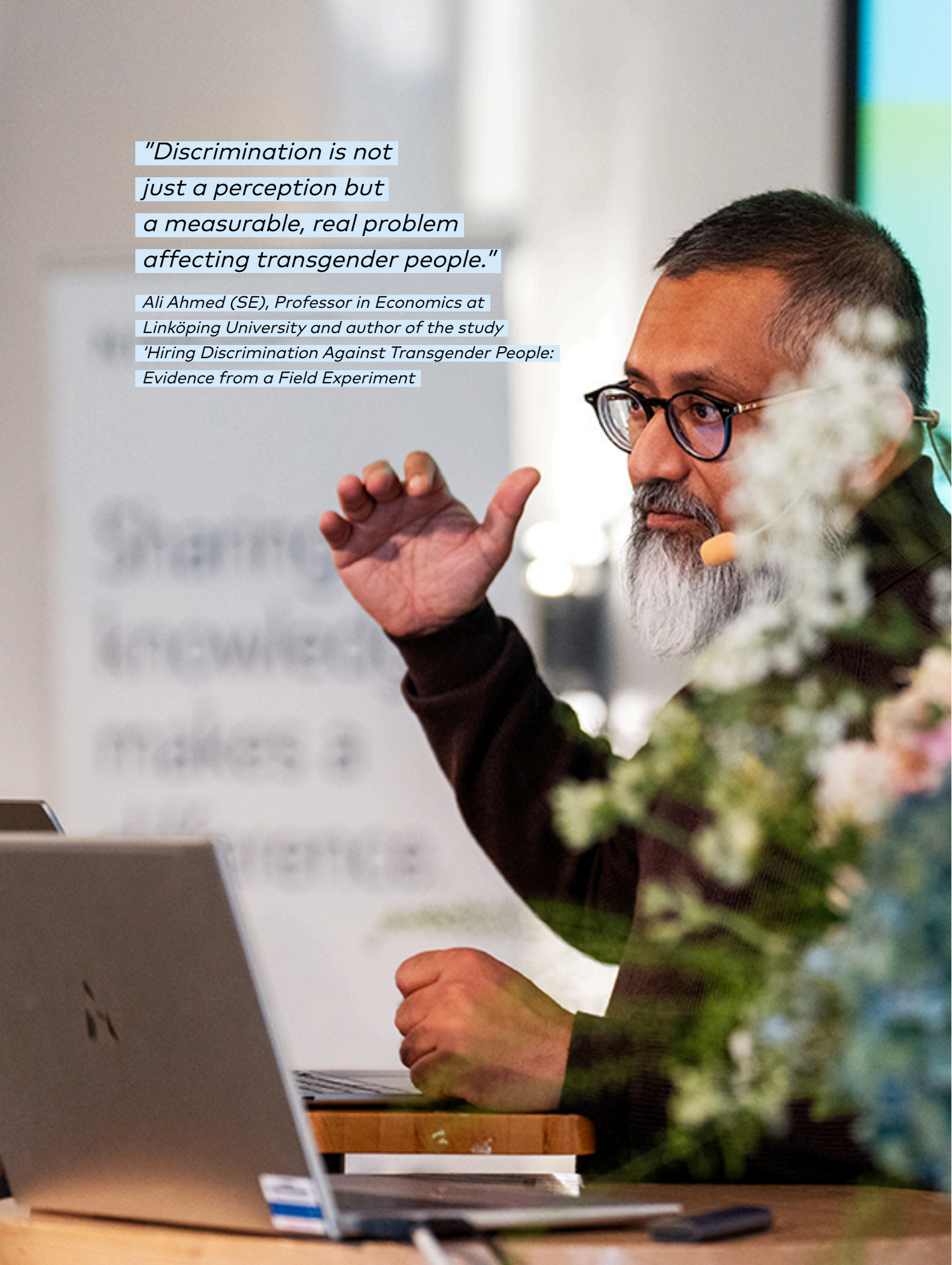
Edward Summanen (SE).
Photo: Maja Brand



Tanja von Knorring (FI).
Photo: Maja Brand

*"Discrimination is not
just a perception but
a measurable, real problem
affecting transgender people."*

*Ali Ahmed (SE), Professor in Economics at
Linköping University and author of the study
'Hiring Discrimination Against Transgender People:
Evidence from a Field Experiment*



Economic consequences

The fact that trans people do not have the same access to the labour market as cisgender people has implications for their finances. The Nordic knowledge review 'Trans People's Working Life Conditions in the Nordic Region' shows that trans people are more likely to have a low annual income. A Danish report shows that many have an annual income of less than DKK 100,000 per year, while in a Norwegian study, non-binary people stand out as a group with particularly low incomes. The finding that trans people generally earn significantly less than cisgender people is a result that persists even when accounting for other factors, such as age.


Trans people's finances are further examined in the Nordic project '[*Trans. arbetsmarknad, plånbok*](#)' (Trans, labour market, wallet). The study is based on a questionnaire survey with participants from Sweden and Finland. Some preliminary results from the study were presented during the conference in Stockholm and confirm findings from previous research on the low incomes of trans people. The survey also shows that a number of factors help strengthen trans people's ability to work, for example support from a manager and the feeling that you can be yourself.

"We need to hold employers accountable to ensure they provide good working conditions, because it is their responsibility by law."

Lukas Romson (SE), equality consultant and expert on trans issues and one of the project leaders of 'Trans, labour market, wallet'.



Lukas Romson (SE). Photo: Maja Brand

A woman with dark skin, wearing a light brown turban and a matching hoodie, is speaking at a podium. She has a small orange microphone clipped to her hoodie. Her right hand is raised in a gesture, and her left hand holds a small black object. A name tag on her hoodie reads "Farah Abdi, Speaker, YUCLA". In the background, there is a laptop with a stylized logo, a glass of water, and some greenery.

"If you for example are migrant, disabled or of colour, the more vulnerable you are to discrimination and poverty."

*Farah Abdi (GER/SOM),
policy officer at Transgender
Europe (TGEU)*

Intersectional discrimination makes some people particularly vulnerable

Several speakers at the conference called for more knowledge about conditions for different groups under the transgender umbrella. Based on the studies available in the Nordic countries, it is not possible to provide satisfactory answers, but studies have been conducted at the EU level that capture, for example, opportunities for trans people with migrant backgrounds. During the conference, the report '[Trans & Poverty. Poverty and economic insecurity in trans communities in the EU](#)', produced by the organisation Transgender Europe (TGEU), was presented, which shows that groups facing intersectional discrimination face particularly high barriers.

FACT BOX: Intersectional discrimination

Many people's experiences of discrimination span different contexts and follow them throughout their lives. It is not uncommon for the discrimination experienced by an individual to be related to several grounds for discrimination under the law. Taken together, this leads to increased vulnerability /.../ A word that is often used to describe discrimination at the intersection of different grounds of discrimination is *intersectionality*.

Source: Equality Ombudsman (SE)

"We need to make it very easy for employers, so that they can no longer say they don't know what to do."

*Martin Parnov Reichhardt,
Project Manager at
Boston Consulting Group (DK)*



At work: Harassment and ill-treatment

As well as being excluded from the labour market, trans people face problems in the workplace. Several Nordic studies show that trans people are subjected to discrimination and harassment at work. Many have experienced poor treatment and microaggressions from managers, colleagues and customers.

During the conference, emphasis was put on the responsibility of employers to improve conditions for transgender people in Nordic workplaces, but the role of trade unions was also highlighted.

"More trade union representatives need to be active. We often ask for more knowledge, and we need it, but there are also things we can do. With the knowledge we have, we can give employers a kick and make them do better."

Daniel Hjalmarsson (SE), Strategist at Akademikerförbundet SSR

During the conference, several recent reports and guides were presented that offer guidance for employers. One example is the Swedish report '[*God arbetsmiljö för hbtqi-personer – en forskningsbaserad guide till arbetsplatser*](#)' (A good working environment for LGBTI people – a research-based guide for workplaces). It is produced by the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise and provides guidance for employers when an employee transitions, among other things.

The conference also saw the presentation of the Norwegian study '[*Jeg vil ikke ha oppmerksomhet, men jeg vil ikke være usynlig*](#)' (I don't want attention, but I don't want to be invisible), published in spring 2024, which provides recommendations to employers on how they can promote better conditions for transgender people in the workplace. However, it is not always easy to give universal advice as each person varies when it comes to how open they want to be in the workplace.

"What one person appreciates might be difficult for someone else. For example, some people find it empowering when their workplace displays a transgender flag during Pride Week, while others find it creates an uncomfortable hyper-visibility."

Camilla Stub Lundberg (NO), Senior researcher at OsloMet Metropolitan University and author of the study 'Jeg vil ikke ha oppmerksomhet, men jeg vil ikke være usynlig' (I don't want attention, but I don't want to be invisible).

During the conference, several experts emphasised the importance of creating a positive work environment for openly trans people, as well as those who are not openly trans. One participant said that it is always best to assume that a trans person is listening, as trans people are everywhere. In addition, the workplace may

include parents, siblings, children and partners of trans people, who are also affected by negative rhetoric.

FACT BOX:

Recommendations for employers

- Provide competence-raising courses to increase the knowledge of managers, HR representatives, deputies and safety representatives about transgender people and people with gender incongruence. In particular, the study shows a need for expertise on transitioning.
- Ensure a follow-up for transgender people and people with gender incongruence that is oriented around the individual, flexible and conducted on the individual's terms.
- Develop trust-based diversity management to give transgender people and people with gender incongruence the courage to talk and be open when they want and need.
- Promote gender-neutral changing rooms/toilets/uniforms.
- Ensure correct use of personal pronouns.
- Raise awareness among managers, HR representatives, deputies and safety representatives of the polarised and sometimes offensive public debate about transgender people and people with gender incongruence, which can also affect the work environment.

Source: '*Jeg vil ikke ha oppmerksomhet, men jeg vil ikke være usynlig*' (I don't want attention, but I don't want to be invisible).

FACT BOX:

Guidance for employers when an employee transitions

- Hold a one-to-one discussion focusing on the employee's individual needs. The discussion should include the employee, the manager and possibly an HR representative. Examples of questions to raise: How open does the employee want to be about/during their transition? Should the team be informed and if so, how? Have the employee's pronouns and/or preferred name changed? How does the employee want this information to reach others in the workplace? Will the employee's legal gender change? Does the employment contract need to be updated? How can the manager or HR support the individual in the best possible way?
- Draw up a plan based on the individual dialogue. The plan should specify the steps to be taken and who is responsible for them.
- Implement the plan. After a period of time, the manager and/or HR should also have an evaluative dialogue with the employee to ensure that their needs have been met and that their work environment has not deteriorated.

Source: '*God arbetsmiljö för hbtqi-personer – en forskningsbaserad guide till arbetsplatser*' (A good working environment for LGBTI people – a research-based guide for workplaces).

"Many managers want to support but lack the tools and language. Policies must be in place before it's known that an employee is transgender."

Sølve Storm, PhD in Gender Studies, independent researcher and consultant (DK)



Disinformation spreads in the workplace

During the conference, several speakers reiterated that there is growing opposition to transgender rights. In recent years, disinformation about trans people has been spread in the Nordic countries, as well as in many other countries. The conference highlighted that the negative stereotypes being spread affect the working lives of transgender people, as the rhetoric seeps into the workplace and creates an unsafe environment.

In addition to the direct impact of negative rhetoric on trans people, the conference highlighted that disinformation risks creating a stigma around researchers working on issues related to the lives of trans people. There is concern that disinformation will lead to a reduction in research funding. The growing opposition to transgender rights is also evident in other sectors. Many companies and organisations that stand up for transgender rights describe encountering strong negative reactions, not least on social media, and there is concern that this will eventually lead to voices being silenced and to work for transgender rights coming to a standstill.

Not least with regard to the social climate, the conference emphasised that the attitude of upper management is crucial to creating a welcoming workplace. In addition to the knowledge needed across HR departments and managers working in the organisation, commitment is needed right up to CEO level.

As stated by, for example, Wenche Fredriksen (NO), Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Den Norske Bank (DNB), which aims to be a pioneer in equality and diversity work and is one of the main sponsors of Oslo Pride. In the closing panel discussion, she made a promise to the conference participants:

"We live in scary times, but we never give up."



Wenche Fredriksen (NO). Photo: Maja Brand

"We need to work against the negative rhetoric about trans people. This became clear in the work on the new gender identity law. A huge amount of disinformation was spread when it was introduced, and not only by extremists."

Paulina Brandberg, Minister for Gender Equality and Working Life (SE)



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