



Introduction¹

The second 2025 issue of *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* comprise four research articles with studies from Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

In the first article, *Chutes and Ladders? Job Opportunities for Generation Covid*, Erling Barth, Harald Dale-Olsen, Pål Schöne, and Kjersti Misje Østbakken investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job opportunities for young workers in Norway, with a specific focus on those completing their education immediately before or during the pandemic—termed ‘Generation Covid’. The authors pose the central research question: *How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect job postings directed at young entrants to the labor market, particularly in comparison to other groups?* They analyze job posting data from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) covering the years 2018–2020 to examine labor demand trends during the pandemic. Youth-targeted jobs are identified based on the top 20 occupations most commonly held by individuals aged 16–25 years before the pandemic. The article also includes analyses of jobs for students and entry-level positions differentiated by education level. The study uses a quasi-experimental research design, comparing weekly job postings in 2020 with corresponding weeks in 2018 and 2019. A series of two-way fixed-effects regression models are employed, controlling for week, occupation, year, and holiday effects. The authors also include interaction terms to isolate the effect of the pandemic on youth-related jobs versus other occupations. Findings reveal that job postings in Norway dropped by 39% during the first lockdown in spring 2020, with youth jobs declining 40% more than the average. The hardest-hit sectors were those requiring physical proximity—such as retail, hospitality, and personal services—which are disproportionately staffed by young workers. Entry jobs for individuals with lower education levels saw the most severe decline, followed by those with higher education and student jobs. In contrast, jobs commonly held by older or more experienced workers were less affected. The authors conclude that the pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in the youth labor market and warn of potential long-term ‘scarring effects’ for Generation Covid. Their findings underscore the risk of increased inequality due to the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on low-skilled and entry-level positions. While the study refrains from making strong causal claims, it provides compelling evidence that the pandemic substantially reduced labor market entry opportunities for young people.

In the second article of this issue, *The Studentification of Low-Wage Service Work in Sweden: Who Participates?*, Anna Kallos investigates the growing prevalence of part-time employment among upper secondary school students in Sweden, focusing on how this form of youth labor is shaped by intersecting social divisions such as gender, class, and migration background. The study contributes to research on non-standard and low-wage employment by examining students aged 15–20 years who work during the school year, a group often overlooked in labor market analyses. Drawing on an intersectional theoretical framework, Kallos challenges dominant portrayals of student jobs as transitional or voluntary by highlighting how youth labor is increasingly embedded in precarious and exploitative conditions, particularly within the hospitality and retail sectors. Methodologically, the article uses microdata from the Swedish Labor Force Survey (2006–2019), linked with population-based registries, and applies regression models to

¹ You can find this text and its DOI at <https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index>.

examine both the likelihood of student employment and the intensity of work, measured by hours per week. The findings show a marked increase in part-time employment among students over the studied period, with a particularly strong rise among female students. Girls and students with higher academic achievement are more likely to be employed, whereas students from lower-income households or with less-educated parents are more likely to work at a higher intensity. While employment is often framed as beneficial for youth development, the study shows that intensive part-time work—defined as more than 15 hours per week—is disproportionately undertaken by socially disadvantaged students and is associated with risks such as reduced academic performance and school dropout. Furthermore, students with a migration background, particularly young men with origins in the global south, are less likely to be employed and to work intensively, though this may reflect underreporting in official statistics. Kallos concludes that young student-workers are increasingly integrated into a deregulated segment of the Swedish labor market as a flexible and inexpensive labor force. Rather than viewing student employment as neutral or uniformly positive, the article emphasizes how part-time work during school years is deeply structured by social inequalities. These patterns raise critical concerns about how youth employment may contribute to the reproduction of class-based and gendered disparities in education and labor market outcomes.

In *Promotion of Self-employment: Manager Justifications for Online Labor Platform Operations*, Jere Immonen explores how managers of online labor platforms (OLPs) in Finland justify their companies' use of self-employment contracts and various forms of market control. The central research question is how OLP managers justify their contractual relations and market control practices—such as task distribution and compensation—within the context of the Finnish labor market model and critical platform work discussions. The study is motivated by concerns about the legitimacy of OLPs in Nordic welfare states, where traditional full-time employment forms the normative foundation of labor relations and social protections. Immonen uses *justification theory* (Boltanski & Thévenot) and *market control classification* (Maffie) as analytical tools to explore the legitimacy claims made by platform managers. The empirical material consists of semi-structured interviews with eight managers from seven Finnish OLPs, covering a range of industries and control intensities. The interviews were analyzed through a mixed inductive and theory-driven approach, with a particular focus on justifications for self-employment, task matching, and compensation control. The findings show that all managers justified the use of self-employment by emphasizing worker autonomy, flexibility, and entrepreneurial choice. These direct justifications were often accompanied by indirect ones, such as critiques of the Finnish labor market model's rigid focus on standard employment and its inadequate protection of self-employed workers. Market control practices—particularly in task distribution and compensation—varied across OLPs, and managers offered normative justifications depending on the level of control. Some saw compensation control as necessary to ensure fair pay and prevent underpricing, while others viewed it as legally risky or illegitimate. Notably, even platforms with algorithmic control sought to distinguish their practices from more controversial companies like Uber by emphasizing transparency and workers' freedom to decline tasks. Immonen concludes that although justifications differ, they converge around the idea of promoting self-employment as a desirable and modern form of labor. However, the findings also reveal a tension: OLPs operate in a gray zone where they both resist and adapt to the normative structures of the Finnish labor model in order to secure legitimacy.

In the final article *Implementing the Place-Train Approach in Train-Place Services: Organizational Culture and Supported Employment*, Blanka Støren-Vaczy and Vidar Bakkeli bring us back to Norway to explore how organizational culture affects the implementation of supported employment (SE) within public employment services, using NAV as a case study. The research addresses the key question: how do organizational culture and cultural profiles influence the implementation of the SE approach, particularly its transition from traditional ‘train-place’ models to the more inclusive ‘place-train’ model? The article draws on Edgar Schein’s theory of organizational culture and Cameron & Quinn’s Competing Values Model to examine how shared assumptions, values, and behavioral norms within NAV shape the reception and enactment of SE. The theoretical argument is supported by an embedded case study design, utilizing qualitative data from two earlier research projects that include interviews with managers and employment specialists from two NAV offices. The research applies a thematic analysis to this material, interpreting how different cultural contexts influence the practical application of SE principles. Findings show that existing organizational cultures—rooted in medically oriented and stepwise vocational training models—pose significant challenges to implementing SE’s person-centered, empowerment-based philosophy. The case study identifies four organizational culture profiles (market, clan, hierarchy, and adhocracy), each associated with specific advantages and risks for SE implementation. For instance, a market-oriented culture promotes measurable results and performance but can lead to excessive pressure and client ‘creaming’, while a clan-oriented culture supports relational, flexible work but may underperform in efficiency and standardization. The study further illustrates how SE implementation unfolds differently in offices dominated by these cultural profiles. Støren-Vaczy and Bakkeli conclude that SE implementation is not a linear administrative process but a culturally contingent one. Organizational culture plays a central role in shaping both resistance and support for innovation. Therefore, successful implementation of SE requires not only structural and managerial adjustments but also a cultural shift that aligns with SE’s values.

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