



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The first issue of the 2026 volume of the *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* brings together four compelling research articles that span several levels of the labor market, from individual experiences to organizational practices and broader occupational structures.

More than six years have passed since the world first encountered the COVID-19 virus, yet the pandemic continues to offer valuable lessons about work and working life. This issue revisits that period through two studies examining remote work and work schedules in health care. The opening article, ‘Organizational Support and Work Engagement: Onsite, Hybrid, and Remote Work during COVID-19’ by Kirsikka Selander and Tuomo Alasoini, explores how different work arrangements shaped engagement during the pandemic. Drawing on data from the 2022 Finnish MEADOW survey of 1816 employees, the authors analyze how job autonomy, mental demands, and organizational support relate to work engagement, and how these relationships vary across onsite, hybrid, and remote workers. Their findings highlight the powerful role of organizational support: it not only boosts engagement directly but also buffers the negative effects of high mental demands. The authors emphasize, in line with earlier research, that remote work itself is not inherently positive or negative, rather its outcomes depend on how work is organized and how well employees are supported. They close by pointing to the new challenges remote work brings for managers seeking to sustain employee well-being.

The second article also looks back at the pandemic, this time focusing on shift schedules among nursing staff. In ‘A Longitudinal Study of Nursing Staffs’ Shift Schedules during the COVID-19 Pandemic’, Isabelle Hernandez, Ann Rudman, Philip Tucker, Göran Kecklund, and Anna Dahlgren studied nurses working in 24/7 hospital care in one Swedish region. Using payroll data, they compare shift patterns before the pandemic (2018–2019) with equivalent periods from 2020–2023. Despite expectations of major disruptions, the study finds that weekly working hours, shift length, and night shift duration remained largely stable. There is tentative evidence of an increase in night shifts and some increase in weekend work, but no strong indication that shift intensity rose overall. These findings offer a nuanced picture: while the pandemic clearly strained health care systems, it did not dramatically alter working hours for these nursing teams at the group level.

In the third article, attention shifts to another major societal challenge: immigration and its implications for labor market opportunities. ‘Immigrants’ Prospects on the Labor Market, Occupational Change, and Unequal Opportunities in Sweden’ by Tomas Berglund, Gabriella Elgenius, Denis Frank, and Vedran Omanović examines how immigrants fare within Sweden’s occupational structure. Drawing on Swedish Labor Force Survey and register data from 1998 to 2000 and from 2012 to 2014, the authors investigate mobility, polarization, and wage distribution. Their results show that while job growth has been strongest in higher-paid occupations, the lowest-paid tier has remained stable. Sweden’s solidaristic wage regime continues to uphold relative wage equality, yet clear stratification persists: immigrants from outside the EU are disproportionately represented in the lowest-paid roles, while Swedish-born and EU migrants more often

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



enter well-paid positions. Importantly, the authors find little evidence that low-paid jobs provide upward mobility. They argue that shifts in the occupational landscape, combined with the enduring disadvantages tied to migrants' origins and migration histories, challenge the ideals of the Swedish egalitarian model.

The fourth article turns to the organizational level and the realities of the fourth industrial revolution. In 'Skills for Digitalization: Employer Strategies for Competence Management in Manufacturing', Anna Davidsson and Johan Røed Steen explore how manufacturing companies in Sweden and Norway navigate digital transformation. Through qualitative case studies and 21 interviews with managers, specialists, and union representatives, the authors show how new digital systems, from automation to sensor technologies and data analytics, reshape skill requirements. They identify rising demands for technical, methodological, social, and personal competencies, along with broader task profiles and continuous learning. The study identifies two contrasting employer strategies: an 'enabling path', characterized by long-term skill development and investment in employees, and a 'pragmatic flexibility path', in which companies rely on short-term recruitment and external specialists. These approaches illustrate the tensions organizations face in balancing flexibility with sustainable competence building within the Nordic working life model.

As we open the 2026 volume, we also begin a new chapter for the *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*. After nearly a decade guided by the capable leadership of Editor-in-Chief Anders Buch and Journal Manager Bo Carstens in Denmark, the journal has now moved to Karlstad University and to a new editorial team. From January 1st, 2026, our submission process has also gone fully digital. We are still learning the OJS platform and appreciate your patience as we adapt—but we are confident that this transition will strengthen the journal in the long run.

We look forward to receiving continued strong submissions that deepen our understanding of Nordic working life, and we hope this issue inspires you to explore each of the rich contributions it contains.

Kristina Palm  
Editor-in-chief