

**Research and development project:  
The Nordic Welfare Watch (Norræn velferðarvakt)  
-in response to crises**

**The aim** of this study is to investigate how well Nordic welfare systems are prepared for various crises. The welfare state plays an extensive role in crisis and disasters, yet emergency response plans and the organization of civil defence do include the health systems in their planning while the role of social services is rather unclear. Furthermore, the literature shows a need for long-term response plans, which are typically governed by municipalities and social services in cooperation with health care services.

The aim of this pioneering study is twofold: 1) Investigate the role of social services in disaster planning in the Nordic countries and evaluate the experience and lessons learned from the Welfare Watch created in Iceland following the bank crisis; and 2) Evaluate the challenges for which Nordic welfare systems should be prepared.

The study is divided into four independent projects:

- 1) Examine emergency response plans amongst the Nordic states focusing on the role of welfare services, especially social services;
- 2) Evaluate the activities of the Icelandic Welfare Watch;
- 3) Define and map the risk challenges that the Nordic welfare system could face in coming years;
- 4) Combine the results from the above three projects, as well as the results of other research groups (the reaction to the bank crisis, social and health indicators as well as results from the NordForsk Centres of Excellence on Societal Risks). Based on these results a proposal will be made for a Nordic Welfare Watch based on the following:
  - Is there a premise to create a welfare watch in all Nordic states?
  - How will the cooperation of the Nordic Welfare Watch be organised?
  - What challenges do Nordic states face?
  - Interdisciplinary cooperation on risk assessment-what do the results of studies in various fields indicate (e.g. social, health and natural sciences)?
  - How would welfare systems respond to such risks/challenges?
  - Is it sensible for welfare watches to support specialist knowledge that can be shared between states if pertinent (e.g. Iceland's perspective on the response of welfare systems following natural disasters, Sweden's understanding of the response of welfare systems following a nuclear disaster)?

## *Main Tasks*

- 1) Examine how response systems (civil defence) and monitoring systems in the Nordic countries define welfare systems in regards to their emergency response and public service plans. Emphasis is placed on the specialised knowledge of each country in order to evaluate whether the states should adopt any given procedure. Special attention is placed on the role of the social system, especially social services, as initial analysis indicates that the role of the health services is already well defined.
- 2) Evaluate the activities of the Icelandic Welfare Watch. This includes a complete evaluation of the watch as well as its effectiveness.
- 3) Examine current understandings of future challenges and risk mapping in order to assess what issues the welfare systems might need to handle in the near future.
- 4) Compile the results of the studies above with results of other research groups along with the results of other Nordic research in the field. The final outcome: an evaluation of the need for a Nordic Welfare Watch.

This project is overseen by a steering committee of five specialists led by Professor Guðný Björk Eydal, Faculty of Social Work, University of Iceland. There will be a representative of each Nordic state in the group. Each representative appoints and leads their own advisory team of 5-7 experts whom have researched the role of welfare systems/social services or are currently working as specialists in the field of civil defence.

As pointed out above the project focuses on the emergency responses and monitoring (civil defence) in the Nordic states and how much emphasis they place on welfare systems in emergency response. The role of the welfare system and its functions will be analysed. Special emphasis is placed on the role of social services as preliminary analysis shows that the role of the health services is already well defined.

Focus is placed on defining the response systems and examining the specialist knowledge of some states to help evaluate whether all the states should adopt any procedure systematically. All of the Nordic states have some form of monitoring system, but each are variously organized as well as the role of their welfare systems in response to a disaster. There has been quite extensive research done on welfare systems following an economic crisis, but little has been done to examine their role in other disasters. Therefore, it is profoundly important to examine the role of the welfare system has in each Nordic state. Such analysis creates the premise for the Nordic states to learn from each other, while possible creating the basis for a Nordic Welfare Watch.

## **The project tasks**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Phase: The role of the welfare system and social services in case of disasters**

Analysis of the state of the art. This project will be led by the steering committee, but the data will be gathered and analysed by the research assistant. Furthermore, the advisory teams in each country will help ensure the best possible analysis (and in 2015 also contribute to the risk mapping future disasters or challenges the welfare systems may need to deal with). Focus will be placed on cooperating with other professionals and third sector organisations as well.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Phase: Evaluation of the Icelandic Welfare Watch**

This phase will be overseen by project managers and two specialist consultants; Ingibjörg Broddadóttir, The Ministry of Welfare and Lára Björnsdóttir, who chaired the Welfare Watch for the last five years. This will be contractual work. This phase will conduct an analysis of the organization, work and influence of the Icelandic Welfare Watch, which has been functioning over the last five years. The emphasis in the watch has been on multi-disciplinary co-operation, flexible management and the participation of various individuals from public service, social (activist) groups and the employment market. A managing committee oversaw the work done by the watch.

The following factors will be analysed: 1) the creation and organization of the welfare watch, 2) procedures and supervision; 3) proposals to the government and their outcomes. Data: Welfare Watch's and other reports; interviews with those participating in the watch and focus groups with specialists in the field regarding the effectiveness of the watch. Methods: Content analysis, interviews and focus groups. This will be an evaluative study conducted by an independent research organisation (as proposed by the Social Science Research Institute, while other research facilities could be utilized during this phase).

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Phase: Future Challenges**

An analysis of known future challenges in order to evaluate what type of projects the welfare systems may need to handle in the near future. The study, will be conducted by the steering committee and the employee (see phase 1, the steering committee consists of one representative from each country who each oversees an interdisciplinary advisory team) under the leadership of the project leader. This includes analysing both manmade crises and natural ones. For instance the increased focus in the arctic region on environmental changes and the crises it will create based on the results of Nordic research on sustainability and environmental effects over the last years.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Phase: A Nordic Welfare Watch?**

In this phase the answer to the question will be sought of whether there is reason to create a welfare watch in each Nordic country (a Nordic Welfare Watch) and how such a welfare watch could cooperate in preparing crisis responses for future threats

that the states and autonomous countries may all need to deal with. This will be based on the reports of the previous phases outlined earlier as well as cooperation with specialists who analysed the reaction of the Nordic welfare state to the bank crisis under the leadership of Stefán Ólafsson and the NordForsk Centres of Excellence on Societal Risks. This phase will be conducted by the same steering committee as in phase 1; composed of a representative from each country who oversees an interdisciplinary advisory team.