

## Should we invest in a cross-border expert? Do we need a cross-border expert?

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The Nordic countries have a long-standing tradition of cooperation. Since the Convention between Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden concerning the waiver of passport control entered into force 65 years ago, citizens have not in principle needed to show their passport when crossing a border. Goods and services began to move freely across the border between Finland and Sweden when the two countries joined the European Union in 1995. Today, Nordic cooperation spans to nearly all political areas and cooperation is pursued both through formal and informal channels.

The Nordic Council of Ministers partly finances cross-border advice services along the borders between Finland, Sweden and Norway. There are the Öresunddirekt between Sweden and Denmark, Gränsetjensten Molokulien between Sweden and Norway as well as Pohjoiskalotin Rajaneuvonta, the advice service that I represent and that has two offices and works with three countries – Finland, Sweden and Norway. These advice service offices are cross-border experts. They offer targeted and up-to-date information about free movement. They also react to border obstacles and take part in removing them. <http://rajaneuvonta.net>

The questions that we receive at Pohjoiskalotin Rajaneuvonta are very diverse. Among other things, they have to do with how to find a job or where to study, what to do if employment on the other side of the border comes to an end, or what happens to their pension and the taxes on pensions when one has worked in two or more countries. Enterprises wonder about recruitment of staff, starting a business, collective labour agreements that are typical of the Nordic countries as well as taxes and permissions.

The primary responsibility to provide advice on these issues lies with the public authorities. However, the authorities only provide answers to questions that fall within the scope of their competences. Therefore, it might happen that the customer does not get a comprehensive answer to their problem. The cross-border expert makes use of the network and takes a

comprehensive look at customers' questions so that they get a response that covers the sphere of several different authorities.

There are two prerequisites to Nordic border expertise: a good network and knowing Finnish, Swedish and/or Norwegian. You might wonder why we need to know Swedish, as surely Finnish and English should be enough. Indeed, English might be enough for running errands but if you wish to cooperate or do business with your neighbours, they will immediately become your friends if you speak a Scandinavian language.

Last year, Pohjoiskalotin Rajaneuvonta had 4,000 customer contacts. The number of times we are contacted has risen every year. Especially questions from entrepreneurs have become more common. However, the largest number of questions still comes from the citizens of Finland, Sweden and Norway. The resources available to Rajaneuvonta are limited and the current financial model is a short-term model. The Rajaneuvonta and its border expertise are important and needed, and, on the one hand, praised but when it comes to finding financing, on the other hand, no one seems to be ready to provide the resources needed.

I would like to ask an open question: Can Finland and the border area afford to lose this already existing network of border expertise?