

# Police 'can't afford' cop jobs

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AV NINA BERGLUND

The cost of living in Norway is so high, and police salaries so low, that increasing numbers of police officers are quitting. They say they can't afford to stay in their chosen profession.

"We can't live off our police salaries any more," one experienced police officer in Bergen told Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) on Wednesday. He noted that he has three children and his wife is a school teacher. When he received an offer from the private sector, at much higher pay, he felt compelled to take it.

It's a familiar story in other parts of the world as well, where low pay for important jobs in the police and fire departments and schools, for example, make it difficult for police officers, firefighters and teachers to live in the cities where they work. In Norway, the situation can be especially difficult because prices in the country are among the most expensive in the world.

The starting salary for a police officer fresh out of the academy now lies around NOK 320,000 (about USD 53,000). After-tax income amounts to around NOK 200,000.

In Oslo, where even a small, two-room apartment rents for NOK 10,000 a month and groceries can cost three- to four-times US levels, that doesn't leave much to cover other living expenses. Police officers say they need to work lots of overtime in order to make ends meet.

The union representing police officers in Norway is running ads in local newspapers this week, demanding at least extra pay for risks taken on the job. The union is also encouraging its members to send postcards to Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg with the following question: "Why do you think I'm worth so little?"

Norway has a state police force, with the justice minister primarily responsible for it. The police already seem to have some support from the director of the Norwegian police, Ingelin Killengreen.

"It's a major challenge for us, that we have a salary level in the police that is so low that very many accept offers for new jobs outside the police force," Killengreen told NRK. "We believe it's necessary to examine this problem now, to counter a negative trend that we can't afford."

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