

REPORT ON THE COMPARISON OF THE AVAILABLE STRATEGIES FOR PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION AND REINTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH CHRONIC DISEASES AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

BASED ON FIVE CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL WELFARE MODELS IN EUROPE

Norway: country report

Main legislative frameworks on chronic diseases, mental health and employment

The main policy framework that is applicable for the employment of persons with chronic diseases in Norway is the tripartite Inclusive Work Environment Agreement (IA Agreement), which was first signed in 2011 between social partners (represented by employer and employee organisations) and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) (represented by NAV Inclusive Workplace Support Centre). The agreement aims to improve the working environment, enhance presence at work, reduce sick leaves and prevent exclusion and withdrawal from working life. The important feature of this policy document is that it assigns more active roles to employers and employees in preventing early retirement, in recruiting and retaining workers with reduced work capacity, and in reducing sick leaves (the effectiveness of the IA is evaluated in the OECD report on Mental Health and Work: Norway¹).

In terms of policies specific to one of the categories of NCDs considered in the study, there is a National Strategic Plan for Work and Mental Health 2007-2012². The strategy concentrates on five main areas: 1) collaboration and cooperation of work-related help, 2) user involvement and self-help, 3) availability of measures and services, 4) competence, networks, information and attitudes, and 5) knowledge, research and development.

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https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/AD/publikasjoner/rapporter/2013/Mental_Health_and_Work_Norway_2013.pdf

² <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/HOD/Vedlegg/Planer/I-1127EWEB.pdf>

Main legislative frameworks on disability and employment

In 2011, the government of Norway launched the Job Strategy for People with Disabilities³. The strategy aims to include more people in employment and reduce the number of benefit recipients. It aims to reinforce one of the main goals of the IA Agreement - to increase the employability of people with disabilities. The main target group of the strategy is people with disabilities under the age of 30. The strategy identifies four barriers for labour market participation (discrimination barrier, cost barrier, productivity barrier and information and attitudinal barrier), and proposes concrete initiatives to tackle these barriers. For example, the strategy proposes having working-life coaches at Inclusive Workplace Support Centres in each county to assist employers.

- The Work Environment Act (Arbeidsmiljøloven): § 4-6 on Accommodation for employees with reduced working capacity.
- Discrimination and Accessibility Act.
- Labour Market Act (Arbeidsmarkedsloven)
- The Social Insurance Act (Folketrygdloven), Section 11 on rehabilitation benefit and Section 12 on disability benefits.
- UNCRPD was ratified in 2013.

Policy provisions on mainstream and specialist employment programmes

NAV, through its local branches, is responsible for mainstream employment services. It has a general national database of job vacancies through which job matching can be done. A similar service is also provided by private commercial entities. NAV provides a variety of services, including Job Club (Jobbklubb), a short-term course for those who are registered as job seeker with NAV. There are no formal entry requirements. In the Job Club, job seekers receive guidance on how to market their skills to employers, how to design CVs and applications to specific jobs based on job analyses, how to behave in interviews and use network to obtain the job.

Apart from general employment services, NAV has special obligations towards people with “reduced ability to work.” The authority can facilitate employment in the open labour market and also in sheltered workplaces. NAV addresses the needs of persons with reduced work capacity, but it has a more targeted approach towards young persons with disadvantages in employment (under 30

³ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/jobs-strategy-for-people-with--disabilit/id733535/>

years). For instance, secondary schools are expected to provide personnel who can advise students, including those with disabilities, about future employment.

Policy provisions on access to employment support

“Reduced ability to work” can give persons in Norway access to additional support in employment. Work capacity is defined as the person's ability to achieve and retain paid work. A supervisor/advisor in the NAV assesses individual cases based on information from the person as well as from documentation from the general practitioner, therapist, education system, social workers, etc. The information is balanced against the opportunities to achieve or retain paid work in the labour market. NAV identifies any gap between individual capabilities and the demands and requirements in working life. Work capacity is not measured by medical expertise alone, but diseases, illnesses or impairments are often the main reason for reduced working capacity. In cases where an employment relation exists already, the person will be reviewed in light of her/his working capacity in that specific position. In such cases the employer and employee review the options together. NAV assesses the case on the basis of information provided by employer, employee, vocational education or training, doctor, etc. This includes assessment of education, work experience and other competences. The assessment is intended to be holistic and based on professional discretion in each individual case.

Policy provisions promoting stakeholder cooperation and integration of services

Norwegian policies promote collaboration between NAV and local authorities and health services to ensure that users receive coordinated assistance. NAV has been also developing collaboration with education authorities to prevent school drop-out, service providers and local employers. NAV itself is a result of a merger of a public employment service (PES), a national insurance office and local social services. IA Agreement is example of an attempt to involve employers and social partners in the process.

Policy provisions promoting persons-centred approach and individualised service provision

NAV provided individualised assessment (Avklaring) services to employed or unemployed persons to identify or test their ability to work. These services are important for identifying and assessing individuals' expertise, possibilities and needs in employment.

A system of individual activity plans is in place at NAV for users with emphasis on work and work-related issues. Each individual registered with NAV with an aim to enter or stay in the labour market

gets an individual assessment based on their needs, preferences and competences and participates in creating an individual activity plan. These activity plans are tailored to each individual and may contain different employment schemes and supports.

Policy provisions on localised and accessible employment service provision

In Norway, local authorities and central government cooperate through 456 NAV offices in municipalities and city boroughs. Each local authority and NAV agree on what local authority services their office should provide. The services provided by a NAV office thus vary across local authorities. Despite working at local levels through its branches, the decentralisation of NAV's employment activation activities can be questionable. Services delivered by service providers are highly dependent of NAV requirements, thus they are relatively inflexible in adapting to local needs.

NAV also regulates a national database of job vacancies and employers are obliged to post job announcements on the NAV website. However, there are still commercial entities providing services related to vacancy databases.

Activation services for persons with reduced work capacity, including persons with NCDs, are mainly the responsibility of NAV. The impact of NAV is considerable on the sector through its definition and funding of employment schemes. NAV provides supports to persons with reduced work capacity and may require beneficiaries of its support to undergo job search/retaining activities specified in individual activity plans. Such activities can be provided by a wide range of entities that offer vocational rehabilitation services. Many of such service providers are united under the umbrella of the Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Enterprises (AVRE). Vocational rehabilitation services provide various services related to job placement in the open labour market or sheltered work. The services are based on measures and specifications issued by NAV.

Employment support in the open labour market

The main supported employment scheme is called a follow-up (oppfølging) programme, which is intended for persons who require support to be able to find or keep a job in the open labour market. The programme is tailored to individual needs based on opportunities in the labour market and includes guidance, advice and assistance in developing work-related and social skills, job search or workplace adaptation. The programme is overseen by NAV, which has agreements with a number of coaches who provide support in a transitional period. The follow-up measure may last for up to six months and extended by another six months (for special needs it can last up to three years).

A Follow-up programme intended to provide long-term support for workers with mental health issues is based on the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) approach that involves continuous individual follow-up in rehabilitation process as well as parallelism and integration between treatment and employment services. In addition, follow-up measures for persons with mental health issues are specifically aimed at preventing drop-outs from rehabilitation programmes as it seems to be often a case within this group of people.

In addition to follow-up measures, NAV can provide funding for a mentor, a fellow colleague who provides extra assistance to master a job or training.

In order to support employment in the open labour market, NAV also provides funding and guidance in workplace adaptation, including assessment of needed adaptations and contribution to cover the costs of special equipment and assistive technologies at work. Inclusion grants (Inkluderingsstøtte) are available for employers to compensate for costs of workplace adaptation and/or costs associated with the recruitment and work-oriented monitoring of persons with reduced work capacity (up to NOK 115,200 over a period of 12 months from the date the first expenditure).

The support by NAV not only covers the needs of adapting existing circumstances to facilitate the integration of persons with reduced working capacity, but also to prevent the deterioration of health conditions and sick leaves. For example, NAV also oversees the programme on health and rehabilitation services for people on sick leave (Raskere tilbake). This programme includes follow-up measures by employees and employers aimed at a quick return to work.

Sick-leave compensation can be granted if an employee has a prolonged or chronic disease that leads to a serious illness or a frequent absence for a limited time. A request to cover the sick leave can be filed with NAV by employer or employee.

Employment support through Social enterprises or social cooperatives

No information available.

Employment support through sheltered work

Traineeship in a sheltered business (arbeidspraksis i skjermet virksomhet) is an employment scheme for those who need to improve their opportunities for entering the work force or starting an education. It allows testing the ability to work in a sheltered environment. A traineeship in a sheltered business is only available for persons with an impaired work capability who have

particularly uncertain professional capabilities and who require close and broad supervision and assistance. Sheltered businesses produce goods and/or services and provide assessment, job training or qualification services for people with reduced working capacity. The aim of the initiative is to strengthen the ability to find work. Greater collaboration between sheltered and open labour market work is promoted in order to ensure smoother and flexible transition between the two types of work. This is needed to fulfil the need of some persons with mental health issues in stability and security.

Permanent adapted work (varig tilrettelagt arbeid) is a work scheme for persons who receive a disability pension from NAV and need to work in a sheltered environment to participate in working life. In this type of work tasks are permanently adapted to individual capabilities. Permanent adapted work can also be offered in the form of individual placement at an ordinary business or organisation. The aim of the scheme is to develop skills needed to qualify for an ordinary job. Participants of this programme can have a temporary leave from the sheltered business to try themselves in the open labour market (so-called hospitering). The goal of this measure is to assist participants during the transition from a sheltered business to an ordinary job.

Incentives for persons with NCDs to participate in activation programmes

Work assessment allowance (Arbeidsavklaringspenger, AAP) is an income support paid by NAV in periods when persons are ill or injured and need assistance to return to work. The allowance (66% of income in previous job) paid when work capability is impaired by at least 50% and when there is a possibility that the work capacity can be improved through treatment, an employment scheme or follow-up by NAV. A condition for receiving the AAP is to contribute actively in the process of returning to work (duty to participate in creating an activity plan, attend meetings, participate and complete the activities in the activity plan)

Qualification benefit (Kvalifiseringsstønad), worth the double of the National Insurance basic amount (the National Insurance basic amount equals to NOK 90,068 as of 1 May 2015), can be paid to persons participating in the Qualification Program (described in later sections).

Support when participating in measures (Tiltakspenger) – financial support covering day to day expenses while participating in the employment measure (low rate – NOK 257 per day; high rate – NOK 355 per day). This can be paid, for example, when a person participates in the Follow-up programme and does not receive sickness benefits, unemployment benefits or AAP.

A person may receive partial disability benefit if her/his work capacity is reduced by a minimum of 50% due to sickness and/or impairment. If the person receives a rehabilitation benefit (a temporary and time-limited benefit), a 40% reduction in work capacity is sufficient. If the reduced working capacity is due to a work related sickness or impairment, it is sufficient that the ability to earn a living is reduced by 30%. The benefits are paid to insured persons of working age. Relevant treatment and vocational training must be completed before disability benefit is granted. Disability benefits and rehabilitation benefit can be combined with the receipt of salary.

Financial incentives for employers to recruit/retain persons with NCDs

Wage subsidies, provided by NAV, cover part of the employee's salary if she/he is in danger of losing her/his job for health reasons (including high sickness absence related to chronic disease or pregnancy). There are temporary and permanent wage subsidies, but they are not a major part of the Norwegian labour market inclusion policy. The temporary wage subsidy is paid by NAV to the employer (60-70% of the salary) for a limited period of time to compensate for lower productivity. The measure is applicable for persons having a difficulty entering the labour market on ordinary wage and working conditions. If the employee has a reduced work capacity, the subsidy can be provided for a maximum of 3 years. Permanent wage subsidy targets persons who have a permanent and significant reduction in work capacity. Employers may have 75% of their costs covered the first year and 67% in the following years. Since 2007, Norway has had a pilot program with permanent wage subsidies, limited to 2,500 cases. In 2014, the program became permanent and without a formal ceiling on the number of beneficiaries. The program is intended to prevent permanent receipt of disability benefit.

Non-financial incentives for employers to recruit/retain persons with NCDs

The Ripples in the Water programme is based on a methodology for the cooperation between businesses and vocational rehabilitation service providers. The programme emphasizes socioeconomic benefits of integrating employees with reduced work capacity. The idea is that companies can fulfil their labour needs with a successful fulfilment of their corporate social responsibility strategies. Service providers can, on their part, provide follow-up and coaching services for the employees with reduced work capacity. The programme is collaboration between the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) and AVRE.

Duties of persons with NCDs

Persons with reduced work capacity are required to go through relevant treatment and vocational training before a benefit is granted.

Duties of employers

In Norway, there is no quota system for employers. In fact, Norwegian employers are not subjected to any strict obligations and receive considerable support from government authorities in terms of integration measures for persons with reduced work capacity (informational measures and services in recruiting and retaining workers).

Public employers also do not have to fulfil quotas, but there is a “The State Shows the Way” approach, in which the public sector is supposed to set an example in employing persons with reduced work capacities.

General and specialised employment services for persons with NCDs

NAV provides funding for different types of education and training aimed at equipping persons with reduced work capacity with necessary skills and qualification:

For persons with impaired work capabilities, NAV may provide financial support for ordinary education or vocational training.

Qualification Programme (Kvalifiseringsprogrammet, KVP) is available for persons of working age with reduced work capacity who have undergone work assessment and receive no or limited benefits from NAV. The programme is based on the individual needs and circumstances and includes work-oriented activities, training activities, and close individual supervision and guidance. The programme is planned by a NAV supervisor and the user. It lasts up to one year and includes 37.5 hours per week (NAV can extend the program for another year if it finds it appropriate and necessary).

IA-space (IA-plass) is a special arrangement among companies that have signed the agreement on an inclusive workplace (IA) to provide internships for persons with reduced work capacity. IA-space allows participants to undergo internship in the open labour market to obtain necessary work experience.

Courses, training and internships aimed at preparing persons with impaired work capacity can be provided by vocational rehabilitation entities. Their services may include various forms of “Work Preparatory Training,” assistance in obtaining ordinary education, traineeship in sheltered work, job coaching, supported employment, etc.

In addition, service providers can develop their services that fulfil NAV requirements in terms of facilitating the activation process. Jobpics, for example, is a tool developed by the AVRE to work with vocational interests of disadvantaged persons in a systematic way to avoid wrong career choices and to prepare for optimal career choices in the rehabilitation process. The main target group of Jobpics is persons in vocational rehabilitation aimed at joining the labour market.

Some services specifically aimed at the employment of persons with mental health issues include:

- “Personnel with User Experience” training for obtaining a qualification to work in businesses providing services to persons with mental problems.
- Courses on mental health at the workplace to develop the right competences for employer organisations.

Awareness raising about the normality of having mental health issues and about measures and services available for persons with mental health issues in employment.