

Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life

A working life with room for everyone

**1 January 2019 – 31 December 2022
(The IA Agreement)**

The Norwegian working life model has delivered good results for employment, productivity, adaptability and a working life that encourages learning. In Norway, most people enjoy good and sound working conditions. Many workplaces carry out good and systematic efforts to prevent and reduce sick leave and withdrawal, and many also assume considerable social responsibility by contributing to integration and inclusion in working life.

The objective is to facilitate conditions to ensure that as many as possible can work as much as possible, as long as possible

The labour force is Norway's most important resource. A high degree of employment is the foundation for maintaining a sustainable welfare society, while having a job is also of great importance to the individual. The tripartite cooperation for a more inclusive working life aims to help achieve high employment and mobilise the workforce through preventing and reducing sick leave and withdrawal from working life.

Focus on the workplace

The agreement's priority areas, its organisation and instruments shall support the work performed by managers, employee representatives, safety delegates and employees in the individual enterprises. This includes good preventive working environment and sick leave efforts, but also early mapping, discussion and measures for skills upgrading. The work performed by the enterprises in these areas will help prevent and reduce sick leave and withdrawal and facilitate inclusion. The tripartite cooperation shall support and enable follow-up and results in the individual enterprises. To achieve the objectives in the agreement, efforts and instruments must build on relevant knowledge at all levels.

Working conditions are constantly changing

Large-scale changes such as technology development, climate challenges, internationalisation, changes in industrial structure, immigration and an ageing population will influence work life and society's future competence needs. Addressing these development trends requires integrated efforts through the tripartite cooperation.

An integrated cooperation

Good cooperation between the parties, including both the tripartite cooperation on a society level and the two-party cooperation in the workplaces, is the most important tool in the inclusion work. The IA agreement must be seen in context with other processes relating to skills, employment and inclusion. The parties cooperate well on education and skills policies and labour and welfare policies, and make active contributions to the government's work with integration and inclusion.

The most important contribution of the IA agreement to this integrated cooperation is the common efforts by the parties to prevent sick leave and withdrawal and promote inclusion in the workplaces. The authorities shall support this work through their policy instruments.

The Government will not propose changes in the sick leave benefit scheme during the term of the agreement, neither for employees nor for employers, unless the parties agree. However, the agreement does not prevent the parties from discussing issues related to sick leave benefits.

Objectives of the cooperation

Objectives on a national level

The IA agreement aims to create a working life with room for everyone through preventing sick leave and withdrawal, thus increasing general employment.

- Sick leave: The agreement aims for a 10 per cent reduction in sick leave compared to the annual average in 2018.
 - Several sectors, industries and enterprises have low sick leave rates. In these industries and enterprises, it could be an objective in itself to maintain the low sick leave and focus efforts on preventive working environment measures and reducing withdrawal from work life.
- Withdrawal: The agreement aims for a reduction in withdrawal from work life.
 - Withdrawal is defined as situations in which working people do not return to work after sick leave. These are often people with long-term sickness absence, who start receiving work assessment allowance and then disability benefits, or people who turn to early retirement.

The enterprises shall help create good arenas for inclusion in working life through good and systematic work to prevent and reduce sick leave and withdrawal. The success of the IA agreement must be assessed in light of the parties' specific efforts, activities and results. Indicators shall be developed to provide information about activities and deliveries from all parties in the cooperation, including efforts from the authorities.

Objectives on industry and sector level:

The industry and sector development in working environment, sick leave and withdrawal is important for the achievement of the agreement's overall national objectives. Industries and sectors have different starting points, challenges and trends, and their contributions to achieving the national IA objectives will vary.

The parties to the agreement agree to focus efforts on the industries and sectors with the greatest potential for reduction in sick leave and withdrawal, in order to achieve the national objectives for the agreement. Based on documented knowledge, specific objectives and

indicators will be set for prioritised industries and sectors. The parties will agree on which industries and sectors to prioritise in the agreement period, and how they will follow this up in their own work.

How the IA agreement is organised

The IA agreement comprises all of Norway's working life. The workplace is the main arena for IA work. Successful cooperation between the parties is a prerequisite for succeeding with the IA work, and management, employee representatives as well as safety delegates have important roles in this respect.

The tripartite Council for Working Life and Pension Policy, under the leadership of the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, is responsible for following up the IA agreement at the national level. On an annual basis, the Council must discuss experiences and results achieved, as well as the future strategy and general plans, etc. for the IA work.

The follow-up of prioritised industries and sectors will be a central part of the organised cooperation between the parties and the authorities. The parties and the authorities shall evaluate the cooperation together and agree on an appropriate cooperation form in the prioritised industries and sectors. Employers' and employees' organisations can establish their own regional cooperation models where they think this is appropriate.

The operative follow-up of the IA agreement at a national level will be performed by a *coordination committee* under the Council for Working Life and Pension Policy. The group consists of the main organisations and the authorities, including the Labour and Welfare service (NAV), the National Institute of Occupational Health (STAMI) and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority (Arbeidstilsynet). The group's task is to follow up core initiatives and priorities in the IA agreement and prepare discussions in the Council for Working Life and Pension Policy.

The *expert group* is a work group consisting of the parties, the authorities and relevant expert organisations. The expert group will discuss status and development in the IA goals, and ensure good and relevant knowledge concerning important factors in relation to the IA agreement's objectives and priority areas. Assessments made by the expert group provide an important basis for the work in the coordination committee and the prioritised industry efforts. The group will also submit an annual report to the Council for Working Life and Pension Policy. The expert group's mandate, including composition, tasks and organisation shall be reviewed and adjusted in the beginning of the agreement period, in order to support the direction and priorities in this IA agreement.

Policy instruments in the IA agreement

Policy instruments and measures in the IA agreement will support the objectives and the priority areas in the agreement. New measures should be knowledge-based, and a review of consequences and effects of priority efforts and measures must be initiated. In line with the

direction of the agreement, several policy instruments and measures should be general and cover working life on an overall level. The parties and the authorities also agree to prioritise instruments for targeted efforts in industries and sectors that have a potential for reducing sick leave and withdrawal.

The measures in the agreement could be prioritised differently throughout the agreement period.

Focus areas

In order to support the objectives of the IA agreement, the parties and the authorities agree to emphasize efforts for prevention of sick leave and withdrawal and to focus efforts on long-term and/or frequently recurring sickness absence.

Preventive work environment efforts

In order to be effective, preventive working environment efforts must be knowledge-based and directed towards real needs in the individual workplace. The IA agreement aims to strengthen the parties' cooperation in local working environment efforts and help enterprises access good, knowledge-based support in their work.

Efforts focused on long-term and/or frequently recurring sickness absence

Long term sickness absence makes up the greatest part of the total sick leave in Norway, and also increases risk of permanent withdrawal from working life. During the IA period, the parties will focus on long-term and/or frequently recurring sickness absence in particular. The work will be knowledge-based.

General policy instruments

New working environment programme

As a proactive measure to improve preventive working environment efforts, a new working environment programme will be established to help improve knowledge, skills and tools in the enterprises.

The working environment programme will support both priority areas in the IA agreement, and will include targeted industry and workplace-oriented knowledge development, communication and guidance in preventive working environment efforts. This work shall improve the enterprises' preventive working environment efforts in the areas that contribute the most to sick leave and withdrawal. Through this professional alignment, combined with a focused knowledge communication and guidance role, the Labour Inspection Authority will prioritise its support to industries, sectors and enterprises that need and want guidance in targeted, preventive working environment efforts, in addition to traditional inspection and control.

This programme will be prepared and established through a development project in 2019. Programme measures will be tested in pilots, and the aim is to establish an overall online solution/portal in 2019 for communication of knowledge and skills relating to efficient preventive working environment efforts to industries/sectors and enterprises. The portal will

provide a framework for IA cooperation and activities in the individual workplace, and also give incentives for such activities. Furthermore, the portal must clarify expectations for the local parties and the responsibilities carried by local parties in the IA work. The portal must be gradually and continuously supplemented and developed after 2019. The portal will be linked to the Labour Inspection Authority's web pages.

The working environment programme includes making knowledge-based information and guidance materials and recommendations available, to enable enterprises to use the new policy instruments as support and inspiration in their own local improvement work. The portal must be user-oriented and interactive, so that the parties in the workplace can map their own operations and compare their own activities and results with other relevant enterprises.

The portal must be seen as a supplement to the services that are offered by NAV Work Centres, and should also simplify the enterprises' dialogue with these centres, for example through links to NAV.no. The Work Centres should base their support to the enterprises on knowledge and skills from the working environment programme.

In addition to the enterprises, important target groups for the programme will be occupational health services, the Labour and Welfare Service, including NAV Work Centres, relevant organisations etc. Through a combination of digital tools, advisory services and guidance from the authorities, the work environment programme should reach all across working life. A reference group for the programme will be established, consisting of relevant parties and authorities.

Training in working environment efforts

The employers' and employees' organisations will contribute to better and more knowledge-based training in working environment efforts. Knowledge and skills among managers, employee representatives and safety delegates are crucial to achieve results in the workplaces. Training in working environment and targeted working environment efforts should be built on knowledge and skills from the new working environment programme, and should be included in the training of managers, employee representatives and safety delegates. The portal mentioned above could also be a helpful tool in working environment training.

A coordinated working life service

The work to create an inclusive working life takes place in the individual enterprises. An important condition for success is a well-functioning cooperation between the parties. In order to find support for work with the IA agreement objectives and focus areas in the individual workplace, enterprises could start cooperating with a NAV Work Centre. The support and skills provided by NAV Work Centres could be an important tool for enterprises in their IA work. A documented dialogue between the parties in the individual workplace must be in place before NAV Work Centres can provide any assistance.

The Labour and Welfare Service shall develop digital services that provide the enterprises with an overall range of services and interaction interface with the Labour and Welfare

Service. This will give the enterprises a digital contact point which could simplify and streamline the enterprises' dialogue and cooperation with the Labour and Welfare Service, including the NAV Work Centres. The parties agree that several functions should be set up as digital services in the time ahead, and that personal support functions will be reserved for the issues where the need for assistance is greatest. Enterprises with a regular contact in a NAV Work Centre can keep this unless the enterprise contact could be ensured in some other and better way.

The work centre resources should be an instrument in the IA work.

To support the work to prevent and reduce sick leave in the individual workplace, a grant for expert assistance should be provided in individual cases of long-term and/or frequently recurring sickness absence. The grant will be limited to situations where documented in-house measures and other public support schemes have been used, and where the employer, the NAV Work Centre as well as the individual employee agree that external expert assistance would be appropriate to find solutions.

Health in Work

The purpose of the Health in Work instrument (HelseArbeid) is to ensure health promotion and preventive information in the workplace, with quick access to individual and interdisciplinary consideration and clarification to promote coping and work participation. The target group is the large group of employees who risk falling outside working life due to musculoskeletal and/or mental illnesses.

HelseArbeid is currently offered in the three northernmost counties. The parties to the agreement agree to implement HelseArbeid to a greater extent than today. The instrument shall be implemented within the current regulatory framework and the regulation on prioritisation.

Work Centre resources will be used to achieve greater implementation of HelseArbeid.

Skills measures

People on long-term sick leave are a complex group, and for some, it could become clear at an early point that skills measures would be necessary to enable them to go back to work. In cases where in-house facilitation does not lead to the desired result, the Labour and Welfare Service should consider whether work-related measures should be tested as early as possible. In order to support and strengthen this responsibility, the authorities will start a test project with extended use of skills measures under their direction. The target group is employees on long-term sick leave, who, due to sickness or injury cannot return to their previous employers, and thus need skills measures to qualify for alternative work and a new job. The test project will provide new knowledge about whether and how new skills could strengthen the work attachment of people in this target group. A reference group for the project will be established, consisting of relevant parties and authorities.

Sick leave follow-up

As a support for physicians, a new course module on issuing medical certificates will be prepared in Centre for quality in medical offices (SKIL, Senter for kvalitet i legekontor). The course modules are developed by SKIL together with the parties and the authorities in a reference group, and will be based on existing professional support tools for issuers of medical certificates.

The extension of the self-certified sick leave system has been a successful and appropriate instrument to promote dialogue at the workplace and relieve the health care system of the work related to following-up short-term sick leave.

The parties to the IA agreement propose that the opportunity to implement an extended right to submit self-certified sick leave should be specified in the National Insurance Act. They also suggest that employers should be obliged to discuss an extended right to submit self-certified sick leave with the employee representatives. This will give more employees the opportunity for extended self-certification.

The organisations will invite previous IA enterprises to continue their arrangement with extended right of self-certification. The organisations will call on enterprises which have not previously offered the right of extended self-certification to consider this arrangement.

The parties and the authorities will be attentive to the statutory requirement to follow up sick leave and pay close attention to new knowledge and information in this area. The development of new digital services in sick leave follow-up gives better opportunities to exploit the flexibility in the current regulatory framework and to ensure targeted efforts towards long-term and/or frequently recurring sickness absence. This requires that enterprises maintain an overview of the individual employees' sick leave records and take the initiative at an early point in time for dialogue meetings 2 and 3, when appropriate. The Labour and Welfare Service should ensure that such meetings are held when requested by either the employer, employee or medical certificate issuer. In cases where in-house facilitation does not lead to the desired result, the Labour and Welfare Service should consider whether work-related measures should be tested as early as possible

Improved data and knowledge basis

The IA agreement shall stimulate knowledge development in the focus areas chosen for the agreement. Knowledge about measures in the workplace and cooperation between the parties at a workplace level should also be prioritised. Furthermore, there could be a need to develop a better data and statistics foundation at an industry/profession level in the focus areas of the agreement, including sick leave and use of self-certification, withdrawal, working environment etc.

Policy instruments for prioritised industries and sectors

Industry programmes

Industry programmes will be established in industries and sectors where the IA parties agree to make targeted and prioritised efforts to support the objectives of the IA agreement. Together, the parties and the authorities will assess and find out the number of and which industries and sectors are candidates for this, and find an appropriate form of cooperation in the prioritised industries and sectors.

Industries should be selected both from the public and the private sector. Other criteria for selecting prioritised industries and sectors would be the potential to reduce sick leave and/or withdrawal and industries that are considered particularly exposed to restructuring. The industries will be selected in the first quarter of 2019, and the industry programmes will be implemented in the second quarter of 2019.

The parties and the authorities agree to prioritise development and evaluation of measures in the industry programmes under direction of the IA agreement, and measures and policy instruments that support the objectives of the agreement. Arrangements will be made for the parties in the industry programmes to test various targeted measures in the selected priority areas: preventive working environment efforts and follow-up of long-term and/or frequently recurring sickness absence. A review of consequences and evaluation of the measures will be initiated, in order to assess the effect of the overall policy instruments.

Follow-up of the IA agreement

Based on experience gained and development trends, the parties in the Council for Working Life and Pension Policy shall annually assess the results achieved in relation to the objectives of the agreement.

If the results of the IA work show a negative trend, the authorities will initiate discussions with the parties to the agreement regarding necessary adjustments.

Oslo, 18 December 2018

The government, represented by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs

The Confederation of Norwegian
Enterprise (NHO)

The Norwegian Confederation of
Trade Unions (LO)

The Norwegian Association of Local
and Regional Authorities (KS)

The Confederation of Unions for
Professionals (Unio)

The Enterprise Federation of
Norway (Virke)

The Confederation of Vocational
Unions (YS)

The Employers' Association
(Spekter)

The Federation of Norwegian
Professional Associations
(Akademikerne)

The Norwegian State as employer, represented by the Minister of Local Government and
Modernisation

ENCLOSURES

The parties agree to the following prioritisation of resources for policy instruments:

Policy instruments	Total resources 2019–2022
New working environment programme	MNOK 70 in 2019, then MNOK 50 annually
Coordinated working life services	Work centres
Health in work (HelseIArbeid)	Work centres
New grant for expert assistance	MNOK 50 annually
Skills measures – testing	MNOK 70 annually
Industry programmes, including development, testing, consequence evaluation	MNOK 60 in 2019, then MNOK 80 annually
Knowledge development, Knowledge basis	MNOK 21 annually
Development of course module and testing (SKIL)	Total MNOK 2 in 2019-2021 ¹
Working environment training	Annually, covered by the parties

¹ Provided that the financial framework is in accordance with state subsidy regulations.