

Action plan 2013-2016: We need the competence of immigrants – Summary

Background

The background for the action plan is the report to Parliament on integration policy (Meld. St. 6 (2012-2013) *En helhetlig integreringspolitikk – mangfold og fellesskap [A comprehensive integration policy – diversity and community]*). This document presents the Government's efforts to increase employment among immigrants. First, measures have been implemented to strengthen the basic qualifications of newly arrived immigrants. Second, the goal has been set to better utilise the skills and competence of immigrants. The action plan and its initiatives are a concrete result of this goal.

All people who live in Norway should be able to utilise their resources in working life and to participate in the community. Work is the key to financial independence, social participation and equality. High employment rates for both women and men are a necessary condition if we are to maintain a sustainable welfare state and reduce social inequality.

While each individual must make an effort to find work, employers and the public authorities must help inhabitants to enter working life and be able to use their education and other competence.

Stronger and more comprehensive efforts are needed to benefit from the competence of immigrants. The action plan features 19 measures in the fields of *recognition*, *recruitment* and *entrepreneurship*. These are designed to contribute to

- improving the schemes for recognition of education and training from abroad
- getting public and private employers to recruit more immigrants, thus helping them to utilise their competence
- making it easier for immigrants to obtain adapted information and counselling about establishing their own company

The measures in the plan must be considered in the context of other elements in the Government's policy designed to increase employment rates and to enhance the utilisation of the competence immigrants have, such as measures to counteract discrimination. The Government will also begin work on a new action plan to promote equality and prevent ethnic discrimination, to take effect from 2014.

The measures will be implemented in the 2013- 2016 planning period. Seven ministries have been involved in designing the plan, under the leadership of the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion. The action plan will be reviewed on an annual

basis to assess how well it has been complied with. The responsible ministries will ensure that the measures are assessed.

Measures

Recognition of prior competence

Recognition schemes for education from abroad shall ensure that applicants have the required qualifications for working in a specific occupation in Norway. A good and efficient system for such recognition is necessary. It will give immigrants the possibility of quickly finding a job where they can use the competence they have from their country of origin to the benefit of society.

Measure 1: A national system for recognition of education from abroad for those who are unable to document their education

Many refugees who come to Norway are unable to document their education and training due to conditions in their country of origin. Other immigrants may also have problems in verifying their education. A permanent system for such recognition will be introduced by NOKUT (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) in 2013 based on experiences gained from a pilot project. NOK 3 million has been granted for this purpose in the revised national budget. NOKUT's means of processing such resource-demanding cases will be strengthened from 2014.

Measure 2: New authorisation scheme for recognition of health personnel from countries outside the EEA

The goal is that the system for authorising health personnel shall ensure quality and patient safety while also guaranteeing fair and effective case processing. The new scheme will consist of assessment of equivalence and qualification measures.

Measure 3: Better adaptation of Norwegian language instruction for immigrants with higher education

This measure applies to persons with the right and obligation to Norwegian language instruction. VOX (the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning) will launch pilot projects with alternative models for Norwegian language instruction with rapid progression, including a programme adapted for people with higher education. The aim is that such programmes will be part of the regular Norwegian language instruction.

Measure 4: More knowledge about needs for supplementary education for applicants seeking recognition for regulated professions

The need for supplementary education for immigrants from countries outside the EEA seeking approval to work in regulated professions will be studied. The aim is to ascertain the needs relating to different regulated professions and those subjects where there is a particular need for measures for applicants, for example in the health sector. The study, which will also include a socio-economic cost-benefit analysis, will assess possibilities the university and college sector has to establish such programmes, and will take experiences from Sweden under consideration.

Measure 5: Raising competence on recognition schemes for programme counsellors in the introductory programme for newly arrived immigrants

IMDi (the Directorate of Integration and Diversity) will work with NOKUT to develop a programme for raising competence on recognition schemes. The target group will primarily be programme counsellors in the introductory programme for refugees and in the programme "Jobbsjansen" [Job Opportunity]. If possible, other groups, such as staff in adult education or NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), may be offered the same programme.

Measure 6: Improved career counselling for immigrants

VOX allocates project funding which county career centres may apply for. The projects will be established in cooperation with municipal adult education centres that provide Norwegian language instruction and other agencies. The exchange of competence between the agencies will be an important element in the projects. Participants should be given the opportunity to receive further career counselling after completing their Norwegian language instruction.

Measure 7: Full statistics relating to applicants in the recognition process for regulated professions

Several recognition agencies for regulated professions do not keep statistics of applicants, and there are significant variations when it comes to what is registered. The aim of this measure is to obtain better information about flow-through and efficiency in the recognition process. The statistics should form the basis for pinpointing and reducing any impediments in the schemes that might delay the transition to the labour market. Models for registering and statistics that can be adopted by all the recognition agencies for regulated professions will be examined. Models under consideration must be tested by the recognition agencies before choosing the most suitable model which can then be used by the other agencies.

Measure 8: Cooperation forum for recognition agencies for regulated professions

A cooperation forum will be established which each recognition agency for regulated professions can use to exchange experiences. In this way, more agencies can share good examples of effective procedures that can quickly lead immigrants through the recognition process.

Recruitment in the public and private sectors

Working life must utilise the competence that can be found in the population. In some fields qualified labour is a scarce good. Therefore employers must recruit widely. Another goal is that the labour force should reflect the composition of the population. This also builds trust. Diversity in the labour force also gives more and new approaches to tasks.

Measure 9: Grants for mentor and trainee programmes for persons with immigrant backgrounds

A grant scheme will be established to initiate and support work with mentor and trainee programmes in companies. The purpose of the grants is to encourage more companies to initiate and systematise this type of work. An increase in the recruitment of people with immigrant backgrounds to management positions, for example, will have positive ripple effects for future recruitment.

Measure 10: Working group composed of representatives from the social partners to strengthen efforts to recruit persons with immigrant backgrounds to state enterprises

A working group with representatives of the social partners (labour and employer associations) will be convened to present proposals for measures that can be implemented as part of the central employer policy or can be implemented in the enterprises.

Measure 11: Development of regional networking activities for increased employment

The aim of two pilot projects implemented by Innovation Norway is to get more immigrants working in local/regional business and industry. The first project aims to contribute to increased value creation in companies owned by immigrants through building networks with other local businesses and the provision of innovation and marketing skills. The other aims to find impediments and establish measures that will help local businesses to use the competence of immigrants. The experiences gained from the two projects will be used to assess whether to expand them to other regions and whether to introduce other new pilot projects.

Measure 12: Competence upgrading for consultants in NAV offices

Developing the competence of consultants working in the NAV offices is necessary to achieve better individual facilitation and better matching of jobseekers and employers. This competence can be increased if the county authorities conduct regular courses in multicultural competence for NAV employees.

Measure 13: Greater efforts to encourage employers to send job vacancies directly to NAV

Immigrants have fewer networks that can land them jobs than the people who have grown up in Norway. Therefore more effort will be put into having more job vacancies reported directly to NAV. The Directorate is working to enter into binding cooperation with the local authorities on employment services. Efforts will also continue to enter into agreements between NAV and public and private enterprises to report vacant positions that match competent candidates.

Measure 14: E-learning tools in diversity recruitment to employment with the central authorities

The e-learning tools in diversity recruitment developed by the Norwegian Tax Administration will be distributed to the entire state administration. The e-learning course follows a recruitment process. The course addresses four main topics: Designing the position vacant advertisement, summoning people for a job interview, the job interview and writing a recommendation.

Measure 15: Guidebook for diversity recruitment to employment with the central authorities

A guide will be prepared for diversity recruitment for the central authorities to be used by human resources managers. The guide will be part of the training in recruitment in the central administration.

Measure 16: Better knowledge base on suitability assessments when hiring employees

More knowledge is needed on suitability assessment when hiring. Key questions are whether assessment of "personal qualities" may cover discriminatory attitudes, and the extent to which different cultural backgrounds may cause misunderstandings and erroneous interpretations in the employment process.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship among immigrants is a positive contribution to the value creation in society. Immigrants who are or would like to become entrepreneurs often encounter more impediments than other people when establishing a business. More information and counselling are needed on how to go about starting a company in Norway. This may help more companies survive in the long term.

Measure 17: Grants for regional entrepreneurship centres for immigrants

Regional centres can offer information about and training in starting a business with special focus on the challenges immigrants encounter. The centres will also serve as competence centres for the local authorities in the region wishing to establish local programmes with counselling and information about establishing a business.

Measure 18: Immigrants as a prioritised group in NAV's funding scheme for job creation projects

Funding of job creation projects is a scheme where NAV grants funding to projects/suppliers of courses offering training and counselling to people wishing to establish their own business. Immigrants who wish to start their own business are a prioritised target group.

Measure 19: Better adapted entrepreneurship counselling from the municipal first-line service

Innovation Norway will increase the quality of municipal first-line service with relevance for entrepreneurs. The aim is that these services improve their ability to fill the special needs of immigrants for counselling through the provision of information about rules and regulations and through courses for entrepreneurs.