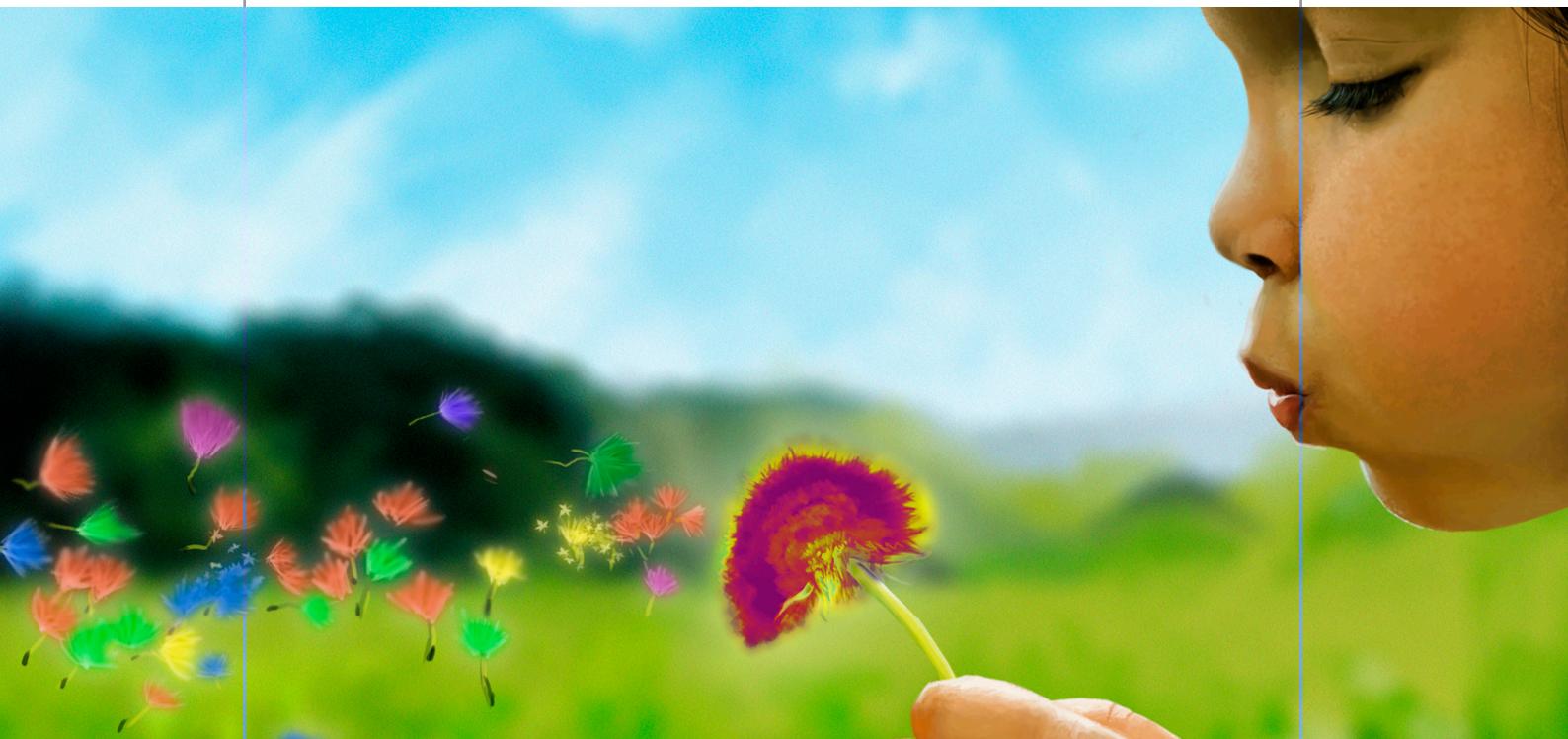




REGIONAL PLAN

for equality, inclusion and diversity in Agder (2015–2027)



Aust-Agder
fylkeskommune



Vest-Agder
fylkeskommune

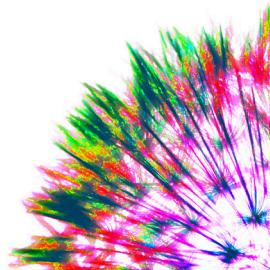


REGIONPLAN AGDER 2020

Table of contents

REGIONAL PLAN FOR EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN AGDER (2015–2027)

Preface	4
Background	5
Planning for equality	5
Active and broad equality work	6
Seeing connections	6
Definitions	6
Organising the planning process	7
The LIM plan vision: An equal, inclusive and diverse Agder region	
Justice and resources	9
We cannot afford not to	9
Making the plan work	10
Main objectives 2027	10
Topic 1 - An open region with a diverse democracy	11
Political participation	11
Organisations and voluntary work	11
The importance of time and place	11
Media imbalance	12
Development objectives 2027 – Topic 1	12
Topic 2 - Equality in education – a tree of possibilities	13
Gender differences in kindergartens and schools	13
Boys lagging behind in school	13
Promoting girls' interest in technology at the university	13
International diversity in education	14
School for everyone	14
Development objectives 2027 – Topic 2	15



Topic 3 - Workplaces for everyone	17
The structure of Agder's economy	17
Part-time work and low incomes	17
Disability and mental and chronic illnesses	17
The IW Agreement and young disabled people	18
Immigrants in the labour market	18
LGBT people in the workplace	19
The activity duty	19
Development objectives 2027 – Topic 3	19
Topic 4 - Services for the individual	21
New services and expertise needed	21
'Equal' treatment may yield different results	21
Access and universal design	21
Diversity in the health and care sector	22
Development objectives 2027 – Topic 4	22
Topic 5 Unity against harassment and violence	23
Violence – a social and general health problem affecting everyone	23
Domestic violence	23
Hate violence and harassment	24
Political priorities	24
Development objectives 2027 – Topic 5	25
References/endnotes	27

Preface

The Regional Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Diversity in Agder 2015–2027 (the LIM plan) is the Agder counties' first regional plan relating to these policy areas. It has been prepared in accordance with the counties' regional planning strategies and the goals set out in the Regional Development Plan Agder 2020. From 2015, this plan is the main tool for developing a region characterised by equality and good living conditions. Our region needs such a plan in order to ensure everyone equal opportunities to participate in all areas of society. The two Agder counties have long been at the bottom of various equality and living conditions statistics, but we have now decided to break the vicious circle through a long-term effort. Individuals, businesses and organisations, and society at large all stand to benefit if we remove the obstacles to equality and create a warm and inclusive region.

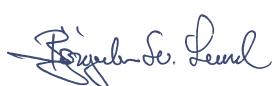
The planning process complies with the procedural requirements in the Norwegian Planning and Building Act, and we have succeeded in achieving broad and diverse participation throughout the process. The young people involved made their mark on the plan from the outset, there has been heated debate in the media, and we received many good consultation submissions from municipalities and others. The result is a good, well thought out plan with five main goals and 30 developmental objectives.

To achieve these goals in the course of the 12 years the plan will be in effect, the good cooperation established during the planning process must be maintained and expanded. We expect municipalities and government agencies to use the LIM plan as the basis for their work, and we also encourage business and industry and the voluntary sector to use the plan. The county councils must set good examples in their work on LIM issues. We have an obligation to do so, both in our role as planning authority and as an agent of societal development, and, not least, in relation to the services we are responsible for and the policy we pursue as employers.

A lot can change in 12 years. A joint action programme has been prepared for the plan and will be reviewed annually. It is the responsibility of the county councils to invite others to cooperate to ensure that the action programme is made effective and relevant through good measures and partnerships.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of the plan and wish you all the best in your future equality, inclusion and diversion efforts!

January 2015



Bjørgulf Sverdrup Lund



Terje Damman

Bjørgulf Sverdrup Lund
County Mayor of Aust-Agder

Terje Damman
County Mayor of Vest-Agder



Background

“The Agder region’s political approach to equality is virtually unparalleled at the regional level in Norway. Equality is discussed and emphasised as an important issue in regional planning processes, and development work is being done in several areas. The Agder region can therefore be described as both an equality latecomer and an equality role model.” (*Bråten, Jensen and Strand: Likestilling og mangfoldstandard for virksomheter, Fafo report 2014*)

The Regional plan for Equality, Inclusion and Diversity in Agder 2015–2027 (the LIM plan) is a platform for joint systematic action to strengthen equality and improve living conditions in the Agder region. It is a result of the Agder counties’ ten-year commitment to equality, which started in 2008 as a response to poor equality and living conditions, compared with other counties and regions in Norway.

There is cross-party agreement that equality, inclusion and diversity should be a long-term and systematic priority in Agder. The projects *Fritt valg* (*Free choice*) (2008–12) and *Likestilling som regional kraft* (*Equality as a regional force*) (2012–15) are other important elements of the long-term commitment. Both projects have developed tools and structures to improve equality through cooperation in the region.

The Centre for Gender Equality at the University of Agder was established as part of the region’s long-term commitment to ensure that work on equality is knowledge-based.

Several other projects and measures have contributed to developing the regional platform for better and broader equality work, some of them with a multicultural perspective.

Planning for equality

The Regional Development Plan Agder 2020 has made *The good life: Agder for everyone* as the second of its five priorities, and equality was a red thread when preparing the plan. As part of the Agder counties’ regional planning strategies, it was decided in 2012 that a regional plan for equality, inclusion and diversity should be adopted by 2016.

The Planning and Building Act states that regional master plans shall form the basis for municipal and central government activities in the regions, emphasising wide participation in planning processes. Conferences and thematic planning workshops were held outside normal working hours, and around 200 people participated in the work. In the public consultation, 58 submissions were received, 18 of them from municipalities. The LIM plan’s Facebook page was used actively in the planning process.

Background

Many of the 30 municipalities in Agder now endeavour to integrate equality in their own planning and development. It is important that the county councils and municipalities cooperate on this issue. The LIM plan and its action programme will be the main tools and source of inspiration for further efforts on this issue and highlight important joint initiatives. In line with the recommendations in the Act, the LIM plan will have a 12-year perspective, and an action programme will be prepared for the plan and reviewed annually.

Active and broad equality work

Responsibility for actively further equality and social inclusion is set out in international conventions, acts, plans and other public documents. The Norwegian Gender Equality Act, the Anti-discrimination Acts and the Working Environment Act form the basis for the LIM plan and the efforts to follow up the plan.

The LIM plan is a broad equality plan that takes account of gender, ethnicity, functional ability, age, religion/beliefs, sexual orientation / gender identity / gender expression and social background. The term 'equality' in the LIM plan concerns all groups in society that may be subject to discrimination on these grounds.

Seeing connections

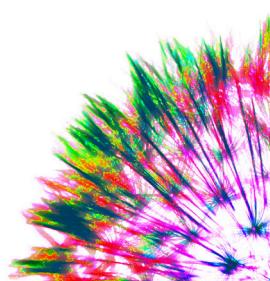
The LIM plan applies a multidimensional equality concept and has a comprehensive view of different discrimination grounds. For example, how can gender, ethnic background and social background interact to affect people's chances in life? We have a lot of experience to draw on, but little research has been done in the field.

We know from women's shelters that disabled women are particularly at risk of violence. We know that gay people from some immigrant communities, and in some religious organisations, are subject to harassment and threats. Agder aims to do pioneering work, and it will be interesting to link the follow-up of the LIM plan with research on e.g. multiple discrimination.

Definitions

We use the following definitions in the LIM plan:

EQUALITY: that all persons shall have equal rights and opportunities in society, regardless of gender, functional ability, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity and religion etc. The Norwegian word 'liketilling' has traditionally been used to refer to



Background

equality between women and men. This is still the most common use of the word, but, in recent years, its meaning has been expanded and now also includes other grounds for discrimination. Equality between the genders is often described as 'kjønnslikstilling' (gender equality) (*Store norske leksikon*).

INCLUSION: that everyone who lives in Norway shall have equal opportunities and obligations to contribute and participate in society, and how society should be organised to achieve this (*NOU 2011:14 Bedre integrering*).

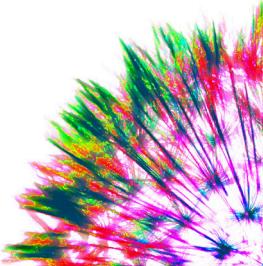
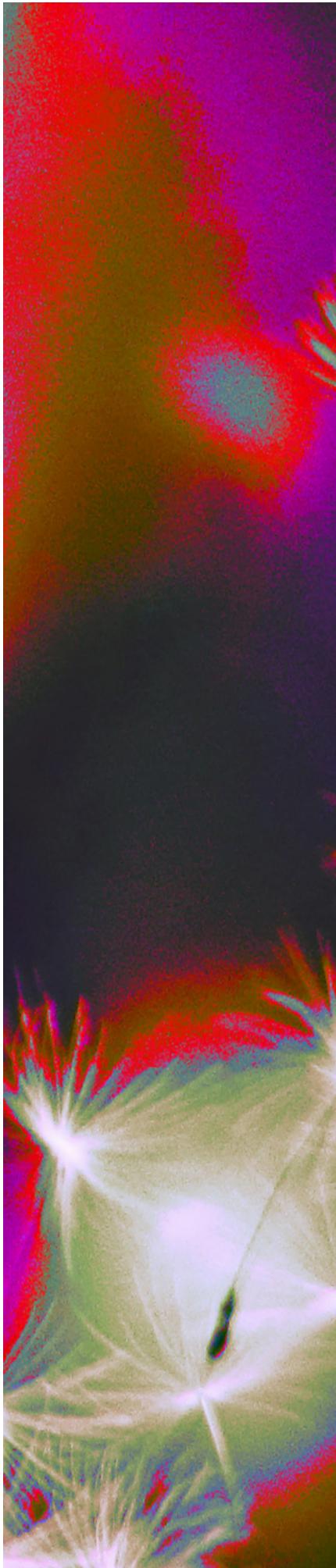
DIVERSITY (HUMAN AND CULTURAL): that the composition of people in a society or institution is varied and that they have different backgrounds and resources/abilities. (Definition made for the LIM plan).

Because of Agder's special challenges in relation to gender equality, and based on the significant increase in the number of immigrants in the region since the turn of the millennium, gender and ethnicity have been given particular attention in the plan.

Organising the planning process

The two executive boards in Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder counties have acted as the steering committee for the LIM plan, with the Regional Development Plan Agder 2020 organisation (the Political Coordination Group and the Group of Chief Municipal/County Executives) as a reference group.

There has been an administrative steering group comprising representatives of the two county governor offices (central government representatives in the counties), the administrative leadership of both county councils, and a project group consisting of experts from both county councils, the County Governor of Vest-Agder, IMDi Sør (the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, Southern Norway regional office), the Centre for Gender and Equality, and the municipalities of Kristiansand, Arendal and Marnardal.



The LIM plan vision: An equal, inclusive and diverse Agder region

The Nordic welfare model is based on strong solidarity and cohesion. Its core values are equal opportunities, social solidarity and security for everyone. A policy for equality and good protection against discrimination is a natural part of the Nordic model.

Justice and resources

The LIM plan combines a fairness perspective with a resource perspective. According to the UN human rights convention and Norway's equality policy, everyone is entitled to life, freedom, personal safety and protection against discrimination. The right to work, education, the best possible health, and cultural and democratic participation for everyone is indisputable.

The report *Samfunnsutvikling for god folkehelse* (the Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2014) shows that we are born into very different environments and with different resources, which, among other things, leads to socially based health inequality. It is society's job to try to level these differences as far as possible.

The resource perspective implies that all inhabitants in society must be recognised and respected as individuals with abilities and opportunities to contribute to the common good. Society needs the experience, knowledge and participation of all its inhabitants in order to develop in the best possible way.

We cannot afford not to act

Agder has scored poorly in Statistic Norway's gender equality index since surveys began in 1999. The Agder counties also fare poorly in Statistic Norway's survey of living conditions. The region stands out because of negative results on many of the indicators measured, and research indicates a connection between low levels of equality and poor living conditions in Agder.¹

There is also a strong positive connection between equality and what is good for the economy. For example, women's increased participation in the labour market from the 1970s onwards has had a significant impact on value creation and prosperity.

People are differently equipped to participate in society and the labour market. Implementing measures to ensure participation by everyone – investing in people – is expensive, but it costs even more not to. When groups are excluded, society loses out on their contributions to the community, and vicious circles, such as increased

differences in health, often arise. Unless systematic efforts are made to prevent and reduce these differences, the cost to society will be high, both in terms of welfare benefits, health expenditures and loss of income.

Making the plan work

There is consensus in the region that we need the LIM plan, and a lot of efforts have gone into preparing both the plan and the action programme. However, this does not guarantee the efficacy of the plan.

The first precondition for the plan to succeed is making sure it is well-known and regarded as useful by municipalities, public and private institutions, and organisations in the Agder region. This is not enough, however. If we are to succeed in strengthening the region's human resources, we need to organise and prioritize well. Reaching our goals requires both people and money. As the regional planning authority, the county councils are responsible for following up the LIM plan. Without improved knowledge bases, structures and alliances in the field of equality continue, however, the region will not succeed.

Main objectives 2027

- 1** Agder is a region characterised by equality, with good living conditions above national average.
- 2** Elected representatives and the public administration in Agder have extensive knowledge about equality.
- 3** Equality perspectives are a natural part of planning, strategy work, budgeting, research and analyses in the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- 4** Tools, models, results and research from the equality work are in active use and in demand throughout Norway.
- 5** Respect and cultural understanding permeate the local communities in the Agder region. Communication in the public domain is characterised by respect for human dignity and understanding for different beliefs, religions and political convictions.



Topic 1

An open region with a diverse democracy

Democratic participation is the LIM plan's first main topic. A functioning democracy enables many people to participate in society. All necessary measures are taken to ensure that governing bodies reflect the diversity of the population. The experience and perspectives of all sections of the population are represented when important decisions are made.

Political participation

In Norway today, some groups are still under-represented in political bodies, important boards and in networks. In statistical studies of such issues, the Agder region is worse off than the national average. To give two clear examples, women are less represented in local politics and fewer immigrants vote in elections than the population at large.² Various measures to involve young people in political work and participation on their own terms can put us on the right path.

Organisations and voluntary work

The great diversity of voluntary organisations such as sports clubs, residents' associations, trade unions, interest groups, and religious and humanitarian organisations is a cornerstone of welfare and democracy in the Scandinavian countries. Participation promotes a sense of community and inclusion and provides democratic experience and competence. Experience of voluntary work can be useful when seeking employment.

Associations and organisations can be group-based platforms for political influence, dialogue and change. The tripartite cooperation between the trade unions, employer federations and the state plays an important role in Norwegian society. Several of the welfare schemes in Norway were originally started by voluntary organisations such as the Norwegian Women's Public Health Association.

A good dialogue is crucial to promoting respect and preventing conflicts and violence in a multicultural society open to people of all beliefs. Organisations and associations can play an important part in this regard, together with the authorities and service providers.

The importance of time and place

Universal design of population centres, meeting places and outdoor areas is an important precondition for equal rights to participation. Other important issues include providing venues for events and activities at feasible times. There are good examples of synchronising public transportation outside central areas with specific events and activities, thus laying a foundation for demand-responsive public transport services in sparsely populated municipalities.

Media unbalance

Access to the media is very important for people's right to be heard. Media-facilitated debates are important arenas for dialogue, defining challenges, and political alternatives. Research shows that there is a gender imbalance in the media and that sources and journalists from ethnic minorities are under-represented.³ *Kvinnepanelet's (the women's panel) report* from 2010 documented that women who participate in public debate are often subject to harassment.

Development objectives 2027 – Topic 1

The LIM plan has helped to open up the Agder region and foster a diverse democracy..

- 1** Local democracy enjoys a good reputation. Engaging in politics is attractive, and the level of recruitment from all sections of the population to offices and positions is good.
- 2** Election turnout is high in the Agder region and above the national average, also among first-time voters and immigrants.
- 3** (*Aust-Agder:*) Municipal councils, county councils, municipal executive boards and county executive boards reflect the diversity of the population. Ethnic and age diversity is good, as is representation of people with different educational and occupational backgrounds and functional impairments. Half of the elected representatives and half of the region's mayors are women, and the LGBT population is well represented in important positions.
- 3** (*Vest-Agder:*) Municipal councils, county councils, municipal executive boards and county executive boards reflect the diversity of the population. Half of the elected representatives and half of the region's mayors are women, and previously under-represented groups are well and visibly represented in important positions.
- 4** All population groups participate equally in labour market organisations, culture, sports, humanitarian work and religious/belief communities. Participation begins and is encouraged in organisations for children.
- 5** All premises, meeting places and arenas for political, voluntary, democratic and cultural participation are universally designed and accessible to everyone.
- 6** There is a good gender balance and visible diversity in the media.



Topic 2

Equality in education

- the tree of possibilities

Education is the LIM plan's second main topic. The population in Agder is varied and diverse in terms of education and real-life competence and work experience. The highest number of university or college educated persons are found in the university municipalities of Grimstad and Kristiansand. Municipalities with an economy dominated by industry and primary industries have more inhabitants with craft certificates and vocational training. The shortage of apprenticeships in many fields, particularly in the public sector, is a challenge.

Gender differences in kindergartens and schools

Differences in school achievements of boys and girls are well documented in Norway, and equality in education has been on the agenda since the 1980s. The Kindergarten Act, the Education Act and the Gender Equality Act all state that kindergartens and schools are obliged to promote gender equality, and several national action plans have been launched for this purpose. The 'Fritt valg' (Free choice) project (2008–2012) developed tools to promote equality, and useful experience was gained in the Agder counties. The kindergarten staff participating in the project discovered that their behaviour towards boys and girls differed systematically, which was good motivation for them to change their practice.⁴

Boys are lagging behind in school

Since the 1970s, gender differences in schools have attracted significant public attention. Initially, the focus was primarily on girls being overlooked, but in recent years, public debate has often addressed the fact that boys are lagging behind. In primary and lower secondary school, the average grades of boys are poorer, and they drop out of upper secondary school more often. The reasons for dropping out are complex, but there is a connection between lower secondary school grades and the likelihood of completing upper secondary school.⁵ The dropout rate is clearly highest in vocational training programmes. The pattern of boys struggling with school work to a greater extent than girls was confirmed in a big regional survey of ten-year-olds in the Agder region in 2012. Although the difference is smaller than had been found in other research, the researchers still recommend targeted efforts towards boys' school work, as well as a critical view of the facilitation of boys' and girls' learning.⁶

Promoting girls' interest in technology at the university

Young people's choice of upper secondary school programmes in the Agder region differs even more by gender than in the rest of the country, and the regional initiative 'Fritt valg' has yet to yield visible results at this level. Indications are that the further away young people live from Kristiansand and the other towns, the more likely they are to choose programmes in accordance with gender traditions.⁷ Thanks to targeted efforts, more girls are now studying technology subjects at the University of Agder (UiA). This is a result of collaboration between businesses, labour unions, UiA, and the county councils, spearheaded by the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO). No similar schemes exist for education programmes dominated by girls, such as nursing and kindergarten studies.

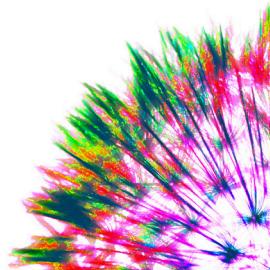
International diversity in education

The percentage of immigrants and Norwegian-born children of immigrants among the general population has increased significantly since the turn of the millennium. International diversity in kindergartens and schools is increasing as a result of immigration. Internationalisation of education, work to combat racism, cooperation between the school and the home, bilingual teaching, special Norwegian language tuition, and smooth transition between lower and upper secondary levels are becoming increasingly important issues.

As a result of increased immigration, more adults are taking primary and secondary education courses. A high percentage of women apply for admission to health and care programmes. For natural reasons, adult immigrants often perform poorer than other pupils. Good, user-adapted language tuition is an important key to improved results. Good introduction schemes and transitional procedures between the lower and upper secondary levels are also important.

There are big differences between immigrants and children of immigrants as regards choice of education and academic performance. Norwegian-born persons with immigrant parents more frequently choose programmes for specialisation in general studies and perform quite similar to other pupils with regard to mastery and school results, but there is great variation within this group.

In a Statistics Norway report from 2014 covering 13 Norwegian municipalities, the county capital Kristiansand sticks out because of negative results in some areas concerning education and Norwegian-born persons from immigrant backgrounds. Five percentage points more girls than the national average did not achieve higher education entrance qualifications or vocational qualifications, and significantly fewer Norwegian-born persons from immigrant backgrounds entered higher education.⁸ Kristiansand was the only municipality in the Agder region described in a separate report in the survey.



Schools for everyone

We know too little about how pupils with functional impairments or mental or chronic illnesses fare in the course of their education. A report from *Unge funksjonshemmede*, a cooperative body for young disabled persons, indicates that disabled pupils strive harder to complete upper secondary school. We know that schools focus on this issue, and in some places do excellent work to address it, but the report concludes that there is poor general understanding of how teaching and teaching premises can be adapted.

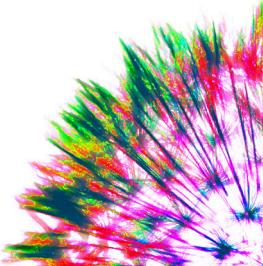
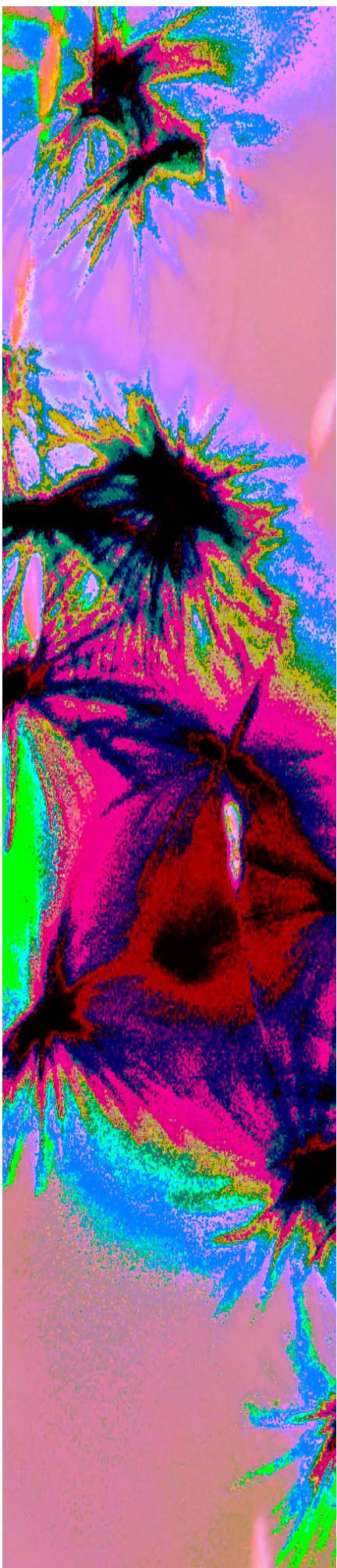
Schools need increased competence and improved teaching about LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) persons. ‘Homo’ is still one of the most commonly used word of abuse in Norwegian school yards. Teachers, school nurses and other school staff need to feel confident about how to address these issues when they arise if everyone is to feel they can be themselves and feel included.

Bullying, sexual harassment, violations and abuse are a challenge among school pupils and they take place both on the school grounds and outside. Both boys and girls experience as well as subject others to such behaviour, and systematic and targeted efforts are needed.

We have good experience of decentralised higher education programmes in Agder and this can be further developed

Development objectives 2027 - Topic 2

- 1** Education is regarded as attractive and important throughout the region. This applies to both academic and vocational education.
- 2** Kindergarten and school staff reflect the population, and diversity is valued. Teaching emphasises the development of creativity, courage, self-esteem, respect and the ability to make decisions.
- 3** Premises, teaching and educational methods are adapted to the needs of children/pupils/students from all population groups.
- 4** Introductory schemes and language tuition for pupils who have only lived in Norway for a short time are of high quality. Good procedures are in place to ease the transition from lower to upper secondary school.
- 5** Pupils have a sound basis for choosing an upper secondary school programme and everyone completes school. Gender balance is at least 30/70 in all programmes in upper secondary school and in all study programmes at UiA.
- 6** There are enough apprenticeships available and equal opportunities for getting an apprenticeship.



Topic 3

Workplaces for everyone

Equality in workplaces is the LIM plan's third main topic. Value creation in Agder depends on a sufficient supply of labour with the right qualifications. Access to the labour market and the right to paid employment are important for people's control of their own lives, financial independence, social ties and influence on the development of society. The principles of equal access to paid employment and equal working conditions are essential elements of Norwegian equality legislation. Nevertheless, some groups have weaker ties to the labour market than others.

Agder's industrial structure

Planning and measures to promote equality, inclusion and diversity in the labour market and work place must take account of the region's history and economic structure. In the Agder counties, a higher percentage of the workforce is employed in the manufacturing sector than the national average, and a somewhat smaller percentage in the service industries. In several municipalities, many people commute out to work.

Part-time work and low incomes

Over time, and to a greater extent than in other regions, women in Agder have had different and weaker ties to the labour market than men. They are less often in paid employment, work part-time to a much greater extent and generally work in low-paying sectors. Agder also has fewer female executives than other regions. Combined, these factors have resulted in lower gross income for women in Agder than the national average.

Sørlandet Hospital and several municipalities in Agder are working to create more full-time positions to improve gender equality and offer better services. Songdalen municipality sets a good example of a successful project. Its 'Saman om ein betre kommune' ('Together for a better municipality') programme has increased the percentage of full-time jobs from 60% to 70% by means of tripartite cooperation (between politicians, the administration and the unions).

Public debate in Agder often point to the difficulties of combining motherhood with full-time work. However, the results of the *New Facts* survey of women in the processing industry and the oil and gas industry in Agder indicate otherwise: Women in these industries, where full-time jobs are the norm, believe they have struck a good balance between work and family life, even if they work a lot.⁹

Disability and mental and chronic illnesses

There is a high proportion of people receiving disability benefits in the Agder counties, and women are over-represented among them. Together with Northern Norway, Agder region has the lowest level of education among working women in Norway. Statistically, limited education and part-time work increase the risk of becoming disabled. Young people with parents on disability benefit, and especially mothers on disability benefit, run a higher risk of becoming disabled themselves.

Around half the population will experience mental health problems once or several times during their lifetime, and, for some people, drug or alcohol addictions can become an additional problem. One fifth of all sickness absence and every fourth disability benefits claim are related to mental health problems. Work can be a good medicine. For many people, a combination of treatment and employment yields the best results.

Combining a chronic illness with work can be challenging, and often requires facilitating and the use of appropriate measures.

The Inclusive Workplace (IW) Agreement and young disabled people

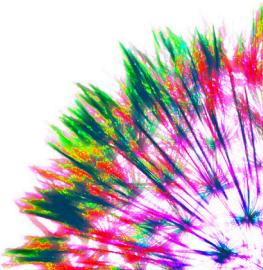
Over time, the employment rate among disabled people in Norway has been around 45%, and there are many more disabled people who wish to work. Many disabled people work part-time.

One of the sub-goals of the inclusive workplace (IW) agreement is about preventing disabled persons from dropping out of the labour market, and about increasing the employment rate. Starting in 2014, efforts will be made to target young disabled people. Work-related assistance, good follow-up and facilitation are important keywords.

Immigrants in the labour market

International diversity in the labour market is increasing in the Agder region. This means new resources, but also new challenges. The four most important reasons for immigrating to Norway are work, family relations, education and escape from persecution and war. At the time of writing, a somewhat higher proportion of the immigrants in Agder has arrived due to escape when compared to the rest of the country. An increase in the number of labour migrants, many from Poland and the Baltic countries, is a result of the EEA Agreement.

For decades, the unemployment rate among immigrants has been around three times higher than for the rest of the population. Causes for migrating, gender, country background and length of residence in Norway are all factors influencing



immigrants' employment opportunities, but there is also some geographic variation. In Statistic Norway's mapping and analysis of the proportion of immigrants in Norwegian enterprises in 2012, Vest-Agder had the poorest results (together with Østfold county), whereas the results in Aust-Agder are somewhat better.¹⁰

Immigrants generally hold lower-paying jobs than ethnic Norwegians, and the share of women from minority backgrounds in paid employment is particularly low.

Families with immigrant backgrounds are especially at risk of enduring poverty, and the quality of municipality introduction programmes for immigrants is very important for their living conditions. Introduction programmes aim to give refugees basic Norwegian language skills and basic insight into Norwegian society, and to prepare them for participation in the labour market. The municipalities' results vary significantly. *IMDi Sør* conclude that good results are contingent on the municipalities setting concrete goals, orienting their measures towards work and ensuring good cooperation among various responsible municipal entities.¹¹

LGBT people in the labour market

Research from several countries indicate that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons experience more discrimination than heterosexual people in the workplace, even though attitudes towards LGBT people in general have changed for the better. Transgender persons are at particular risk. Studies also show gay men earning less than heterosexual men, and lesbians and gay men discriminated against in recruitment processes.¹² There are no recent broad Norwegian studies of LGBT people in the workplace, but limited surveys show that many experience discrimination.

Some positive stories from the labour market in Agder indicate that experience of international diversity can make the workplace more open to diversity in general. It is important to study these examples more closely to create a labour market where it is easier for everyone to be themselves.

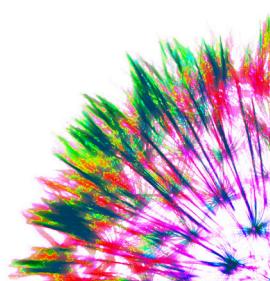
The activity duty

In line with equality and anti-discrimination legislation, employers are obliged to make active, targeted and systematic efforts to promote equality and prevent discrimination. Discrimination in the workplace is often unintended. An obligation to make active efforts in this regard may help to reduce unintentional discrimination. The Sexual Orientation Anti-Discrimination Act entered into force on 1 January 2014, and its mandatory activity duty includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Since this is a new focus, some employers may need to raise their competence as regards this issue.

Development objectives 2027 – Topic 3

New possibilities for everyone to find work are highlighted by good examples, a focus on the inherent resources of diversity, and reward schemes for diversity in the workplace.

- 1** No one in Agder needs to work part-time, and the public sector normally advertises all vacancies as permanent full-time jobs.
- 2** The workforce in public institutions and private enterprises reflects the population in the Agder region.
- 3** The needs of the business community and the public sector are well known, and steps are taken to ensure that job seekers can acquire the right expertise. The business community and the public sector offer apprenticeships for both young people and adults, and a sufficient number of good language internships are available, as is access to user-adapted Norwegian language tuition.
- 4** The road to recognition, approval and expansion of qualifications acquired abroad is made as short as possible through practical help and individual follow-up.
- 5** Choosing non-traditional occupations for one's gender confers status, and more men work in the health and care sector.
- 6** The labour market is characterised by a culture of diversity and mastering/empowerment, and working conditions are well-ordered. More people over 70 stay employed. It is easy to be an open LGBT person in the workplace. The number of disability pensioners in all age groups is below the national average, and the percentage of disabled people in paid employment has increased significantly and is above the national average.



Topic 4

Services for the individual

Equality of public service provision is the LIM plan's fourth main topic. The Norwegian welfare system is characterised by a broad range of publicly funded services. These services are used by all inhabitants of Norway from cradle to grave. Everyone is entitled to services of equally good quality, and the services shall be adapted to the needs of the individual. Access to equal services for all population groups is statutory by law.

New services and competence needed

In a population and a society undergoing change, new work methods and new competences are required in the public service sector. Public agencies have a delegated responsibility to adapt services to a diversified population. This includes how services are organised, guidelines for service provision and first-line contact with users. Appreciating differences and being open to diversity leads to better services for everyone.

'Equal' treatment may yield different results

Equal public service provision takes account of the fact that people are different. Users shall be provided with the services they are entitled to, and the services be based on individual needs and circumstances. If the service providers treat everyone 'the same', this could result in systematically different results.

Adapting services to the needs of a diverse population is not only important in terms of due process protection, living conditions and public health, but also to other topics covered by this plan: the individual's access to democratic participation, education, and work, as well as the right to be protected against harassment and violence.

Each sector must feel a strong sense of ownership and a clear responsibility for developing good and targeted measures and services.

Access and universal design

Everyone shall have access to public services regardless of background and situation. Access has to do with the physical design of premises and buildings, adapted information and communication technology, and preventing anyone from being excluded on unreasonable grounds, for example because they are required to speak Norwegian.¹³

As a result of new technology, many services are now offered electronically. This provides easier access for new groups, but it can also exclude the disabled, old people or people who cannot afford necessary equipment.

Universal design shall ensure equal access to services for everyone. Access should

not be limited because of functional impairments. A service location of universal design has made buildings and premises physically accessible for everyone, has technology providing everyone with real access to services, and has adapted information and personal service for everyone who needs it.

The county councils are responsible for providing public transport, which shall help to level differences in mobility. The scope of public transportation is based on various goals, conditions and the number of users in different areas. Work is under way on adapting public transportation services to the principles of universal design.

Diversity in the health and care sector

Immigrants and Norwegian-born persons from immigrant backgrounds constitute a growing group in the health and care sector, both as users and as service providers. Many immigrants come from countries without a well-developed welfare state, and where the state is associated with conditions far removed from the concept of welfare. We need to build trust, inter-cultural competence and cultural sensitivity in the public services, particularly services authorised to exercise power.

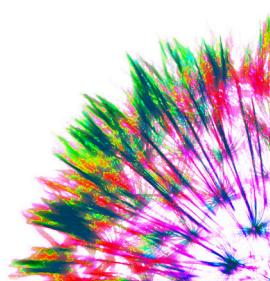
The majority of the LGBT population has good health and good living conditions. However, the proportion with poor health, especially mental health, is higher than among the rest of the population.¹⁴ It is vital that health and care personnel have knowledge about and can discuss important topics in an enlightened and confident manner. In some cases, the right expertise can save lives.

The right to practise one's own religion, as well as freedom from unsolicited religious preaching, must be safeguarded for everyone living in public institutions.

Development objectives 2027 – Topic 4

The LIM plan has highlighted the importance of equally good services to everyone. Awareness of equality in service provision has increased, problems have been identified and the level of expertise has been raised.

- 1** Being different is seen as normal in Agder, and everyone feels valued and respected in meetings with public service providers, when they are admitted to hospital or stay at an institution.
- 2** Public sector employees are knowledgeable about human and cultural diversity.
- 3** Services and public service premises are of universal design..
- 4** All public agencies in Agder evaluate their services from an equality perspective.
- 5** User participation is established as normal practice in public services, and the user groups' experience plays a key role in improving employees' expertise.
- 6** Plain and clear language is used in all information material and communication from public agencies and authorities. When necessary, the material is translated into different languages, and interpreters are used in a professional manner. Electronic services and forms are used in a non-excluding way.



Topic 5

Unity against harassment and violence

Protection against harassment and violence is the LIM plan's fifth main topic. People's right to a life without harassment and violence is crucial to improving equality and public health in the Agder region. Statistics from women's shelters and the police tell us that a lot of work remains to be done. In the police's experience, previously hidden statistics come to light when the topic is put on the agenda. Good results will come through knowledge-based cooperation.

Violence - a social and general health problem concerning everyone

'Violence is any action directed against another person that, by injuring, inflicting pain on, frightening or denigrating this person, makes him/her do something against his/her will or stop doing something he/she wants to do.' (*Per Isdal, Alternative to Violence*)

Everyone is entitled to a life without violence, and Norway is obliged by international conventions to implement measures in this area. Violence is a violation of the individual and creates fear, subjugation, insecurity and injustice. There are big differences between different groups. Young people, and especially young men, are most likely to be victims of violence committed in public places, often under the influence of alcohol/drugs. Violence against girls and women is of a different nature. Females are most often victims of sexualised violence and violence from a partner.

Domestic violence

There is broad political consensus that tackling domestic violence requires a concerted effort, and, from 2014, we have a national action plan for this area, *Et liv uten vold*.¹⁵ The preface includes a good explanation of the issue:

'Domestic violence is a serious crime, an attack on fundamental human rights, and a public health problem. This violence is expressed in many ways and includes physical, psychological, sexual and material abuse of a person with whom the abuser has a close relationship. The victims of this abuse may be the abuser's current or former girlfriend, cohabitant or spouse; an old person may experience violence at the hands of a child, grandchild or another close relative; children may experience violence in the family; or women can be forced into marriage and female genital mutilation. At worst, this violence costs lives.'

People who work on preventing, uncovering and handling domestic violence need to be aware of particularly vulnerable groups, and different types of violence. Good knowledge about topics such as honour cultures and alcohol and drug addiction is a precondition for being able to assess safety in critical situations and to deal with the victim and the abuser in the best possible way.

In addition to the action plan against violence, a national strategy has been developed to combat violence and sexual abuse of children and young people: *Barndommen kommer ikke i reprise* (2014–2017).¹⁶ The strategy is based on a stronger focus on the child's perspective, and children and young people have provided a lot of input that has been incorporated into it.

Hate violence and harassment

Hate crimes are crimes targeting people because of their identity, for example sexual orientation, gender expression, ethnicity or disability. Examples of hate crimes include violence, harassment, vandalism and speech. It is assumed that there are very many unregistered cases of hate crimes. When hate violence or other hate crime is reported to the police, the police shall register this separately. Hate motives constitute aggravating circumstances in connection with sentencing.

Reports on gay people's living conditions show that many of them, particularly gay men, report that they have been victims of hate violence. LLH Sør, the southern region office of the Norwegian LGBT Association LLH, states that gay people living in asylum reception centres are more at risk of hate violence.

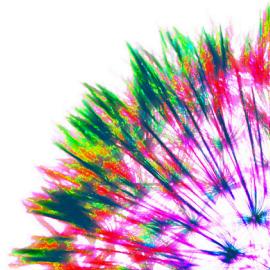
Political priorities

Political prioritisation is necessary in order to create a region where harassment and violence are unacceptable. A clear focus on human rights, especially children's rights, is decisive in this context. The topic is closely linked to all the other topics in the LIM plan. Violence must be prevented and uncovered through good attitudes and cooperation in many arenas, such as kindergartens, schools and other public services.

Social media are new arenas where harassment and psychological violence occur, largely affecting children and young people.

Work on combatting violence is demanding in terms of resources and must be carried out on several levels:

Prevention can involve working with children and young people to foster good attitudes, respect, equality and the ability to set, understand and respect limits. It can also involve working with parents, integration measures and measures to develop self-esteem, a sense of belonging and mastery. Measures may target specific



groups, for example adult children of abusers, young parents or immigrant parents from countries where it is normal to use corporal punishment in children's upbringing.

Uncovering violence is about giving everyone who interact with people as part of their job, or through voluntary activities, information enabling them to discover violence, as well as information about their obligations and the option to notify relevant agencies if they suspect violence.

Dealing with violence concerns situations in which violence has already taken place, or the problem or conflict level is so high that there is a greater risk of violence. Womens' shelters, the police and child welfare services are often the correct agencies to contact during these phases, but in other cases, family counselling offices, primary health service or specialist health service can deal with such situations.

Development objectives 2027 - Topic 5

The LIM plan has helped to pave the way for combating prejudice with knowledge. We have learned more about meeting the unfamiliar with respect that fosters equality. Norms have been challenged and new meeting places have been created as platforms for equality.

- 1** There is zero tolerance of violence. Preventing and uncovering domestic violence is a political and economic priority in the region as a whole and in the individual municipalities.
- 2** Violence, both domestic violence and hate violence, is prevented through early intervention, guidance for parents, relationship building and focusing on human dignity and respect.
- 3** Staff in kindergartens, schools, the child welfare service, health centres, the dental service etc. have the knowledge and expertise required to uncover violence against children. There is a focus on alcohol/drug abuse, raising children without violence, and on handling conflicts.
- 4** There is greater trust between public service providers and vulnerable groups.
- 5** System understanding, interdisciplinary cooperation and the quality of cooperation/cooperation patterns have been strengthened.
- 6** Support services for victims of violence, including women's shelters and children's houses, as well as help and treatment services for abusers, are available to those who need them, when they need them.

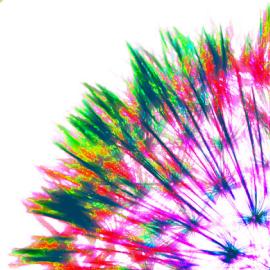


ABOUT AGDER

Agder is the southernmost region in Norway and consists of two counties and 30 municipalities. The counties, Vest-Agder and Aust-Agder, have a combined area of 16,500 km², and a population of 292,000 inhabitants with backgrounds from 140 countries. The two largest cities in the region are the county capitals Kristiansand and Arendal with 86,000 and 44,000 inhabitants, respectively. The majority of the region's population and businesses are concentrated along the coastline.

Agder is the leading region in Norway on entrepreneurship and export from processed goods. The industry in Agder is to a high degree based on energy intensive raw materials processing (e.g. aluminium, nickel, and silicium). The region is also host to world leading producers of off-shore equipment (drilling and mooring), and has also strong maritime industry clusters. There is furthermore a strong potential for the production and distribution of clean energy from the region in to Europe, as Agder is one of Norway's biggest producers of hydroelectric power.

Kristiansand's Airport Kjevik connects the region to Europe, whilst the Port of Kristiansand is one of Norway's largest ferry boat and container hubs. Last but not least, Agder has the country's newest university with about 10,000 students, attracting more and more students from abroad each year.



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Aust-Agder
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