

Early retirement pension system in Norway

Occupations with lower age limit and their pension schemes

Preliminary paper.

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Innhold

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## Foreword

This paper is about early retirement systems in Norway, age retirement limits and pension schedules for occupations who have a lower than standard age limit in the occupational pension system.

The client for the project is Norsk Lokomotivmannsforbund (National Union of Norwegian Locomotive drivers) and their contact person in the project has been Øystein Aslaksen.

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# Introduction

Special pension schemes for certain occupations have a long tradition in Europe. In many countries such pension arrangements were established long before general public pension system were set up. Special occupational pension schemes were primarily developed in the public sector, and especially connected to civil servants and military personal, but also groups of employees in health care. In some cases it was “særlige” occupations like seamen and fishermen who got their own pension schedule. In Norway we have examples of both of these types of pension arrangements for certain occupations.

In many countries these pension schemes formed a basis for the development of public pension systems. The existence of several, parallel, occupation-based pension schemes constituted the “spine” of the public pension system in some countries. In other countries the occupation-based schedules were transformed and continued to exist, in addition to the public pension system. Examples of this is the transformation of the teacher pension system into an occupational pension schedule on top of the basic and supplementary pension in the general public pension system, while seamen’s pension was transformed into an early retirement system. There are also examples which show that own pension schedules for certain occupations were established through collective agreements.

Because of these different historic developments different occupation-based pension schedules exist today, and they link with the public pension system in different ways. Some schedules are a part of the public pension system, while others are partly complementary to the public system, or exist as own occupational pension schemes, independent of the public pension system.

In this paper we present the main components of the early retirement system in Norway. We have focused on pension schedules established for certain occupations with a lower age limit for pension withdrawal than the normal age limit of 70 years, which exists in the occupational pension system. In chapter 2, we first present in what way different retirement age limits exist in Norway. Second, we present the occupations in public and private sector which have a lower age limit than 70 years for retirement. Then we briefly discuss an interesting topic: Does an employee working in a sector with a lower retirement age limit have to retire at that specific age, or can he or she continue to work or to combine work and pension withdrawal? Finally in chapter 2 we present the main arguments in the ongoing discussion about the future of a system with lower age retirement limits for certain occupations in Norway. In chapter 3 we present the system of early retirement in Norway and specifically look at issues related to the pension schemes for employees who have a lower age retirement limit than 70 years:

* Conditions for early retirement
* Type of pension schemes
* Pension entitlements
* Financing of the pension schemes
* Administration of the pension schemes

This paper does not contain a full presentation of the early retirement system in Norway, but provides merely a a brief introduction to how it works.

# Occupations with lower than standard age limits for retirement

## Development of age limits for retirement in Norway

The general age limit for retirement in Norway is 70 years. For some occupations there are age limits lower than 70 years, which means that an employee has a right and, in several cases, an obligation to retire at a set age, varying for different occupations.

In Norway, an early retirement age can be established for occupations;

1. which causes physical or psychological burden in a way that normally implies that the employees cannot perform their work in a proper way up to the age of 70, or
2. where the services require specific demands to physical or mental abilities, which normally weakens more strongly before the age of 70 compared to what is required for proper execution of work.

Early retirement for specific occupations is based on either

1. National law or
2. Collective agreement in the labor market

“Lov om aldersgrenser” (the law) for public sector workers (civil servants) is from 1956 and comprises persons who are members of Statens Pensjonskasse (Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund). Most of existing age limits for retirement were decided in 1995 and implemented from 1996. The law regulates at what age public servants can retire and “alderspensjonslovens § 2” (the law) states that the normal age limit for retirement is 70 years. However, lower age limits can be drawn for some occupations, at the age of 65, 63 or 60 years, according to point a) above.

The basic principle for public sector workers (and members of Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund) is that where the age limit for retirement is lower than 70 years (65, 63 or 60 years) it is possible to retire 3 years before that age limit provided that the sum of the employee’s age and years of service is at least 85 years.

It is pointed out in “forskrift om kommunale og fylkeskommunale pension schemes” (lawregulation about municipal pension schemes) that the age limits for retirement in the municipal sector should not be lower than in the state sector. According to this regulation, it is the labor market actors (the employer organization and trade unions) who decide the age limits in the municipal sector.

It is also decided by law, that some occupations outside the public sector should have an age limit for retirement lower than 70 years. Typical examples of such occupations are fishermen and seamen.

Age limits in the private sector are regulated in “forskrift til lov om foretakspensjon” (law regulation from 2000 and the “forskrift” specifies which occupations that ) been given a set age limit for retirement

## Occupations and age limits for retirement

About 30 percent of the public employees have an age limit for retirement lower than 70 years (40 percent in the municipal sector and 12 percent in the state sector). In private sector it is estimated that about 8 percent of workers have an age limit for retirement lower than 70 years.

Table 1 shows occupations with age limits for retirement lower than 70 years in the public and private sectors.

Table 1. Age limits according to “forskrift til lov om foretakspensjon” and lov om aldersgrenser for offentlige tjenestemenn. Main groups of occupations.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Age limit** | **Private sector** | **Public sector (state and municipal sector)** |
| 55 years | Pilots, divers, rescuers on helicopters in the North Sea |  |
| 60 years | Flight crew | Military officers, police officers, fire officers, ambulance drivers |
| 62 years | Drivers, transport workers (drivers) |  |
| 63 years |  | Shipmaster/machinist. Prison guards |
| 65 years | Nurses, mining workers, operator of cranes, excavator, bulldozer, insurance agents, sellers (travelling), reindeer herding, employees on fixed oil installations, drivingteachers. | Railway personal (locomotive drivers and other employees with operational safety responsibilities) aviation personal, nurses, prison personal, cleaning personal, professional drivers, dentists, physiotherapist, «miljøterapeuter». |

A more detailed list of occupations with lower retirement age limits than 70 years in state and municipal sector, can be found at: http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/AID/publikasjoner/rapporter\_og\_planer/2009/R\_OfTP\_utvalget\_11.03.2009\_Vedlegg4\_Saeraldersgrenser.pdf (municipal sector) and <http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/FAD/Vedlegg/Lønns-%20og%20personalpolitikk/Aldersgrensehefte_09.pdf> (state sector).

As mentioned, it is possible for all occupations in public sector to retire 3 years before the age limits in table 1, if the sum of age and years of services is 85 years or higher.

## Work above the age limits

In public sector, a person who works in a profession with a lower age limit for retirement than 70 years have to leave his or her job when reaching that age. Working beyond the age of 70 in these public sector jobs requires a special agreement with the employer. In order to continue working beyond 70 years of age it is possible to retire from your public sector job and continue working with a new employer, or, continue working with a new employer combined with pension withdrawal.. In the private sector a worker does not necessarily have to stop working when reaching the age limit for retirement. However, a private sector worker has the right to retire when reaching the set age limit for retirement for that occupation.. The problem in the private sector is however a lack of coordination between the age limit for retirement and the right to withdraw pensions from a scheme. This means that if a private sector company has a lower age retirement limit for some of its workers, and the company does not have a pension scheme which can be activated at an earlier retirement age, the worker in question will normally continue working (in the same job or in another job in the same company) until the lowest possible age for pension withdrawal in that company is reached Alternatively the private sector worker in question may have access to an AFP-scheme (see below) which can be activated from the age of 62. If the company does not operate an AFP scheme, the worker will have to continue working until the age of 67 (before 2011/12) or 62 years (after 2011/12). The rules for private workers are unclear in terms of what the rules are for whether a worker have to leave his or her job at a set retirement age or whether the age limit only refers to when a person can retire. This question has been tried in the court quite recently (pilots) and the topic has stirred some debate in in Norway.

In general the Norwegian pension regulation opens up for the possibility of retiring earlier than the set age limit at 70 years and receive a pension. Alternatively combine pension withdrawal before the age of 70 with work in another job. I This is in line with the established individual flexibility in the new general public pension system, and in the occupational pension system. Both systems open up for the opportunity to combine work and pension withdrawal from the age of 62. For example, it is possible to work full time and withdraw pension (from both public pension scheme, occupational pension scheme and the AFP-scheme – the last if you are qualified receive this pension). This rule applies to employees in private sector. In the public sector you cannot receive pensions from the occupational system from the age of 62 (unless you have a lower age limit). This is possible from the age of 67, but in practice from the age of 65 (because of the “85-years rule”). It is possible though for all public employees to retire from age 62 from the AFP-schedule (which is different from the AFP-scheme in private sector).

We do not know how many of the persons at these age limits who actually continue working in other jobs, but there is no doubt that many of the employees who have lower age limits for retirement wishes to, and actually do continue, working beyond the set early retirement age, either in the same job (if possible) or in a different job (Midtsundstad 2005 and Bureau of Statistics(2008).

# Pension schemes for occupations with lower age limit for retirement

## Introduction

In private sector it is not possible to establish occupational pension schemes for certain occupations. All occupational pension schemes are company based and have to include all employees, independent of type of scheme. This law-based regulation and the so-called “principle of proportionality” constitute the framework for private occupational pension schemes. In the public sector, all employees are included in the pension system (with some exceptions). [[1]](#footnote-1)

In order to establish pension schedules for certain occupations, they have to be based on public law regulations. There are some pension schemes which includes certain occupations and most of them is regulated by law and institutionally controlled by the government. When these schemes do not break the principle of including all employees and that all employees have the same pension entitlements (the principle of proportionality), it is because the pension schemes in all public sectors is approximately equal.

## Early retirement system in Norway

In this section we will give a brief description of the system for early retirement in Norway. From 2011 it is possible for all workers (both public and private workers) to retire at the age of 62, and receive retirement pensions from the public pension system. Prior to 2011 the retirement age in the public system was 67 years, and retiring any earlier than this required being included in the early retirement system AFP. All public sector employees have access to AFP. In the private sector AFP can be received from 62 years on certain conditions, even though all employees in private sector in principle built up entitlements to AFP. It should be mentioned that since 2011 the AFP-pension systems differ quite considerably between the public and private sectors. In the public sector the AFP-system is still defined as an early retirement system for workers between the age of 62 and 65/67 years. In the private sector the AFP-system has been more adjusted to the principles in the new public pension system, and is paid out lifelong from the time of withdrawal (flexible from 62 years of age). In both AFP systems it is possible to retire at the age of 62, but the systems work differently. Another difference between public and private sector pension schemes is that in the private sector it is possible to combine pension and work at your own desire, while in the public sector there are strong restrictions for on occupational pension withdrawals and the combination of working beyond retirement age and withdraw pension (cf above).

Retiring before the age of 62, is generally only possible if you become disabled, or work in an occupation with a set low retirement age. This applies to a fex occupations, as shown I table 1. In the latter case you will receive pensions from the occupational pension scheme before the age of 62 if you are employed in the public sector. Normally this is not the case for employees in private sector (with a few exceptions).

## Hallmarks of public and private pension schemes

Table 2 below shows a set of hallmarks for the occupational pension schemes and early retirement schemes in Norway.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Table 2. Occupational pensions and early retirement in Norway. Key indicators to be presented.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Conditions for early retirement** | **Type of pension scheme** | **Entitlements in the pension scheme** | **Financing the scheme** | **Administration** |
| What are the main conditions to receive early retirement pension | Define benefit or define contribution | How are the entitlements built up during working life | Who pays the contribution or the premiums | Who runs the pension scheme |

In section 3.4 and 3.5 we will present the early retirement system in public and private sector separately, based on these key hallmarks as shown in table 2.

The different occupational pension schemes in the public sector are almost identical, independent of where in public sector you work. This means that the pension system which covers employees working in an occupation with a lower than 70 years set retirement age is include in the general description of the public pension system.

In the private sector the pension schemes vary The principle stated in the law with set low age retirement limits for certain occupations applies to both workers in the public and the private sector. This is an issues that applies for instance to nurses, where the pension scheme for nurses working in the public sector also includes nurses employed in private companies (such as private hospitals).

## Occupational pensions and early retirement in public sector

All public sector workers in occupations with an age limit for retirement lower than 70 years (table 1) are comprised by the same pension scheme.. The only difference is at what age the retirement limit is set which may vary according to occupation (because of a) and b) in section 2.1). Workers with lower age limits for retirement can retire and withdraw pensions from the occupational pension scheme earlier than other public employees (earlier than at the age of 65).

Table 3. Occupational pension scheme in public sector. Description of the key factors.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Conditions for early retirement** | **Type of pension scheme** | **Entitlements in the pension scheme** | **Financing the scheme** | **Administration** |
| That you belong to an occupation with lower age limit for retirement. That means the conditions referred to in section 2.1 | Defined benefit. Pension, based on the principle of final salary. | Normally: If 30 years of accrual: 66 percent of final salary. Pension level guaranteed.  If the sum of age and years of accrual is at least 85 years, employees can retire 3 years earlier than the set age limit. | State sector: pension expenditures are financed by the state budget, employer and employee contributions.  Municipal sector:  The municipalities finance most of the expenditures  Employees (in all public sector) pays a contribution of 2 percent of their salary. | State sector:  The pension schemes are administered by SPK (Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund).  Municipal sector:  In general the pension schemes are either run by KLP or other life insurance companies. KLP manages the pension scheme for nurses. |

The occupational pension scheme in the public sector is a final salary defined benefit system. Normally it requires 30 years (at retirement day - maximum of 40 years from start to retirement) of accrual to reach the maximum pension of (minimum) 66 percent of final salary (and it is guaranteed). In general, a person can retire 3 years before the age limit, if the sum of age and years of accrual is 85 years or more, or at the age of 67. If your age limit is 70 years, you can retire at the age of 67 years if the sum of your age and years of accrual is 85 years or more. If your age limit is 65 years you can retire at the age of 62, and if your age limit is 60 years, you can retire at the age of 57. An example can illustrate this point: a police officer has a set occupational retirement age at 60 years. This means that police officers may retire at the age of 57 years, if he or she has 28 years of pension accrual (28 + 57 = 85).

In the state sector the pension schemes are administered by SPK (Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund) and is owned by the government (Ministry of Labour), The pension expenditures are financed by the state budget, premiums from public companies which have their pension scheme in SPK, and employee pension contributions paid at 2 percent of gross salary. In the municipal sector the expenditures are mostly financed by the municipality, however the employees also here pay a contribution of 2 percent of the salary. The pension schemes for the municipality sector are either administered by KLP (Kommunal Landspensjonskasse = Pension Fund owned by its customers), or life insurance companies delivering public pensions. KLP also manages the pension scheme for nurses, including nurses working in private companies.

Besides retirement pension, the public occupational pension scheme also includes disability pension and dependents pension.

## Occupational pensions and early retirement in private sector

Currently it is now possible for private sector employees to retire and receive pensions from the occupational system from the age of 62. This is not possible in the public sector (unless you have a lower occupational age limit for retirement). Prior to 2012 it was not possible to retire and receive occupational pension earlier than from the age of 67, unless for occupations with lower age limits. Private companies which had employees with lower age limit had to pay all the pension cost connected to those employees until the age of 67, unless the employees continue to work above the age limit in the same job or in another job in the company. As far as we know, there are just a few cases where age limit and possibility to retire and receive pensions coincide (cf. above). One example is pilots and cabin personal.

Because of the new and flexible pension system as mentioned above, all employees can now retire from the age of 62 and receive pensions from the public pension scheme, occupational pension scheme and the AFP scheme (if qualified to receive this pension). The system of having lower age limits for retirement for some occupations has not yet been evaluated in relation to the introduction of a new pension system with new flexibilities in retirement age This is an issue likely to be discussed further in the coming years. One point is that the system of age limits for employees in private sector (except for nurses and other health care personal) in practice do not function as intended, since there are no law-based obligation for private companies to establish a pension scheme at the set early age limit for retirement for some occupations.

Table 4 Occupational pension schemes in private sector. Description of the key factors.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Conditions for early retirement** | **Type of pension scheme** | **Entitlements in the pension scheme** | **Financing the scheme** | **Administration** |
| That you belong to an occupation with lower age limit. That means the conditions referred to in section 2.1 | Define benefit or define contribution | Define benefit:  Pension level 60 – 70 percent of final salary. Most 66 percent or under. Pension level not guaranteed .  Define contribution:  Between 2 and 5 percent of wage between NOK 80 000 and NOK 400 000 and 2 and 8 percent between NOK 400 000 and NOK 960 000.  Almost 50 percent have 2 percent contribution. | Both types of schemes: employer covers all the expenditures through premiums or contributions. Employee contribution allowed, but not normal. | Define benefit:  Own pension fund (big companies) or life insurance company.  Define contribution:  Life insurance company, banks, fund and asset management companies |

In the private sector about 1,1 million employees have a define contribution scheme and about 340 000 employees have a define benefit scheme. Define benefit schemes are likely to be transformed, by law regulation, into hybrid schemes (based on a principle of define contribution) in the near future.

In define benefit schemes the pension levels varies between 60 and 70 percent of final salary and the actual pension level depends on different factors. The level is therefore not guaranteed (as in public schemes), but rather a pay-out level the scheme aims to achieve. Most define benefit schemes provides a pension level at 66 percent of final salary, or lower. To get a maximum pension pay-out, you have to be a member of the company pension scheme for 30 years (at retirement day - maximum 40 years from employed in the company to retirement).

In define contribution schemes, which now is the most common scheme in private sector, the contribution rate varies from 2 to 5 percent of wages between NOK 80 000 and NOK 400 000, and between 2 and 8 percent of wages between NOK 400 000 and NOK 960 000. Almost half of the employees have a contribution rate of 2 percent of wages, which is the minimum rate in the law of mandatory pension from 2006.

Defined benefit schemes in private sector normally include disability pension and dependent pensions. Insurance products like disability pension and dependent pensions are not that usual in defined contribution schemes (less than 40 percent have disability pensions).

Employers in private occupational pension schemes pay all costs and contribution, including administration costs and asset management. Employee contribution is allowed, but it is not common.

Define benefit schemes are administered by life insurance companies or company owned pension funds. The former is the most common. Define contribution schemes are administered by life insurance companies, banks, or fund and asset management companies.

We do have good data on the kinds of pension arrangements for employees in occupations with lower age limits for retirement in the private sector, but as we have mentioned, there is poor connection between the existence of a lower age retirement limit(the right to retire early), and the existence of a pension arrangement that gives access to withdraw early pension for private sector workers.

# Conclusions

The overall pension system in Norway has been changed a lot over the past seven years. Occupational pension has been mandatory by law from 2006, and the public pension system was reformed and changed substantially from 2011. In addition the AFP pension system in the private sector (a system for early retirement based on an agreement between the actors in the labor market) was changed in 2011, and is now a system of life long pension payment, flexible in the sense that withdrawal can start any time from the age of 62. The AFP-system in public sector remained unchanged and is still defined as an early retirement system between 62 and 67 (65) years. The occupational pension system in private sector is about to be changed further and the traditional define benefit schemes will probably by law be transformed to new types of (hybrid) pension schemes.

During the work with pension reforms, the government was signaling that the age limits of certain occupations will be considered. One of the main reasons for changing the public pension system is the increasing life expectancy of the population and it was then found natural to consider the age limits for retirement In addition the new flexibility in both public pension and occupational pension system allowing retirement from the age of 62 has made it of current interest to look at the age specific rules for early retirement in some occupations. One issue that has been raised in the public debate on lower age retirement limits for certain occupations has also been whether it should be the nature and risks of work that decides the need for an early retirement, or whether it should be reaching a certain preset age, as the is the system today. Because of high resistance from trade unions as well as legal ambiguities, this is a discussion that has been postponed. Whether the age limits will be raised or changed in the future, therefore remains unclear.

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1. State sector, municipal sector and publicly owned companies which have a public sector occupational pension scheme (in Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund - SPK, Municipal Pension Fund – KLP and schemes established in life insurance companies). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the following we do not include the AFP – system. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)