

Denmark

Each year, the ESN European Semester Group follows the European Commission's cycle of policy coordination with EU Member States known as the European Semester and produces a report based on a questionnaire completed by public social services authorities on the social situation in European countries with a particular focus on social services. This country profile identifies the most important common challenges facing social services as reported by ESN members in Austria, related to three principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and makes recommendations for the 2023 European Semester. The full report, with cross-country analysis of all the participating countries is available [here](#).

1. Children's services

1.1 Key issues

A new law called 'The Child First' was passed in Parliament in October 2022. Taking into account the best interest of the child, the law provides for early child protection placement in case the risks come from the parents. Legislation will also promote the involvement of children in the management of their case from the age of 10. The greatest challenge regarding full implementation of Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) in Denmark is the lack of equal opportunities for children with parents having a low income/living on subsidies and who have a low level of education as well as children from refugee families and/or having a non-western background. Another issue is related to children's poor mental well-being. According to latest data, at least 16% of Danish children experience mental health problems¹. This number has been steadily increasing over the past 10 years and costs 5% of Danish GDP, which is equal to the costs of treating all types

of cancer². As a result, a priority is to reverse this negative trend and prevent mental illness among children and young people. The Government is expected to introduce a 10-year mental health action plan, which is currently awaiting approval by political parties. Both the new law, putting the best interest of the child in all protection procedures, and the upcoming 10-year mental health action plan are highly expected by social services in local authorities.

1.2 Recommendations

The new law is expected to address the key abovementioned challenges, such as putting in place better and earlier measures for vulnerable children and families and providing an earlier quality placement. In addition, significant steps must be taken in relation to hearing children of age 10 and up in case handling

¹ Vidensraad (2021) Mental sundhed og psykisk sygdom hos 0-9-årige børn 2021 <http://www.vidensraad.dk/content/mental-sundhed-og-psykisk-sygdom-hos-0-9-%C3%A5rige-b%C3%B8rn-0>

² Vidensraad (2020) Mental sundhed og sygdom hos børn og unge i alderen 10-24 år <http://www.vidensraad.dk/content/mental-sundhed-og-sygdom-hos-b%C3%B8rn-og-unge-i-alderen-10-24-%C3%A5r-%E2%80%93-forekomst-udvikling-og>

2. Long-term care

2.1 Key issues

The overall challenge regarding implementation of Principle 18 of the EPSR is an ageing population and increasing life expectancy which means that the demand for health and social services will rise in the years to come. Recruitment and staff retention will be a major issue as the growing need for help is combined with a smaller cohort of younger professionals and low application rates to study to be a nurse or social worker. Recent figures show that there is no increased number of new graduate students to respond to labour demands. Consequently, there will be a shortage of labour force in the field of social/health care workers.³

2.2. Recommendations

Efforts need to be undertaken by the Danish Government to improving staff recruitment and retention and maintaining a good working environment in care services. In addition, the Government should invest in digitalisation and assistive technology as crucial to ensure the operability of long-term care services and keep older people in good health in their homes for as long as possible.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

In the past years, several municipalities have strongly invested in implementing Housing First combined with flexible and individual support (e.g. Intensive Case Management Method). This effort now seems to bear fruit. A new census launched on 1 September 2022

reveals that the number of homeless people has reduced by 10 percent over the past three years. 5,789 people in Denmark are homeless, in hostels or spend the night on friends' couch. Three years ago, the number was 6,431 people out of a Danish population of 5,900,000 people.⁴

A new public housing law was passed by Parliament on 26 June 2022⁵: The law contains two key elements aimed at reducing the number of homeless people. First, the state will motivate the municipalities financially to provide housing for homeless people quicker, so that they stay at a hostel for the shortest possible time. While currently homeless hostels are financed 50% by the state and 50% by municipalities for as long as needed, in the future, the state will only finance 50% for the first three months⁶. Afterwards, the municipality should have moved the person elsewhere or pay 100% of their hostel costs. Second, the state provides a subsidy to reduce rent of a specific type of accommodation (in Danish 'almennyttigt boligbyggeri') particularly for people who receive benefits and the municipalities can also refer homeless people to this form of accommodation⁷.

The social affairs ministry has also set up a national partnership against homelessness of key actors in the field, who can contribute with knowledge of and experience to efforts against homelessness⁸.

3.2. Recommendations

Ensure that as the new law is implemented, it does not become an additional financial burden for local authorities' social services in the municipalities that do not have enough social housing to accommodate homeless people after three months.

³ Own Calculations, Association of Social Directors in Denmark (FSD) (2022)

⁴ Source: The Danish Center for Social Science Research: <https://www.vive.dk/da/nyheder/2022/faerre-personer-lever-i-hjemloshed/>

⁵ Source: <file:///C:/Users/elneb/Downloads/aftaletekst-aftale-om-etablering-af-fonden-for-blandede-byer.pdf>

⁶ See above pages 7-8

⁷ See above page 5

⁸ Source: <https://socialstyrelsen.dk/projekter-og-initiativer/voksne/nationalt-partnerskab-mod-hjemloshed>



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Investing in Social
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