

Publication

Social Policy in Denmark

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INTRODUCTION

How is social welfare policy organised in Denmark? How is it financed? What role does local government play? What is done for families with children, older persons, persons with disabilities and persons who are in special need? This booklet provides answers to these questions by outlining Danish social welfare policy – including the general framework for and status of individual professional areas.



A WELFARE SOCIETY FOR EVERYONE - TODAY AND TOMORROW

In Denmark, the offers of the welfare society are generally available to all legally residing persons, and the public sector is required to deliver services of high quality. Older persons and persons with disabilities need adequate care and support, children need attention and challenges as well as necessary special support, and patients in hospitals need proper treatment in due time as well as care from their primary physician. Much of the credit for Denmark's present position as a wealthy and safe country without major social tensions can be ascribed to a well-developed public sector.

A sustainable welfare society is founded on a platform of sound government finances, high employment rates and a well-functioning labour market, coupled with an efficient and well-operating public sector. However, demographical trends are expected to put pressure on public spending on public services in the years to come. Additionally, persons expect services of still higher quality in parallel with growing prosperity and resources for higher private consumption. There are also growing expectations to be able to choose more freely the services that suit specific needs. This puts pressure on policymakers to balance quality, fiscal responsibility and freedom of choice when adopting new welfare policies.

With a growing proportion of older persons, the demographic development in Denmark is putting increasing pressure on the healthcare system.

This requires innovation and creativity in the public sector in order to meet the growing expectations for the welfare society in the future. Equal opportunities for all are instrumental for maintaining a socially coherent welfare society.

THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL POLICY IN DENMARK

The Danish welfare model is based on the principle that all legally residing persons shall be guaranteed certain fundamental rights in case they encounter social problems such as unemployment, sickness or lose the ability to lead their own life.

The social system is characterised by the following principles:

- **Universalism.** All persons in need who are legally residing in Denmark are entitled to receive social benefits and social services.
- **Tax financing.** Social security benefits and social services are mainly financed from general taxation.
- **Public responsibility.** The public sector is responsible for the provision of social security benefits and social services.
- **Possibilities of labour market affiliation.** Improved services for children, dependent older persons and persons with disabilities to contribute to interconnecting family life with working life.
- **Active social measures.** Social protection measures must be active – rather than merely passive support and maintenance.
- **Local community approach.** The social sector is organised with a high degree of decentralisation of social responsibilities to local government.
- **Local scope of action.** Municipalities and regions have wide autonomy when implementing the various social protection schemes.
- **User influence.** Persons and claimants must be involved in the organisation of a social protection programme.
- **Comprehensive view.** The person's social problems and his or her situation must be seen in a broader context.
- **Cooperation with other social players.** The public sector co-operates with private companies and voluntary social organisations to promote social welfare.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

Denmark has divided its welfare tasks between various ministries. However, it is important to stress, that the regions and municipalities are responsible for performing a considerable amount of Denmark's welfare tasks. The social sector is widely governed through legislation. However, it is up to the municipalities to assess the need for social services and, in that manner, ensure that public welfare services are organised as efficiently as possible with respect for the person's specific circumstances and needs and in the interests of local conditions, via public and private suppliers alike.

In addition, various financial funds have been established to support local activities and assist in method development as well as attracting the attention of municipalities to special target groups and useful methods.

Hence, in Denmark the municipalities have the primary responsibility for social services and the main responsibility for promoting people's health and disease prevention.

Local self-government has traditionally been embedded in the Danish policy of mobilising and involving all actors and persons in society. A key element of Danish legislation in the social field is the people's possibility of having influence on how their life and situation is defined by the authorities. According to the legislation, consulting and advisory user councils must be set up to represent people's interests vis-à-vis the municipalities. In addition, a range of independent complaints boards have been set up with representatives from the labour market and various interest groups.

Resident and user councils are set up at the institutional level, and the central government provides financial support to user associations for disadvantaged groups. At the individual level, established legal guarantees ensure that the individual plays a role in organising his or her own case.

The majority of welfare tasks are performed by public employees, and not by private service companies, voluntary social organisations or the family. However, regions and municipalities have contracted out certain public social services to private enterprises in some areas. The public sector also cooperates with businesses and voluntary organisations to achieve a broad social protection programme.

Danish social policy involves:

- *Extended care and service functions.*

Care for dependent older persons, family policy, activation, rehabilitation and preventive measures.

- *Initiatives targeted at particular groups.*

Persons with physical and mental disabilities, socially excluded groups and groups at risk of social exclusion as well as some of the initiatives targeted at persons with mental illness and persons with alcohol and drug addiction.

- *The greater part of transfer payments.*

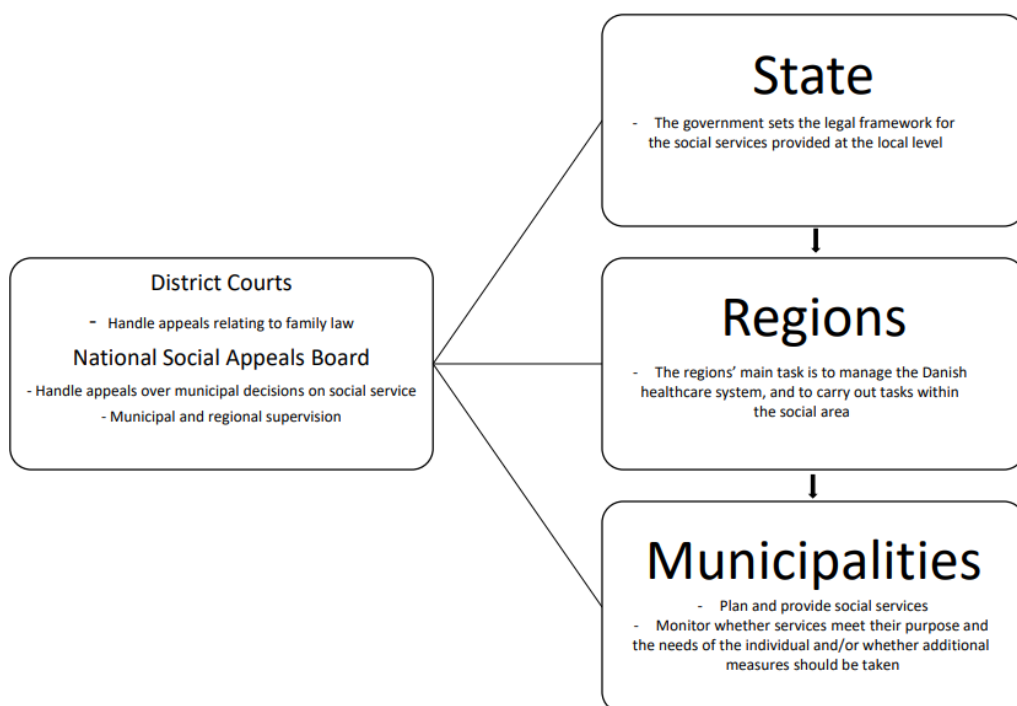
Old-age pension, anticipatory pension, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, cash assistance and a variety of special benefits.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Denmark is divided into five (four from 2027 and on) regions and 98 municipalities. Regions and municipalities are independent, politically controlled organizational units. Only municipalities can levy taxes individually. The bodies charged with local political management – regional councils and local councils – are elected every four years in ordinary elections.

Municipalities are responsible for planning and providing a broad spectrum of social services, including care for dependent older persons, day-care facilities, rehabilitation and activation of unem-ployed persons. Moreover, municipalities implement the social security schemes including old-age pensions as well as decisions awarding disability pension, sickness benefits and child allow-ance. The size of these cash benefits is determined by statute. Finally, the municipalities pay cash assistance benefits under the social assistance scheme. The size of these benefits is also determined by statute.

Table 1: Tasks in Social Welfare and Degree of Centralisation



DIFFERENCES IN LOCAL SERVICE LEVEL

The background for the extensive local self-government system is a desire to develop the social services as close to the people as possible.

As municipalities fix and levy local taxes themselves, they have various options in adjusting their social services to local conditions. At the same time, the local authority sets the political priorities when trading off between tax rate and service level.

This explains the differences in the service level from one municipality to the other and the varying tax rates – the highest local tax rate being about 26 pct. and the lowest about 23 pct. in 2025.

SUPERVISION AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR

A person can file an appeal against the decisions of the municipal authorities with the Appeals Board, which is an independent state appeals board. The Board may accept to consider an appeals case if it is on a point of law or a matter of general public importance.

The National Social Appeals Board has two central tasks. Firstly, they handle complaints over municipal decisions on social services, including children's cases, work injuries, and social assistance. They also handle complaints against decisions from other state authorities, such as the Public Benefits Administration (Udbetaling Danmark), which is a public institution with the responsibility for some of the most important public services, such as pension. Secondly, municipal and regional supervision is part of the National Social Appeals Board. The supervision ensures that municipalities and regions comply with the legislation that specifically applies to public authorities.

SOCIAL AND MUNICIPAL SUPERVISION

The Social Supervision consists of five municipal entities, which task it is to approve and conduct operational supervision of foster families and services covered by the Social Supervisions Act. The municipalities are obliged to conduct individual supervision of children and young persons in care, and of adults who receive help and support. This means that the municipality continuously monitors whether the service(s) provided continue(s) to meet its purpose and the needs of the person or whether additional measures should be taken. The Social Supervision conducts operational supervision of social services and foster families to ensure that the services meet the legal requirements.

THE PARLIAMENTARY OMBUDSMAN

The Parliamentary Ombudsman can assess whether the social service authorities act in violation of the current law or, in any other way, are guilty of errors, maladministration or negligence. The Ombudsman is not authorised to revoke a decision but may voice criticism and submit information about severe errors, maladministration and acts of negligence to the Danish Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee, the Minister in that area of responsibility, and the local or regional council.

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

The public sector is responsible for the provision of social security benefits, social assistance and services. Most benefits are transferred by the state and services are delivered by public sector employees. Social security benefits, social assistance and services are primarily financed by taxes.

Social transfer payments are generally not, or only to a limited extent, dependent on previous income or labour market affiliation. The degree of compensation for loss of income is therefore higher for persons on relatively low incomes than for persons on higher incomes. Along with progressive personal income tax, the social system entails a considerable degree of income redistribution.

Total public expenditure amounts to about 45 pct. of GDP in 2022. About 27 pct. of this expenditure relates to public welfare schemes (health and social protection), and social protection for about 19 pct. of the GDP.

About 30 pct. of the employed is public-sector employees in 2022. Of these, about 72 pct. are employed in regions or municipalities.

The most cost-heavy services are:

- *Early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities for children.*
- *Care for dependent older and persons with disabilities.*

The primary transfer payments are:

- *State old-age pension* which is paid to everyone aged 67 or more. The public old-age pension scheme aims to secure a reasonable standard of living for all individuals that have reached the public retirement age and lasts for the rest of their lives. The pension scheme is financed through public taxation. State old-age pension and disability pension account for the highest social expenditure on transfer payments.
- *Disability pension* which is available to those aged 18 to 66 whose earning capacity is materially reduced on physical, mental or social grounds.
- *Social assistance* which guarantees an income for persons who cannot support themselves.
- *Child and youth allowances.*

Regions and municipalities do not finance all their expenditure through local tax revenues. Local self-government is therefore supported by a system of central government grants, reimbursements and equalisation schemes.

The state covers a certain percentage of the expenditure on particular activities via reimbursements schemes. The expenditure on cash assistance, for instance, is shared between central government and municipalities, whereas the expenditure on old-age pension and child and youth allowance is fully refunded by central government. The funding is designed as an additional incentive for municipalities to take active social security measures.

Additionally, the regions and municipalities receive block grants from the central government, which are general grants from the central government to regions and municipalities. Contrary to reimbursements, block grants are not earmarked for special purposes, but may be used to match local wishes and needs. Block grants are divided among regions according to a sub-

sidy model and for municipalities in proportion to their population. Central government reimbursement and block grants account for almost one third of local government revenues.

User payments and self-financing generally play a smaller role in respect to social services. In certain areas, such as ECEC facilities, residential accommodation and temporary home-care, the user pays some of the expenditure.

BENEFITS AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CASE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The Danish social security system is extensive and covers a range of social security benefits. The social security benefits act as a safety net that enables a flexible labour market and active labour market policies. Simultaneously, the benefits aim to ensure equality of opportunity and a reasonable living standard for all.

Unemployment Insurance Scheme

Unlike most other branches of the Danish social security system, the unemployment insurance scheme is voluntary. To be eligible to receive unemployment benefits through the scheme, the person must join an unemployment insurance fund (A-kasse), which are semi-private funds.

Approximately 75 pct. of the labour force are members of such funds. The person must pay contributions to the fund.

The insurance covers benefits in case of unemployment, if the person has been a member for at least one year. The benefits are paid monthly, for a maximum of two years within a three-year period. The beneficiary has to be available for the labour market and actively search for employment to be eligible to receive the benefit.

Social Assistance and Minimum Income Scheme

Social assistance is a financial safety net in Denmark. It is a last resort and represents the minimum income scheme. Social assistance is only given to persons with very limited assets, and it is a requirement that a “social event”, such as unemployment, sickness or disability, has happened. The beneficiary cannot be an active student. The beneficiary has to be available for the labour market and activation in order to be eligible to receive the benefit. There is no time limit on social assistance. The costs are covered by the state.

VOLUNTARY SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS

Volunteer-based social work plays an important role in the social services sector in Denmark. The public sector has the primary responsibility for children, youth and adults with social problems, but voluntary social organisations can often contribute to, for instance, the effort of helping socially vulnerable persons and families.

Central government aid to the voluntary social sector is provided from different programs, partly as basic grants, partly as project grants. Besides the basic grants and project grants, a range of temporary programs with specific objectives are also available.

Municipalities also cooperate with voluntary social organisations and associations to financially support voluntary social work.

CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY

The Danish system supports that a successful family policy can provide families with a freedom to arrange their own lives. Most Danish families can and want to take responsibility for themselves. Furthermore, the Danish government gives high priority to supporting families that have had a hard time taking care of themselves. Society should provide good framework conditions but it is the responsibility of the individual family to create a good family life. Legislation and initiatives supporting family policy are the responsibility of a range of Danish ministries.

The public sector creates the societal framework for families with children and the objective is to provide children and young persons with optimum conditions during childhood and adolescence and to protect them against ill-treatment and neglect. The public sector provides guidance and support to parents on how to exercise their parental responsibilities.

The various social protection schemes are implemented locally by the 98 municipalities and, to some extent, by the five (four from 2027 and on) regions. The municipalities have a vast degree of autonomy in their choice of policy measures and the organisation of services to be provided.

Support to families with children is granted by way of services allocated on the principle that anyone in need should have equal rights to the services, and by way of financial assistance to all families with children or assistance in special cases.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities cooperate with parents to provide care for children and support the comprehensive development and self-esteem of the individual child. The ECEC system provides the families with flexibility and options regarding various types of facilities and subsidies.

ECEC facilities shall promote children's well-being, learning, development and formation of competences through experiences, play and planned activities that give children room for contemplation, exploration and experience. ECEC shall also, in cooperation with the parents, ensure a good transition to school by developing and supporting the basic competences of children and their desire to learn. Furthermore, the ECEC system also plays an important role in preventing negative social heredity by the general work of promoting the wellbeing, learning, development and formation of vulnerable children.

All children under the school age are entitled to admittance to an ECEC facility. Guaranteed ECEC availability implies that the local council shall offer a place in an age-appropriate ECEC facility to all children older than 26 weeks and until they reach school age upon application.

Parents pay a maximum of 25 pct. of the budgeted gross operating expenditure for ECEC services for children from 26 weeks to age six. In addition, parents who are eligible can receive subsidies that can lower or eliminate the parental payment, e.g. sibling discount, and aided place subsidy based on the financial situation of the household. In 2023, children in Denmark were on average 1 year old when they started in ECEC.

The municipalities are responsible for the quality, development and operation of ECEC settings.

THE PUBLIC PRIMARY AND LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Education is compulsory in Denmark for everyone between the ages of 6-7 and 16. Whether the education is received in a publicly provided school, in a private school, or at home is a matter of individual choice, as long as accepted standards are met. Education itself is compulsory – school is not.

Public School (Folkeskole) constitutes the free, public school system as well as the individual municipal schools. On the national level, the Danish public school system is regulated by the Public School Act (Folkeskolelov), which provides the overall framework for the schools' activities.

The public school system consists of one year of pre-school class, nine years of primary and lower secondary education, and a one-year 10th form.

All municipal primary and lower secondary schools share a common aim, standard requirements concerning the subjects that are to be taught at the specific form levels, standard regulations concerning the so-called Common Objectives for the teaching in the individual subjects, as well as standard regulations concerning the leadership and organisation of the school system. However, it is the responsibility of the individual municipal boards to determine how the municipality's schools are to be organised in practice, within the framework established by law. The municipal boards themselves determine the municipal level of service for the public school within this overriding framework and can set their own additional objectives for the schools.

Thus, the Danish public school system is subject to a range of common regulations, and a child who changes schools will overall find a school routine in the new school familiar to the one they have previously attended. On the other hand, there is the freedom to allow each school to incorporate its own local characteristics.

FAMILY WELFARE SERVICES

In Denmark there is a variety of welfare services in place that give families the freedom and opportunity to arrange their lives according to their own needs and wishes. Besides the extensive early childhood education and care system, there is a range of other social services that aid family welfare, equality of opportunity and gender equality. Three of these are outlined below:

Cash Benefits in Connection with Pregnancy and Parental Leave

Persons who can document a contemporary connection to the labour market (either as employed, self-employed or recipients of unemployment benefits) may receive cash benefits in connection with pregnancy, parental leave or adoption. The Public Benefits Administration distributes and administers maternity/paternity and parental leave benefits.

The mother has the right to paid maternity leave four weeks before the expected birth date. Families where the parents live together when the child is born are each generally entitled to 24 weeks of leave with maternity/paternity benefits after birth. Adopting parents and parents, who become parents based on a surrogacy agreement are also entitled to benefits for 24 weeks. For adopting parents, it is 24 weeks after they have received the child and for parents from a surrogacy agreement it is after the birth of the child.

For employed parents 11 of the 24 weeks are earmarked each parent. The rest can be transferred between the parents. For self-employed parents and unemployed parents, who receive unemployment benefits only two weeks are earmarked, while the rest can be transferred between parents.

If there are more than one child in the same birth each parent is entitled to 13 extra weeks with benefits.

Child and Youth Allowance

The Danish Child and Youth Allowance is a tax-free cash benefit aimed at improving the living conditions of families with children. The Public Benefits Administration administers the Child and Youth Allowance. The allowance is granted to children below the age of 18, it is automatically paid in advance and ordinarily split between the custody holders. The allowance is reduced if the entitled custody holder earns more than DKK 917,000 per year (as of 2025).

Supplementary Child Support Schemes for Families in Need

In addition to the Child and Youth Allowance, it is possible to receive different types of child benefits. The support in these cases are subsidies for children that in general have a higher need for economic support. The primary groups of recipients are children of single parents, children of disability pensioners and children lacking a provider. Benefits can also be granted to children whose parents are studying or in the case of multiple births. The benefits are tax-free.

SPECIAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN, YOUNG PERSONS AND THEIR FAMILIES

In Denmark, the municipalities are responsible for the provision of special support to children and young persons under the age of 18 and their families pursuant to the Danish Child's Act. The municipalities also have a general obligation to monitor the living conditions of children and young persons within the municipality. The purpose of the supervision is to enable the local authority to learn as early as possible about cases where a child or young person under 18 years of age may need support.

The municipality must provide support for a child or young person under 18 years of age when the municipality considers the child or young person to have special needs. The municipality is obliged to give a child or young person the support he or she needs in accordance with the best interests of the child. The authorities shall always consider the views of the child or young person and attribute proper importance to such views in accordance with the age and maturity of the child or young person.

The purpose of assisting children and young persons with special needs is to provide such children and young persons with the same opportunities for personal development, health and an in-dependent adult life as other children and young persons.

Decisions on support and how to secure the best interest of the child shall, as a rule, be made in consultation and cooperation with the family of the child or young person. If this is not possible, support measures may be implemented without the consent of the custodial parent if certain conditions are met. In such situations, the background, purpose and constituent features of the specific measure taken must be explained to the custodial parent and the child or young person.

If the municipal council has reason to assume that a child or young person needs special support, the municipal council must either conduct an investigation or a child protection examination in order to clarify the needs of the child or young person.

The municipal council decides on special support measures where this must be deemed to be of vital importance to a child or a young person's special need for support. Support measures may, among other initiatives, be family therapy or a supportive care arrangement in a network foster family.

In special circumstances, it may be relevant for the municipal council to consider removing the child or young person from the home to ensure the health and development of the child or young person. A decision by the municipal council to place a child or young person in care outside the home is subject to the consent of the custodial parent and the young person aged 15 or over.

In some cases, the custodial parent or the young person aged 15 or over does not support a decision to place the child or young person in care. In this case, the Children and Young

Persons Committee in the municipality can decide on placement in care outside the home without consent.

The Children and Young Persons Committee can only make this decision if there is an obvious risk that the health or development of the child or young person under the age of 18 years will suffer major harm. Furthermore, there must be a reasonable presumption that the problems cannot be resolved while the child or young person remains in the home.

The Children and Young Persons Committee is a special committee consisting of a judge, two children experts and two lay-members of the municipal council. The custodial parent and the child or young person aged 10 or over are entitled to free legal aid and to be assisted by a third party when a case is being handled by the Children and Young Persons Committee.

If the municipal council or the Children and Young Persons Committee decides that it is necessary to place a child or young person in care outside the home, the child/young person can be placed in, for example, a foster family, an accommodation facility for children and young persons or in a residential institution.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OR SUFFERING FROM SERIOUS ILLNESS – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Parents are provided with an opportunity for financial assistance in connection with children's disabilities.

Compensation Benefit to Parents with Children with Disabilities

The local authority provides compensation benefit for the parents' compensation-eligible expenses related to care for a child with a disability in the home. The expenses must be incurred as a result of the child's disability.

Loss of Earnings

The local authority may also pay compensation for loss of earnings to parents caring for a child with a disability in the home.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Danish disability policy is based on four fundamental principles:

- *The principle of equal treatment* entails that public services should aim at supporting persons with disabilities in achieving their potential on equal terms with persons without disabilities.
- *The principle of solidarity* refers to the Danish tax financed welfare system which ensures that almost all services to persons with disabilities are provided free of charge for the individual.
- *The principle of compensation* implies that support and assistance is provided to compensate the needs caused by a disability.
- *The principle of sector accountability* entails that all public authorities are responsible for making their facilities or services accessible to persons with disabilities.

Some of the schemes that social security legislation has made available for persons with disabilities are described below.

SERVICES

Advisory and Counselling Services

Municipalities and regions provide free advisory and counselling services with the purpose of creating favourable living and development conditions for persons with disabilities. When local authority advisory services are insufficient, the person with a disability is referred to regional special advisory services or other special advisory services.

Compensation Benefit

The local authority provides compensation benefit for the compensation-eligible expenses involved in pursuing daily activities to persons between the age of 18 and old-age pension age with a disability. The expenses must be incurred as a result of the disability.

Personal Help and Care Services

The local authority offers personal help and care services to persons who are unable to carry out these tasks themselves because of a disability.

Citizen-controlled Personal Assistance (BPA)

The aim of the BPA-scheme is to provide a flexible form of help for persons with disabilities with a substantial need of help and to ensure the independence of the person. Citizen-

controlled personal assistance is a subsidy which covers the cost of employing care assistants to provide the necessary help. To become eligible, a person must have a permanent physical or mental impairment and need personal assistance for carrying out necessary practical tasks in the home for more than 20 hours per week.

Substitute or Respite Services

The local authority offers substitute or respite care to parents, spouses or other close relatives who care for a person with a disability.

Guided Assistance

A person below the old-age pension age whose freedom of movement is impeded due to a disability is entitled to 15 hours of guided assistance per month in order to be accompanied to activities outside the home. The objective of the guided assistance is to increase the independence, freedom of choice, and responsibility for one's own life among persons with disabilities.

Technical Aids and Consumer Durables

The local authority provides support for technical aids and consumer durables when such devices may mitigate the permanent consequences of the disability, facilitate daily life in the home significantly or is necessary to enable the person to pursue an occupation.

Support Towards the Purchase of a Car

Support may be granted to the purchase of a car to persons whose disability substantially reduces the possibility of finding or maintaining employment or completing an education without the use of a car. It is also possible to obtain support to purchase a car when the disability substantially impairs the person's ability to walk, and it is estimated that a car may substantially facilitate their daily life.

Adaptations to the Home

The local authority grants assistance towards adaptations to the home for persons with disabilities where such adaptations are necessary to make the home better suited for the person concerned.

General Schemes

Besides the above-mentioned schemes, the local authority may also refer persons with disabilities to more general schemes broadly aimed at persons with special needs, which may also be used by persons with disabilities when the need arises. Examples are special labour market and rehabilitation offers.

Disability Pension

The disability pension scheme provides financial support to individuals with a substantially and permanently reduced ability to work. This ability must be assessed through an examination. The benefit is granted when it is assessed that the individual's inability to work makes their capability to self-provide impossible and when it is assessed that their ability to work cannot be improved through activation, treatment, rehabilitation, resource schemes or in any other way.

The recipient may perform some work while receiving the benefit. The disability pension is granted on a permanent basis, but will be replaced by the old-age pension when the individual reaches the public retirement age.



SOCIALLY MARGINALISED PERSONS

Persons in Vulnerable Positions

The socially most vulnerable persons – also referred to as socially marginalised persons – are for example:

- Persons with mental illness
- Persons with drug addiction
- Persons in homelessness and others unable to maintain their own home

These groups experience that their personal and social problems often lie within several problem areas.

INITIATIVES FOR PERSONS WITH DRUG ADDICTION

The municipalities and regions are responsible for providing treatment programs for persons with drug addiction including counselling services, motivation, treatment and post-treatment. They are also responsible for social services other than treatment, as well as for harm reduction measures in the field of drugs.

Previously, services for persons with drug addiction were primarily aimed at the drug misuse itself and at making persons with drug addiction drug-free, but over the years more differentiated approaches have been developed in this field. In this connection, harm reduction is a particular objective where, in certain cases, the elimination of the misuse is accepted as unrealistic in the short term so health, social and other services are provided instead.

INITIATIVES FOR PERSONS IN HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is an expression of a person's difficulties in finding a place in society and attaining suitable housing.

Municipalities have the primary obligation of helping persons, who are in homelessness or unable to function in their own home, and must provide a number of services, covering temporary accommodation, such as repatriation centers, and shelters. There is also an incentive for municipalities to offer persons living in homelessness a permanent home, rather than supporting their stay in shelters.

A person may be admitted to residential accommodation for persons in homelessness by applying directly in person or by referral from public authorities. There is generally a form of self-payment for the stay, but the municipality pays for the majority of it.

In Denmark, Housing First has been the guiding principle of its homelessness strategy since 2009. Since October 2023, key elements of Housing First have been part of national Danish legislation. The main goals are significantly decreasing the number of persons in homelessness and ending long-term homelessness.

These goals are the basis of the political decision to reorganize the efforts against homelessness and base the efforts on Housing First.

Housing First means that persons living in homelessness must first be offered a permanent housing solution, after which efforts are made to address the other challenges they face. The primary tool for municipalities to implement Housing First is to allocate a social housing unit to persons experiencing homelessness. The aim is a full implementation of the Housing First approach in Denmark.

INITIATIVES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE RELATIONS

The Danish Act on Social Services contains an obligation for the municipalities to offer temporary accommodation in a crisis shelter for persons who have been victims of violence in intimate relations. The persons may be accompanied by children and shall receive care and support during their stay. The persons may show up at their own initiative or by referral by public authorities. The person's wish for non-registration and the right to anonymity are always respected.

The municipalities are obligated to offer a maximum of 10 hours of free psychological treatment to all persons who come to stay in a crisis shelter. The sessions are offered both during and after the stay at a crisis shelter. This helps to secure the necessary counselling that allows the persons who have been victims of violence in intimate relations to cope with their experience and rebuild a life for themselves and their children.

Furthermore, the municipalities are obligated to offer psychological treatment to children accompanying their parent during their stay in a crisis shelter.

INITIATIVES FOR PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Under the social services scheme, both municipalities and regions have tasks related to helping persons suffering from mental illness.

The key objective in planning services for persons with mental illness is to provide the services in such a way that allows for the person to experience them as coherent and holistic, irrespective of whether services are multidisciplinary and intersectoral and independent of the fact that treatment is provided at several different locations. The following are examples of individual services targeted at persons with mental illness:

- Outreach services
- Support and contact person schemes
- Care or support services in daily life



OLDER PERSONS

The government recently carried out a comprehensive reform of the long-term care sector for older persons. The reform entered into force on July 1st, 2025. The reform has three central values:

- Self-determination
- Trust in employees and management
- Close interaction with relatives, local communities and civil society

The general objective of Danish senior policy is to enhance the person's possibility of living an independent life or to ease his or her everyday existence and improve his or her quality of life.

The government prioritizes prevention in order to support more older persons in managing as much as possible on their own, and services for older persons are provided on the basis of individual needs.

Activating and Preventive Measures

Municipalities are required to carry out preventive measures targeted at older persons, focusing on those with potential for preventive interventions. These measures aim to identify early signs of physical, psychological, or social challenges, and are particularly important for those not already in contact with the municipality, or who may be at risk of reduced functionality, loneliness, or isolation.

The municipal council organizes outreach efforts based on local conditions and specific knowledge of persons' needs. This can be done by establishing contact with older persons who have not previously used municipal services, and by collaborating with relevant actors, such as voluntary organizations and associations, to reach out broadly and ensure a holistic approach.

CARE FOR DEPENDENT OLDER PERSONS

Personal and Practical Help (Home Care)

The municipalities are obliged to offer personal or practical help (home care) to persons who are unable to carry out the tasks themselves due to impairment of physical or mental function(s) due to reduced functional capacity. Personal and practical help must be provided with the aim of prevention, rehabilitation and maintenance following a principle of holistic care, meaning that the person is entitled to a range of services within the framework of a comprehensive care package. In practice, this means that the person and employee in collaboration are able to continuously decide on which services are needed.

Personal and practical help is founded on the principle of ‘help to self help’. The assistance provided should, whenever possible, entail an activating dimension with the primary purpose to help the recipient regain the ability to take care of themselves. Further, the help must be given and organised in close collaboration with the recipient.

Free Choice of Provider

Whereas the local authority is responsible for ensuring the provision of personal and practical help and training that meets the needs of the individual, the provision of help can be carried out by both private and public suppliers. The Elderly Care Act aims at ensuring that older persons who receive home care services has the freedom to choose between different providers, both public and private and the option of changing the help they receive from time to time.

Additionally, the municipalities are obliged to offer rehabilitation measures to persons with impaired physical functions caused by a disease which is not treated in connection with a stay in hospital. In addition, persons with special needs due to impaired physical or mental function(s) are offered assistance in maintaining physical or mental skills.

Since 2003, municipalities have been obliged to establish a framework to enable private providers to enter the market for home-care. The law has fostered increased transparency and clear separation between the level of authority and the level of provider. This has led to an increased awareness of the costs involved – the link between cost and level of service – and has also invoked an enhanced follow-up system of the service level.

The new reform on long-term care for older persons aims to ensure that healthcare professionals can spend more time on their core duties—caring for the older person and enhancing flexibility—rather than bureaucratic procedures.

Caring for Terminal Patients

If a person takes care of a close relative who wishes to die at home, he or she is entitled to compensation for lost earnings (care allowance). The objective of the care allowance scheme is to give terminal patients requiring intensive care the option of being released from hospital, to die at home attended by a family member or another close relative. A condition for this option is that a medical assessment states that further hospital treatment is futile.

HOUSING

SOCIAL HOUSING

Social housing is a fundamental part of the Danish welfare state and is responsible for solving a range of social welfare problems, including the provision of adequate housing for the ones in need of it. Social housing makes up one-fifth of all housing units in Denmark.

Social housing is built by non-profit social housing organisations and is organised in housing estates.

Along with social housing, the housing benefits scheme is an important element in the overall housing policy. Housing benefit is a tax-free rent subsidy which is granted to households with high housing costs relative to household income. The subsidy is administered by the Public Benefits Administration, and the amount is calculated individually according to objective criteria such as rent, income, size of the household, and size of the dwelling.

Types of Social Housing

There are three general categories of social housing: family housing, senior housing and youth housing.

Family housing is in principle open to everyone and allocation follows seniority on a waiting list. However, in order to ensure social housing for vulnerable persons, the local municipality has an unconditioned right to dispose of 25 pct. of vacant dwellings. The local council and the housing organisation can also agree to allocate vacant dwellings based on prioritized criteria in relation to local conditions. This is especially relevant in vulnerable neighbourhoods where housing organisations want to attract persons in employment.

Senior housing is adapted to the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities. The municipality allocates these dwellings based on an assessment of individual needs. There are approximately 38,000 such dwellings.

Care housing is a specific type of senior housing for dependent older persons with associated care facilities and in-house staff. The municipality must offer such accommodation to older persons with special needs no later than two months after they are admitted to the waiting list. There are approximately 54,000 care housing units.

Youth housing is social housing for young persons in education and young persons with special needs, for instance arising from social problems. There are approximately 44,000 youth housing units.

Management and Supervision

The social housing sector is characterized by extensive tenant democracy.

The supreme authority of the housing organisation may be a general assembly of all tenants or a committee of representatives from all housing estates. The supreme authority elects the executive committee, which has the general responsibility for managing the housing organisation. A majority of the committee members must be tenants in the organisation.

At the local level, a residents' meeting in each housing estate approves the budget and decides on renovations and other activities in the estate. The residents' meeting also elects an estate committee which represents the residents.

The local council of the municipality, in which the housing organisation is placed, supervises the housing organisation. The local councils are to make sure that housing estates are run in accordance with current legislation.

Financing Social Housing

Each individual housing estate is an independent financial unit, and the rent is set in a manner where expenditures and revenues balance out.

The municipalities decide on the construction of new social housing estates on the basis of an overall assessment of the local housing market. They also support the construction of new housing estates in the form of an interest-free loan with deferred amortisation covering 8 to 12 pct. of the acquisition costs.

The majority of the acquisition costs (86 to 90 pct.) are financed with mortgage loans with 30-year maturity for which the state provides mortgage subsidies. Resident repayments are set at about 3 pct. of the acquisition costs yearly - independently of the interest rate. This means that the state bears the interest rate risk. Mortgage loans are state guaranteed with a substantial counter-guarantee from the municipality.

A central feature of the financial model is that rents in the housing estate remain at the same level and contribute to the National Building Fund after the mortgage loan has been repaid. The revenues collected by the fund are re-channelled back into the social housing sector in the form of grants for renovations, constructions, and other projects.

Vulnerable Housing Areas

Danish social housing policy aims at reducing social inequality and ensuring a social mix in neighbourhoods and in individual social housing estates. This is the reason why social housing caters to a broader segment of the population.

Some social housing areas are however characterised by high levels of unemployment, a high proportion of tenants with low educational background, low average income levels, an overrepresentation of ethnic minorities and high levels of crime. These areas may be physically and socially isolated from the surrounding community thus counteracting employment and social welfare efforts as well as preventing social cohesion.

There are a number of policies in place which work to counteract the emergence of vulnerable housing areas. In the most vulnerable housing areas, also called parallel societies, the local housing organisations and the municipality must develop joint development plans. Such plans must include a description of how the housing organisation and the municipality will work towards reducing the proportion of social family housing to 40 pct. of the housing stock before 2030. The intention is to create attractive neighbourhoods with mixed tenure types and a social mix of residents.

HOUSING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

It is a guiding principle in the disability policy that the needs of the person, and not the type of accommodation, decide what assistance should be provided. Consequently, accommodation and services are separated, and persons with disabilities live independently.

There are different types of housing for persons with disabilities who need special accommodation:

- Long-term residential accommodation under the Social Services Act is for persons who, due to significant and permanent reduced physical or mental functional capacity, need extensive help with ordinary daily functions, care or treatment, and whose needs cannot be covered in any other way.
- Temporary residential accommodation under the Social Services Act is for persons in need thereof due to a substantial physical or mental impairment or special social problems. These could take the form of respite care or physical rehabilitation, but it could also be in preparation for living independently.
- As well as senior housing and care housing which is described below.

The municipality is responsible for providing the necessary number of dwellings in senior housing and care housing, as well as facilities in long-term and temporary residential accommodation.

HOUSING FOR OLDER PERSONS

The majority of older persons in Denmark live in ordinary housing. Only a small proportion of older persons live in specially adapted housing, and very few live with their adult children.

Danish ageing policy is based on the principle that the person's needs should be the basis for the care given.

There are different types of housing for older persons who need special accommodation:

- Senior housing is built under the Act on Social Housing, and is adapted to the needs of older persons as well as persons with disabilities. Senior housing may be owned by social housing organisations, municipalities, regions and independent organisations. The municipality allocates these dwellings based on an assessment of individual needs. Residents are tenants and subject to the Act on the Rent of Social Housing, granting them strong tenant rights.
- Care housing is a type of senior housing for dependent older persons with associated care facilities and in-house staff. The municipality must offer such accommodation to older persons no later than two months after they are admitted to the waiting list. Residents are tenants and subject to the Act on the Rent of Social Housing.
- Private care housing is an alternative to care housing provided by the private sector. If an older person is assessed as eligible for a place in a care home, they can also choose to live in a private care home. The municipality decides on the care and pays the private care home for delivering the services. Residents are tenants and subject to the Rental Act.



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