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Public services and the European Semester 2017-2019

Case Study: Denmark



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Denmark: essential context



- EU member since 1973 but rejected adoption of the Euro following referendum
- During the study there was a centre-right coalition led by Liberal Party (replaced by centre-left minority government in June 2019)
- Generally strong commitment to welfare
 - Relatively high spending and high performing in health and education
- Economy took a sharp downturn in 2008 - '*took a long time to recover*' – but now in '*a boom phase*' (NRP 2019)



- A distinctive labour market
 - ‘Flexicurity’ model
 - *‘The Danish labour market model is simply a prerequisite for the welfare society that we know and love’.* (Confederation President)
- Robust industrial relations
 - Established social dialogue structures
 - Strong collective bargaining coverage
 - High trade union density
 - Some challenges (teachers’ lock out, 2013 – but generally secure)
- Since January 2019 – two trade union confederations, dominated by FH
- Both FH and education unions have a dedicated Brussels presence



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Denmark:

Public services and the European Semester



- Following the crisis Denmark was, briefly, in the Excessive Deficit Procedure
- Public services have a low profile in Denmark's European Semester – considered well performing and well managed. Education features most frequently (link to EU2020 priorities?).
- The needs of migrants/integration into labour market is recurring theme – features in 2014-15 Education CSR.
- From 2015-16 Denmark receives only limited CSRs (one or two per year) – with private sector focus.
- In 2018-19 education (vocational) reappears in CSRs as part of the 'investment related' CSR.



- Denmark is a high performer on the Social Scoreboard, but there is a significant difference (deterioration) between 2018 and 2019 (trajectory matters!)
- CSRs are limited (few in number, no public service focus), but public service issues feature prominently elsewhere (too much focus on CSRs?)
- The Country Report and National Reform Programme have little relationship



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Denmark:

Social dialogue and the 2018-19 European Semester



- Fact finding meetings
 - Open agenda, and considered worthwhile (*'not a charade'*)
 - Education unions meet with relevant DG
 - Followed up with exchange of documents
- Country Report
 - Commission organised launch - *'mainly one way communication'*
- National Reform Programme
 - Discussed in 'EU2020 Contact Group' and draft circulated for comment – *'those documents are not linked'* (Country Report and NRP)
- Country Specific Recommendations
 - Trade union responses to CSRs



- Not (generally) a high priority for Danish trade unions – ‘*we can get more progress through other means*’
 - Limited consequences for public services reinforces this
- There are a range of attitudes and approaches within Danish trade union movement – from positive support to ‘arm’s length scepticism’
 - Constructive engagement vs ‘early warning system’
- Priority is to protect Danish labour market and social model
- The NRP was a source of frustration and seen as the key blockage
- The European Pillar of Social Rights might be decisive – emerging development (note FOA response)



- People and relationships
 - Less focus on formal (low expectations) and more on on-going, informal relationship with Desk Officers (ideational impact)
- Resources
 - Brussels presence helps – but still frustration that unions struggle to provide evidence based input
- Timing (lack of . . .)
- Political commitment and alignment
 - Difficult to overcome when it doesn't exist!
- Strategic approach
 - Focused on 'narrative shaping' – but difficult where views may be diverse
- Lack of sectoral social dialogue
 - Meaningful exchanges needs involvement of key partners