



The First Danish Biennial Report on the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee

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1. Context

The European Child Guarantee sets out targets for ensuring that all children have access to key services and for combatting child poverty and social exclusion for children. In accordance with the recommendation, Denmark prepared a National Action Plan on the European Child Guarantee, which was submitted to the Commission in the spring of 2022.

Pursuant to article 11, (f) of the recommendation each Member State is obligated to report every two years on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee Recommendation, in accordance with their national action plan. As stated in the Danish National Action Plan, these biennial monitoring reports will be based on the Social Policy Statement, which is a central instrument in the development and monitoring of social policy in Denmark.

The Social Policy Statement has its legal base in the Danish Finance Act and tasks the Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing and Senior Citizens with preparing an annual report, which follows up on recent knowledge on social policy actions in Denmark. It consists of a range of thematic chapters that addresses measures taken towards different target groups and what effects they have.

In addition to other social policy areas the statement monitors and account for measures for vulnerable children and young people, in regards to expenditure, target groups and specific actions taken to address children and young people in need. Analysis of the academic performances, mental issues and other social problems amongst children and young people is also conducted in the statement.

As stated in the National Action Plan, it has previously been assessed, that drawing on an already existing and consolidated monitoring framework, is the most appropriate approach in regards to the monitoring of the implementation of the Danish National Action Plan of the European Child Guarantee. Not only does this approach ensure the quality of the report, but it is also the most resource-efficient approach to making two reports that have significant thematic overlaps.

Additional contributions to this report has been obtained from other Ministries (in addition to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing and Senior Citizens), in order to make up for some of the aspects of the European Child Guarantee not covered in the Social Policy Statement.

The Danish National Child Guarantee Coordinator has been responsible for consulting these other ministries and obtaining specific contributions to this report in regards to data and other forms of knowledge on vulnerable children and young persons. A total of four Ministries have contributed to the report, in order to shed light on what access vulnerable children and young people enjoy when it comes to health, social security and education.

While Denmark does not have an official poverty threshold, there is a continuous focus on providing the necessary support for children in vulnerable positions. The Danish approach to social policy is focused on a rights based approach, where legislation on what support and services persons in need should receive, makes up an overall legal framework for the municipalities who are tasked with providing these services.

Thus, Children in need in Denmark are legally guaranteed access to the services described in the European Child Guarantee. Much of the legislative framework described in the initial Danish National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee accounts for the general rights and approaches towards helping vulnerable children in Denmark. This report follows up on the legal framework and recent development in terms of new policies introduced or amendments to the Danish legislation on assisting vulnerable children.

1.2 The Child's Act

One of the major new policy achievements, in regards to ensuring the rights of vulnerable children, was the Danish Parliament's recent passing of the Child's Act.

The Child's Act entered into force on January 1, 2024. The Child's Act replaces the Act on Social Service, but only with regards to special support for children and young people in Denmark – including placement of children in care outside the home.

In the Child's Act all regulation concerning support to children and young persons in vulnerable positions and children with disabilities are put together.

The Child's Act provides children and young persons under the age of 18 in vulnerable positions with a number of new rights that aims to ensure that the voice of the child will be in the forefront in cases regarding special support and to strengthen the rights of the child in judicial proceedings.

Some of the new rights of the child and the young person include that any child or young person aged 10 or above exercises the rights of a party in crucial decisions about the child or young person's own life, the right to request a placement, the right to request that visitation and contact to the parents' or the network' be suspended for a period, and the right to a second opinion in case of a change in placement.

2. Target Groups

The Child Guarantee requires Member States to guarantee effective access to key services for children in need, defined as persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Article 5 of the ECG defines children in need as (a) homeless children experiencing severe housing deprivation, (b) children with a disability, (c) children with a migrant background, (d) children with a minority racial or ethnic background, (e) children in alternate care and (f) children in precarious family situations.

This chapter will make account of these Target Groups.

2.1 Vulnerable children in ECEC and elementary school

The vast majority of vulnerable children and young people in Denmark attend regular early childhood education and care (ECEC) and primary and lower secondary school.

The Danish Action Plan for implementation of the European Child Guarantee accounted for the Danish Act on ECEC (*dagtilbudsloven*) and The Act of Public Compulsory Education (*folkeskoleloven*) which regulates children and pupils in ECEC, primary and lower secondary school as well as children in alternate care.

As previously accounted for, it is provided by the Danish Act on ECEC (*dagtilbudsloven*) that ECEC should prevent negative social heritage and exclusion. The Act on ECEC provides a guarantee for equal access to an ECEC facility for all children below the school age. Guaranteed ECEC availability means that the local council must offer places in an age-appropriate ECEC facility to all children older than 26 weeks and until they reach school age.

It is provided in the Act on ECEC that the municipality, as a starting point, gives subsidies for a place in ECEC for a minimum of 75 pct. of the budgeted gross operating expenditure, while parents pay a maximum of 25 pct. of services for children. Families receive a sibling discount. Additionally, the parents may apply for a financially aided place subsidy, which is calculated on the basis of the parents' financial situation. The aided place subsidy is increased for single-parent families.

Moreover the Act on ECEC determines that the municipality must provide a socio-educational 'free place funding' (*socialpædagogisk fripladstilskud*), when a place in ECEC is to be considered as particularly required due to social or pedagogical reasons and that the issue of payment makes the child's enrollment or for the child to remain in the ECEC difficult.

The aim is to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, have equal access to ECEC.

Similarly, 10 years' education is compulsory in Denmark, whereby all pupils have the right to be admitted to their local public primary and lower secondary school (*folkeskole*), which provides education free of charge. The basic principle of the Danish public primary and lower secondary school (*folkeskole*) legislation is that all pupils have the right to an education that meets their needs.

In the Danish Folkeskole pupils with special needs or disabilities should as a starting point stay in the regular classes with the necessary support or help rather than being segregated to institutions with special education. Special education is teaching in special schools and special classes as well as teaching in the regular classes, where the student receives support or help for at least nine weekly hours. Special education follows the general provisions of the Folkeskole Act. Pupils with extensive needs for special support due to severe physical or mental disabilities must however be referred to special education. The independently free primary and secondary schools (*privatskole* and *friskoler*) and independently free boarding schools (*efterskoler*) are also required to offer the necessary special support or help to pupils with educational or social needs. These are not free of charge and parents pay a tuition fee to have their children enrolled.

2.2 Children in homelessness

According to the Danish Centre for Social Science Research's (VIVE) most recent homelessness census¹, 19 children under the age of 18 personally reported to be living in homelessness. In addition, 135 adults reported to be living with children in a homelessness-situation in 2022 compared to 159 in 2019. It is estimated that a total of between 188-207 children are living in homelessness in Denmark, not considering possible overlaps.²

2.3 Children with a Disability

There is not a central register for people with disabilities in Denmark. There is no central register for children with disabilities, delimiting this specific group, either.

There is, however, a central register for vulnerable children receiving services from the Danish Social Services Act. In 2016 it was estimated that a total of 30-35.000 children received assistance related to a disability. It is important to underline, that there might be additional children with a disability in Denmark, as this number only covers the ones receiving support under the Social Services Act.

Since July 1. 2021 the authorities providing a range of specific services under the Social Services Act aimed towards children with disabilities have been required to report it to Statistics Denmark, in order to establish a register on children with disabilities. Thus, the first statistic on children with disabilities was published in June 2023 and is expected to become part of the 2024-edition of the Danish "Social Policy Statement" ("Socialpolitisk Redegørelse").

2.4 Children in alternate care

¹ The National Homelessness Census is carried out every two years, but due to COVID-19 the most recent census was postponed to 2022.

² (VIVE, 2022: 53-56)

Since 2012, the number of children in alternate care has decreased from around 15.600 to around 13.700 children in 2022. The main decrease has been among children in residential institution/residential care facilities, accounting for a total of 36 pct. in 2022 against 64 pct. in foster care families.

2.5 Children in precarious family situations

There is no central register on children in precarious family situations in Denmark. However, "children in vulnerable positions" are defined as children who receive support under the Danish Child's Act's chapter 4, 5 and/or 13.

In 2022 there was a total of 79.200 children or young persons between the age of 0 and 22 who received social support from under The Social Service's Act. This number accounts for around 4,9 pct. of all children and young persons between the age of 0 and 22.

2.6 Children provided for by the Danish Immigration Service

The Danish Immigration Service is obliged to provide for foreign minors, whose application for asylum is being processed or whose stay in Denmark is illegal. As a rule, minors will be accommodated at accommodation centres under the auspices of the Danish Immigration Service. Unaccompanied minors will be accommodated at separate accommodation centres.

The children at the centres under the auspices of the Danish Immigration Service will receive education as well as healthcare and social services.

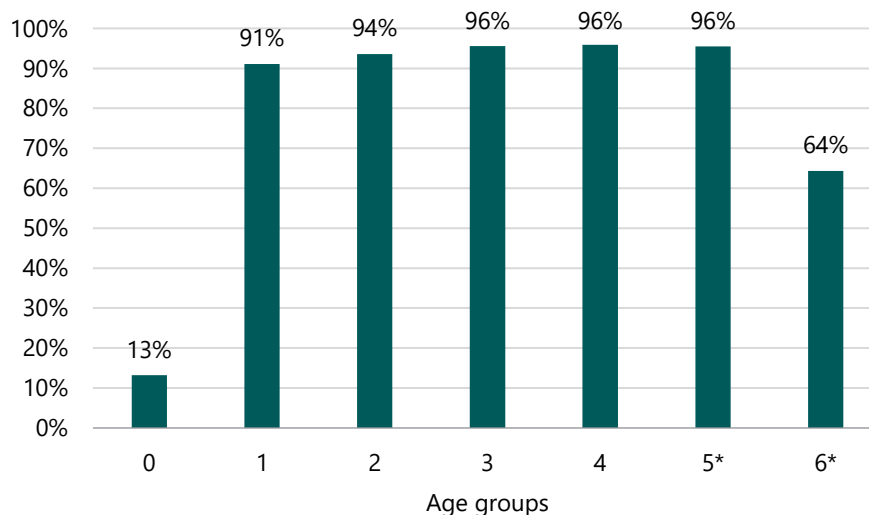
3. Roll-Out of Services

The Danish welfare system covers a wide range of measures, allowances and benefits that contribute to upholding the general objective of the Child Guarantee and its recommendation that all children at risk of poverty or social exclusion have access to the most basic rights such as healthcare, education, nutrition and housing.

3.1 Early Childhood Education and Care

As described in the Danish Action Plan, the vast majority of Danish children between ages of 1 and 5 years old are enrolled in ECEC. Figure [X1] shows the coverage rate, i.e. the proportion of children enrolled in ECEC in 2022. There have been no significant changes in the coverage rate over last few years, why numbers only for 2022 are reported.

Figure [X1]: Coverage rate broken down by age, 2022



Notes: The numbers are based on the proportion of children in the population that are enrolled in ECEC on the 1. October 2022 and includes children in municipal, independent and private daycare centres, municipal family daycare, private care services and parents who receive an allowance for caring for their child. However, children in private care arrangements include only children who receive an allowance for such care. The figures do not include children in private family day-care and pooling schemes, or childcare under the Social Services Act [ServiceLOVEN] or USFO, as the Ministry of Children and Education (BUVM) does not have sufficient data on this. Children enrolled in private daycare that is located in a different municipality than where the children live are not included.

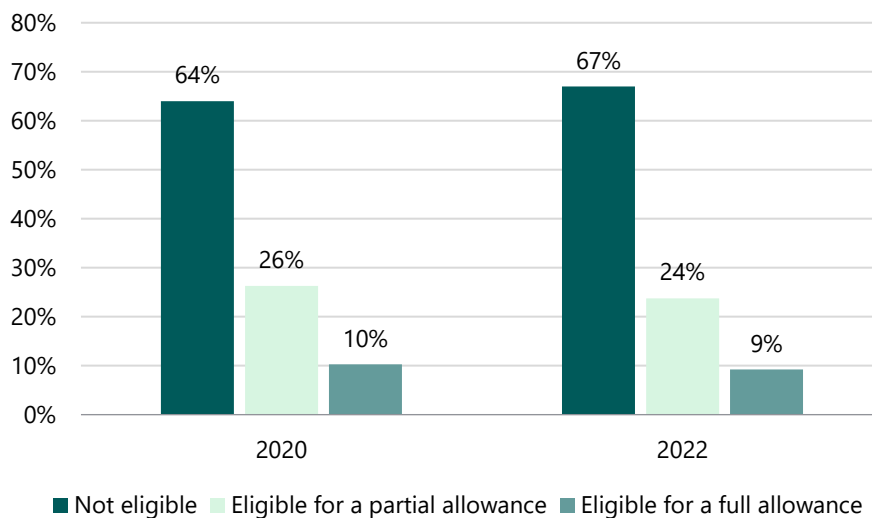
* In Denmark, the school starting age is the year, the child turn 6 years of age. Children that are enrolled in school on 1. October 2022 are excluded from the population.

Source: The Ministry of Children and Education, based on data from Statistics Denmark.

It is provided in the Act on ECEC that the municipality gives parents subsidies for a child's place in ECEC for a minimum of 75 pct. of the budgeted gross operating expenditure, while parents pay a maximum of 25 pct. of services for children. Families also receive a sibling discount. Additionally, the parents may apply for a financially aided place subsidy, which is calculated based on the parents' financial situation. This place subsidy is increased for single parent families. The aim of the rules is to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, have equal access to ECEC.

Figure [X2] shows the proportion of children enrolled in ECEC in 2020 and 2022 who were eligible for a free place allowance. There has been an increase in children who are not eligible for a free place allowance, from 64 pct. in 2020 to 67 pct. in 2022. In 2020, 26 pct. of children enrolled in ECEC were eligible for a partial allowance, while 10 pct. were eligible for a full allowance. In 2022, 24 pct. of children enrolled in ECEC were eligible for a partial allowance, while 9 pct. was eligible for a full allowance.

Figure [X2]: Proportion of children enrolled in childcare services eligible for an income-based free place allowance



Notes: The population are based children that were enrolled in municipal family daycare, municipal and independent daycare centers on the 1. October 2022. The figures do not include children in private family-daycare, pooling schemes, private childcare, childcare under the Social Services Act [Serviceloven] or USFO, as the Ministry of Children and Education (BUVM) does not have sufficient data on this. Children enrolled in private daycare that is located in a different municipality than where the children live are not included in 2022. The free place allowance is calculated on the basis of the income of the household where the child has his or her registered address. For children place in care outside the home, such as in foster families, the household income is set at 0, which means that these children are automatically eligible for a free place allowance.

Source: The Ministry of Children and Education, based on data from Statistics Denmark.

3.1.1 Policies

The Danish Action Plan presented various policies that had been introduced in Denmark to ensure children's well-being, development, learning and formation in ECEC.

Generally, the Act on ECEC lays down a series of specific objectives on the provision of ECEC in order to prevent negative social heritage and social exclusion.

Minimum staff/children ratios

On January 1 2024, legislation on minimum staff/children ratio came into effect stating that there must be a minimum of one adult pr. 3 children for the 0-2 year olds and a minimum of one adult pr. 6 children for the 3-5 year olds as an average per year among all ECEC (excluding childminders) facilities in the municipality. The minimum staff/child ratio is determined as a yearly average on municipal level. It is expected that private ECEC centers will be covered by the legal requirement of minimum one adult pr. 3 children for the 0-2 year olds and a minimum of one adult pr. 6 children for the 3-5 year olds from January 1 2025.

Delayed school start

Compulsory education starts the year a child turns six, however it is possible to postpone a child's enrolment in school if they are in such need. In November 2023, a broad political majority in the Danish Parliament agreed to introduce new legislation to improve children's opportunity to postpone their enrolment in school. The new legislation states that the ECEC leader is responsible for preparing an assessment, if there are aspects of a child's learning or development that creates doubt as to whether the child is ready to begin school when the compulsory education begins. The legislation on delayed school start came into effect January 1, 2024.

1000 days program – a better start to life

In 2023 two evaluations of two initiatives under the '1,000-day program - a better start to life' have been conducted:

- The initiative 'Support and guidance in the home targeting vulnerable and exposed families in the child's first 1,000 days' from 2019 has been launched in order to strengthen early and preventive action. The initiative involves a support and guidance efforts in the home carried out by ECEC professionals (pædagoger) from the ECEC area as a type of a home educational course. The evaluation indicates through experiences from the participating municipalities, that the initiative can have a positive influence on children's development, parents' competencies and the contact between ECEC centers and homes.
- The initiative 'Home-based interventions in civil society' from 2019 has had the aim to strengthen the parenting and upbringing role in the first 1,000. The evaluation that is based on the experience from seven civil organization shows that vulnerable families with children want support and help with their immediate challenges in everyday life, and the organizations has been able to offer support.

Preventing segregation of children in ECEC

No update.

Since 2022, the following additional policies have been further introduced:

New legislation to limit the use of screens in ECEC

The government and all political parties in parliament has agreed to ensure a more restrictive use of digital tools such as computers, televisions, telephones and tablets in ECEC as a precautionary principle. For children aged 0-2 year's digital tools should only be used in the pedagogical work with children's well-being, learning and development in special occasions, e.g. including children with disabilities or cognitive challenges. For children aged 3-5 years digital tools should only be used in the pedagogical work with children's well-being, learning and development if it can be justified professionally. New legislation on limiting screens in ECEC is expected to come into effect from July 1, 2024.

3.1.2 Education and health care provided by the Danish Immigration Service

The operators of the accommodation centers under the auspices of the Danish Immigration Service are obliged to secure the education of children. This will either be education in the public school operated by the relevant municipality, or education in facilities at the accommodation center. The education must be equivalent to the education offered to bilingual pupils in the primary schools in general in Denmark.

Children who are provided for by the Danish Immigration Service are entitled to the same health care as all other children in Denmark.

3.2 Education and school-based activities

As described in the Danish Action Plan, a majority of Danish children are enrolled in the primary and lower secondary school. Table [X3] shows parent's educational levels among primary and lower secondary pupils in the school year 2022/2023. There have been no significant changes since the year school year 2021/2022 except for an increase of pupils in municipal youth schools and municipal youth boarding schools with parents whose highest educational level is either primary and lower secondary school or upper secondary school.

Table [X3]: Parents' highest educational level attained among elementary school pupils in classes 0 to 9, 2022/2023

	Primary and lower secondary school*	Upper secondary school	Higher education
Primary and lower secondary school [folkeskole]	10%	31%	59%
<i>Standard classes</i>	9%	30%	60%
<i>Classes for children with special needs</i>	19%	42%	39%
Special education schools	17%	38%	44%
Treatment and special educational facilities and special educational	25%	40%	35%

facilities in care accommodation			
Municipal youth schools and municipal youth boarding schools	34%	38%	28%
Private independent schools	5%	22%	73%
Total	9%	29%	62%

NB: *Primary and lower secondary school includes parents for whom the highest educational level attained, is unknown. A total of 14 327 pupils have a parent whose highest educational level attained is unknown. The table covers a total of 633 304 pupils, of whom 498 846 attend primary and lower secondary school, 10 730 special children's schools, 2 944 day treatment and nursing homes, 1 419 municipal upper secondary schools and boarding schools, and 119 365 independent and private elementary schools.
Source: Ministry of Children and Education

The Action Plan further showed the distribution of origin among primary and lower secondary school pupils. Table [X4] shows the distribution for the school year 2022/2023. There have been no significant changes since the school year 2020/2021 except for an increase from 11 % to 23 % of immigrant in municipal youth schools and municipal youth boarding schools.

Table [X4]. Distribution of origin among elementary school pupils in classes 0 to 9, 2022/2023

	Danish	Descendants	Immigrants*
Primary and lower secondary school [folkeskole]	84%	9%	6%
<i>Standard classes</i>	85%	9%	6%
<i>Classes for children with special needs</i>	85%	10%	5%
Special education schools	83%	11%	5%
Treatment and special educational facilities and special educational facilities in care accommodation	89%	7%	4%
Municipal youth schools and municipal youth boarding schools	72%	5%	23%
Private independent schools	88%	7%	4%
Total	85%	9%	6%

NB: *Immigrants include pupils whose origin is unknown in Statistics Denmark's population register. A total of 384 pupils have an unknown origin.

The table covers a total of 633 304 pupils, of whom 498 846 attend primary and lower secondary school, 10 730 special children's schools, 2 944 day treatment and nursing homes, 1 419 municipal upper secondary schools and boarding schools, and 119 365 independent and private elementary schools.

Source: Ministry of Children and Education

3.2.1 Policies

The Action Plan presented various policies that had been introduced in Denmark to ensure children's well-being, development, learning and formation in the primary and lower secondary school.

Dyslexia packages I, II, III, IV and V

Since 2019, the government has implemented five dyslexia packages targeted at children, young people, and adults with dyslexia. Dyslexia Packages I and II are particularly targeted at children and young people with dyslexia, while Dyslexia Packages III, IV and V are aimed at children, young people, and adults with dyslexia, with a special focus on the adult area

New evaluation and assessment approaches

A political agreement in 2021 about a new *evaluation and assessment system* in the primary and lower secondary school strengthened focus on identifying students with difficulties. For example, a mandatory screening test for reading difficulties and a mandatory risk test for dyslexia. In addition, schools must fill out a Meddelelsesbog (Notice book) for all students, which must describe efforts for students who need special attention and a more detailed dialogue and follow-up.

"Children first" in education

The implementation of the political agreement about strengthened education for vulnerable children and children in care (March 2022), which is part of a larger government proposal "The Children First" concerning vulnerable children and children in care in the social area, is ongoing. The agreement ensures that children at treatment and special education facilities and care accommodation get the education to which they are entitled. The agreement strengthens the municipal responsibility for the treatment and special education facilities and for special education at care accommodation. In a so-called "quality agreement" between the municipality and the facility, collaboration with the local school system is required. Furthermore, the supervision is strengthened, while ensuring better coordination across supervising bodies. The legislation enters fully into force on 1 July 2024, and currently the municipalities are receiving applications for the quality agreements from the facilities.

Since 2022, the following additional policies have been further introduced:

Commission on the well-being of children and youth

In 2023, the Government has established a commission whose task it is to provide recommendations on how to strengthen the well-being of children and youth. The Commission is among other things going to focus on digital life of children and youth and the communities between children and youth.

A Quality Program for the public primary and lower secondary school

A political agreement in 2024 includes, among other things, a strengthened effort for students with the greatest challenges in Danish and mathematics. In addition, resources are allocated for competence development within special educational competences. The agreement also includes a strengthening of educational psychological counseling (Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning) in the municipalities, so more resources are allocated for early and preventive efforts. In addition, the agreement emphasizes that special support and help can be given in the regular classroom in order to enhance the classroom community, for example by co-

teaching. The purpose is to strengthen early and preventive efforts for students with special needs.

3.3 Healthy meal each school day

ECEC

It follows from the Act on ECEC that every child in municipal, independent, outsourced and private ECECs must be given a healthy lunch meal. The aim is to contribute to the healthy eating habits of children and to their overall well-being and development. The local council may decide to include a healthy lunch as part of the ECEC service overall costs in local-authority, independent and outsourced ECECs. The local council must further decide to provide a subsidy in order to lower parent's payment of the healthy lunch scheme.

Subject to an application from a child's parent, the local council shall decide whether a child may be exempted from a healthy lunch if the child has allergies or other disorders diagnosed by a doctor which require a special diet, and the local authority is not in a proper manner able to give the child a healthy lunch in the ECEC.

Primary and lower secondary school

In Denmark, there are no nationwide policies to ensure that each child receives a healthy meal every day at school. According to the Act on Public Compulsory Education, municipalities can decide to establish meal schemes for primary school students, such as breakfast and lunch. It is also the municipality's decision whether such meal schemes should be provided to students free, based on full or partial parental payment, or with differentiated income-dependent subsidies. Meal schemes can only be offered as an option to parents, meaning it will be the individual child's parents who decide whether the child should participate in the meal scheme or not.

Various municipalities offer parents the opportunity to order school meals for their child. Therefore, there is likely local differences as to whether and, if so, what kind of food is offered in schools and during the afternoon day-care. However, there is no central data on the usage of such programs.

Lastly, parents and guardians receive various financial allowances and subsidies for their children up to the age of 18 years, enabling them to ensure that their children have a healthy and a nutritious diet. The Danish State thus indirectly ensures that all children have access to at least one healthy and nutritious meal each school day.

3.4 Associational life and culture for children and young people

The Danish municipalities are responsible and provide the framework for associational life and culture for children and young people in a wide variety of areas such as art and culture, libraries, sports, and other leisure activities. The framework also includes for instance financial schemes for special target groups such as vulnerable children to support their access to leisure activities. In addition the Danish municipalities as well as the Ministry of Culture supports a number of voluntary associations and initiatives which also provides activities for children and young people.

3.5 The Danish benefits system

People who are unable to provide for themselves temporarily due to for example unemployment are eligible for temporary economic support and those who, for example, have a proven permanently reduced working capacity are provided with a durable means of subsistence. In addition, there are a number of possibilities for assistance, such as support for housing costs, which can be provided both to people in receipt of a public maintenance allowance and to those who are self-sufficient but are on a low income.

All payments of aid require that the persons concerned fulfil the relevant conditions. Cash benefits are available for people aged 30 or over and those under the age of 30 who have a vocational qualification. In order to receive cash benefits, you must meet a residence requirement and an employment requirement. The residence requirement means that you must have resided legally in Denmark (Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland) for a total of nine years within the last 10 years, while the employment requirement means that you must have been in regular employment in the Kingdom of Denmark for a period which corresponds to a total of two years and six months of full-time employment within the last ten years. Education assistance is available for young people under the age of 30 without vocational training who meet the residence and employment requirements. The self-supporting/repatriation/travel/transition allowance [*selvforsørgelses- og hjemrejseydelse eller overgangsydelse (SHO-ydelse)*] is for people who do not meet the residence and employment requirements but otherwise meet the conditions for receiving aid under the cash benefits system.

The cash benefits system is the lowest financial safety net and targeted at citizens who are unable to provide for themselves or their family by any other means. It creates economic security and thereby constitutes one of the pillars of the Danish welfare model. Under the cash benefits system, there are special dependency rates to ensure that the children of benefit recipients do not suffer significant deprivation in relation to their peers.

3.6 Child allowances

It is also possible to receive an allowance for your child's maintenance under the Child Benefit and Advance Payment of Child Support Act [*Lov om børnetilskud og forskudsvis udbetaling af børnebidrag*]. This allowance, primarily targeted at single parents, is subject to the fulfilment of a number of conditions, including, for example, citizenship, place of residence and the right to reside in Denmark. Single parents may also have the maintenance allowance paid in advance by the State if the parent liable to pay maintenance fails to pay. The scheme also covers, for instance, children of single parents when the other parent is imprisoned for more than three months and children of old-age pensioners whose pension is not paid on the grounds of Section 46 of the Social Pension Act [*Lov om social pension*].

3.6.1 Allowances for children provided by the Danish Immigration Service

Families with minor children will, as well as others who are provided for by the Danish Immigration Service, receive an allowance. The families will receive an additional allowance for the first two children of the family, if the family is accommodated at a centre with a canteen. If the family are accommodated at a centre there they can cook by themselves, they

will receive an additional allowance for the first four children. Additionally, they will receive packages with clothes every half year as well as a package with hygienic products every 14th day.

Unaccompanied minors are residing at centres with canteen. Therefore, they are not receiving allowances in cash.

3.7 Support for housing and assistance for unforeseeable costs

In addition, it is possible to receive special support under Section 34 of the Active Social Policy Act [*Lov om aktiv socialpolitik*] based on the need to cover severe expenses for family support or housing, if the conditions for this are met.

It is also possible for tenants to receive individual housing benefits including households with children. Housing benefit is a separate scheme, granted after an objective calculation based on the housing expenditure, the income of the household (excluding children's income), the area of the dwelling and the composition of the household, including the presence of children. It is payable to all tenants on low incomes or as a loan to house owners receiving disability pension, senior pension or old-age pension, provided that they meet the relevant conditions. Thereby, the calculation of the housing benefit is more favorable toward households with children.

The municipality may provide help in special instances for reasonable unforeseeable expenses for people who have undergone a change in their circumstances whereby their own payment of the costs would significantly impede their ability and that of their family to support themselves in the future, see Section 81 of the Active Social Policy Act. Assistance may normally be granted only if the relevant costs have been incurred as a result of unforeseeable needs. However, subject to a specific assessment, the municipality may exceptionally provide assistance to cover expenditure which could have been foreseeable where it is essential for the daily subsistence of the person or family concerned. Similarly, the municipality may provide assistance for reasonably justified temporary rent costs for people threatened with eviction on account of rent arrears, where this is likely to prevent the person from being evicted from their dwelling, see Section 81a of the Active Social Policy Act. In particular, the municipality must provide assistance to families with children. The municipality may make such assistance conditional on the person entering into an administrative agreement, helping them to establish a plan for moving to a more suitable dwelling or participating, for example, in debt management counselling.

All in all, the Danish benefit system maintains a strong focus on children's well-being, upbringing and equal opportunities. This applies to vulnerable children as well as to children in general.

3.8 Agreement on a new cash benefits system

A new political agreement to reform the Danish cash benefits system was signed in October 2023 [*Aftale om Nyt kontanthjælpssystem – flere i arbejde, enklere regler og færre børn i lavindkomst*]. The agreement is based on the recommendations of the Commission for Social Benefits [Ydelseskommisionen] and will become effective by July 2025. The agreement secures a simplification of the Danish cash benefits system, most significantly by removing

some of the complex rules in the current system, including the cap on social assistance. The agreement also aims to ensure that children of parents in the cash benefits system grow up with the same opportunities to be part of the community as their peers. This is facilitated through a number of new initiatives such as the introduction of a new child allowance to all care takers in the cash benefits system with an extra supplement for single parents, as well as a new allowance, which is earmarked children's leisure activities. This allowance is designed to encourage children of parents in the cash benefits system to participate in social and recreational activities on an equal footing with their peers. In addition, the agreement also introduces a subsidy, which covers expenses for medication for children of parents in the cash benefits system.

3.9 Social benefits and interventions for vulnerable children

As described in the Danish National Action plan for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, Denmark has a universal-access social system, including a comprehensive rights-based system for children in need or children in vulnerable positions.

The Danish system is based on a de-centralized system where the 98 municipalities of the country is responsible for carrying out social measures, within the set boundaries of an overall legal framework (mainly in the form of the Danish Child's Act). The Municipalities should provide services based on an individual assessment of each person's need.

3.10 Support for children and young people with disabilities

In accordance with the municipalities' general responsibility for carrying out social measures, the municipalities are responsible for providing support for children and young people with disabilities and their families.

The Act on Social Services and the Child's Act provide an overall framework for the provision of social services. The general aim is to compensate each child for the specific individual challenges that they face. For instance, it is possible for parents to be compensated by the municipality for loss of earnings when maintaining a child under 18 with a disability in the home.

The Child's Act also provides the possibility to offer placement in a special day-care facility for children with a significant and permanent physical or mental impairment. These facilities are aimed towards children whose need for support are so extensive, that it would not be possible to accommodate them in a regular day-care facility.

In addition to the services provided by the municipalities to children with disabilities, the general principle of sector accountability requires each sector providing a service or a product to make these accessible to persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities.

3.10.1 Unaccompanied minors

Unaccompanied minors will be accommodated at separate accommodation centres in the auspices of the Danish Immigration Service while their application for asylum is processing or if their stay in Denmark is illegal.

The accommodation of this group will have the purpose of securing a safe and stable environment as well as offering education and activities aimed at ensuring the development of the minors.

3.11 Special support for children in vulnerable positions

The municipality has a general obligation to monitor the living conditions of all children and young persons within the municipality. The municipality is obliged to discharge its supervisory duties in a manner enabling it to as soon as possible to identify any instances where a child or young person under 18 years of age must be assumed to need special support or where a child must be assumed to acquire a need for special support immediately after being born.

The municipality must be aware of whether there is a specific child or young person in the municipality who may need support. If a child or young person is considered to be in need of support, the municipality has a duty to ensure that an assessment or examination of the child's or young person's circumstances is carried out. The purpose of the assessment or examination is to identify the child's and the family's strengths as well as their difficulties. The assessment or examination should result in an informed decision on whether to take measures to support the child.

If a child under the age of 18 needs special support, the municipality must investigate their circumstances and undertake one or more relevant measures.

This may be in the form of placement and/or in the form of assistance and support for the child and their parents. Supportive measures may entail family treatment, supported accommodation outside of the home and a permanent contact person for the child or the family.

The support provided by the municipality is intended to ensure that all children and young persons have the same opportunities for care, learning, personal development, health, well-being, and for living an equally independent adult life as their peers.

Provision of support or services for children in need, should always be based on a holistic approach and in cooperation with the child or young person's family whenever possible. It must be built on the child's or young person's and their family's own resources, and always take account of the views of the child or young person in line with their age and maturity. The child's or young person's difficulties must as far as possible be resolved in cooperation with the family and with their involvement.

Moreover, as a central element of the Child's Act, children and young persons in need of special support, including children and young persons who have a physical or mental impairment, have the right to gain influence on all matters and circumstances affecting them. The opinion and views of the child or young person shall be provided and taken into account

on an ongoing basis through conversations and other forms of direct contact before decisions are made under the Act about the circumstances of the child or young person.

3.12 Placement in alternate care

If the municipality becomes aware of circumstances, which are a cause for particular concern in a family, or in relation to a child or young person, placement of the child or young person in alternate care may be necessary in order to ensure the well-being of the child.

Placement of a child or a young person in alternate care may be relevant in cases where it is not possible to meet the need's of the child or young person through supportive measures at home. This could entail cases where the child or the young person is exposed to serious issues at home such as violence and/or substance abuse. It may also entail cases where the child or the young person require comprehensive support which cannot be provided sufficiently at home.

Prior to the placement in alternate care, the municipality is obligated to carry out a child protection examination, in order to shed light on the circumstances concerning the child and its family, and to identify the challenges and resources of the child or young person, the family and the network. It also may be relevant to highlight conditions such as the child or young person's development, well-being and behavior, family relationships, school relationships, health conditions, leisure time relationships and friendships, etc. The child protection examination aims to ensure that the correct initiatives is carried out for the child.

The municipality also has an obligation to draw up a child's plan with specific goals for the well-being and development of the child in compliance with the overall purpose of the placement.

It is possible for a young person over the age of 15 to be placed in alternate care, if the young person and the custodial parent consent to the placement.

Placement without consent from the young person over the age of 15 and the custodial parent can only be undertaken if there is a risk of serious harm to the health or the development of the child.

When deciding on placing a child in alternate care, the municipality should always consider what placement would be most suitable for the child, focusing on where the child have the chances of establishing and maintaining stable care relationships. This entails always considering the possibility of a foster family.

3.13 Obligation to notify

All persons resident in Denmark has an obligation to notify the municipality if they become knowledgeable about any child or young person under the age of 18, who is subject to neglect or any degrading treatment by their parents or guardians, or who lives in conditions that endanger their health or development.

Furthermore, all civil servants or persons holding public office has an increased obligation, if they become aware of or have reason to believe that a child or a young person under the age of 18 is in need of special support.

The increased obligation for public officials also goes beyond the obligation to notify in cases where a child or a young person is subject to neglect or degrading treatment or living in harmful conditions. It is sufficient that the young person is experiencing difficulties.

3.14 Healthcare³

Universal access to free and high-quality healthcare. As it is stated in the action plan residents in Denmark are entitled to benefits under Section 7 of the Health Act [Sundhedsloven]. This access to healthcare applies regardless of age and means that children in Denmark have access to high-quality healthcare free of charge, which is one of the key services of the Child Guarantee. This also applies to the treatment and investigation of mental illnesses. Health welfare services include examination, diagnosis, treatment of illness, birth assistance, rehabilitation, professional healthcare and prevention and health promotion in relation to individual patients, see Section 5 of the Health Act.

3.14.1 Safeguarding the health of children and young people

In Denmark municipalities are responsible for managing a number of different areas related to health as well as promoting the health of children and young people. Sections 121-122 of the Health Act state that municipalities are to offer all children and young people health guidance, assistance and examinations given free of charge by healthcare providers until the end of their education. Greater efforts are required for children and young people with special needs, including counselling as well as further preventive testing carried out by the healthcare provider or doctor. Children in asylum centres have access to the same health treatment as Danish children.

Healthcare

Health visitors are specially trained nurses who offer, among other things, guidance and individual support to parents of infants and young children, as well as to pregnant women with special needs. They also focus on providing support, diagnoses and follow-up in relation to care and interventions for children and young people with health issues, including interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation with general practice, municipal doctors, social administration, pedagogical psychological counselling and other services. All families in Denmark are offered home visits from the health visitor during the child's first year of life. In principle, a minimum of five visits are offered during this period, as well as an early visit to ensure the child's well-being in the event of an early discharge from hospital. In addition, extra services may be offered to families with special needs. The focus during the visits is the child's development and well-being, as well as breastfeeding and family planning. Home visits for the child may be offered from the age of one to five years. Families with special needs are offered additional services, including home visits depending on a specific professional assessment, needs and issues.

³ Guidance on actions and special support for children and young people and their families (retsinformation.dk): Vejledning om indsatser og særlig støtte til børn og unge og deres familier (retsinformation.dk)

In a political agreement from 2022 it was decided to expand a model of care which gives the health visitors tools to target the services to families in need of extra support. The goal is to reduce social inequality in health and prevent negative social inheritance. In 2023, 1,5 mio. DKK and 2,5 mio. DKK in 2024-2026 has been earmarked for the Danish Health Authority to implement the concept in all the municipalities.

The healthcare visitor also has regular contact with children and young people of school age, including health education activities in groups or for school year levels. In addition, the healthcare visitor carries out the compulsory medical examinations on starting and leaving school (although these may also be carried out by a doctor).

All children – in parallel with the provision of healthcare – are offered ongoing medical examinations by the doctor. Vaccinations which are part of the Danish childhood vaccination programme (against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, Hib 1, PCV-1, MMR and HPV) are also offered to all children, both boys and girls, and are usually carried out by their own doctor. Vaccination against COVID-19 is offered to special risk groups, usually in hospitals or by the child's general practitioner.

Municipalities provide all children and young people with preventive and therapeutic dental care free of charge in accordance with Section 127 of the Health Act. In recent years the cost-free preventive and therapeutic dental care has been expanded from encompassing children and young people under the age of 18 to encompass people under the age of 22. The new legislation is expected to be fully implemented in 2025.

Special provisions for children under the Danish Immigration Service's care
Children who are dependent on the Immigration Service's care are entitled to the same health treatment as all other children in Denmark.

4. Indicators, Targets and Monitoring

As the Danish monitoring report is based on the Social Policy Statement, separate quantitative or qualitative targets for the Danish implementation of the European Child Guarantee have not been set, as the target-groups of the European Child Guarantee are already monitored in the existing monitoring framework.

Ensuring that vulnerable children and young persons have the same rights and opportunities as all other children continues to be a focus for the Danish government.

One of the focuses of The Social Policy Statement is the monitoring of the success of preventive measures, meant to prevent more severe social problems amongst vulnerable children and young persons.

Therefore, it is important to underpin, that while 79.220 children and young people received social support in 2022 around 60.000 of these received support in the form of preventive measures, ensuring that these children and young people do not end up in a situation of social exclusion in the first place.

While not setting any specific targets it continues to be a priority to ensure that children and young people in Denmark receive the right preventive measures. Therefore, the trend in regards to the distribution of children receiving preventive support versus other forms of social support is accounted for in the Social Policy Statement as part of the foundation for future policy. Initiatives.

In the Social Policy Statement the well-being of children and you people are monitored on a wide range of parameters. The number of children and young people suffering from mental illnesses, in alternate care or in rehabilitation are also monitored alongside some of the target-groups, which are the focus of the European Child Guarantee such as the number of children in alternate care.

In Denmark, there is a holistic approach to children and young people in vulnerable people and the large variety of data on this specific target group aims towards understanding the complexity of potential shortcomings in current social policies.

Thus, rather than set specific fixed targets, it is the ambition to continue the monitoring of the target groups on various different parameters in The Social Policy Statement, In order to take appropriate and timely measures.

However, work has begun to adapt the Social Policy Statement to make it more directly applicable to the European Child Guarantee. This might entail the inclusion of other forms of data or account of services.

5. Financing

As Denmark had a comprehensive system for supporting vulnerable children and young people prior to the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, no resources have been exclusively allocated towards the implementation of the recommendation.

However, in 2022, Denmark spend a total of 19,2 billion kr. on services and support for vulnerable children and young people (in the age of 0-22). From these 10,9 billion kr. were spend on the placement of children in alternate care (covering both children in foster families and in institutions etc.). 7,2 billion kr. were spend on preventive measures and 1,1 billion kr. were spend on day-care centers and other day-care facilities.

The expenditure on services and support towards vulnerable children and young people have increased by 0,4 billion kr. since 2021 and by 1,0 billion kr. since 2020.

The main explanation for the increase in expenditure is that spending towards preventive measures have been rising since 2016, while spending on placement in alternate care have been relatively stable. This reflects that there have been an increase in the number of preventive measures towards children and young people while less have been placed in alternate care.

Looking at the average prices of services towards children and young persons, placement in an institution ranks amongst the most expensive at between 1,3 and 1,4 million kr. annually per child. In contrast a network-foster-family has an average cost of less than 0,2 million kr. annually.

The average annual cost per child for preventive measures such as family treatment or respite care, ranges from 95.000 kr. to around 624.000 kr.

6. Lessons Learned and Further Development

The Danish welfare system covers a wide range of measures, allowances and benefits that contribute to upholding the general objective of the Child Guarantee and its recommendation that all children at risk of poverty or social exclusion have access to the most basic rights such as healthcare, education, nutrition and housing.

However, the European Child Guarantee still provides a good opportunity to work with policy-development regarding vulnerable children, and to look into whether there is the right amount of data to fully account for the specific target group's access to the key services mentioned in the European Child Guarantee recommendation.

Therefore there will be a continuous effort towards ensuring that children in need continue to have access to key services such as proper education and health-services.

While it have been assessed that children in need in Denmark, as defined in the European Child Guarantee has access to the key services mentioned in the recommendation, it have become evident, that a tailored monitoring framework might make the biannual Danish monitoring reports even more relevant.

Therefore, work will begin in terms of seeking out whether the Social Policy Statement could be adjusted to better monitor some of the objectives of the European Child Guarantee more directly.

7. Conclusions

The Council adopted the European Child Guarantee on 14 June 2021 with the aim of preventing and combating social exclusion and ensuring children's access to 'key services'.

The Danish Government supports the overall ambition to combat the social exclusion of children and child poverty in general, and supports the need to secure proper living conditions for children in Europe.

However, as stated in the Danish National Action Plan, the recommendation is to be interpreted as balanced and flexible and to fully respect Member States' national competences. Therefore, the Danish National Action was adjusted to national circumstances, and it showed that Denmark generally lived up to the general objectives of the recommendation.

As stated in the National Action Plan future monitoring reports would be based on The Social Policy Statement, which this monitoring report has been. In addition, relevant ministries have contributed with supplementary data and analysis the European Child Guarantee. Furthermore, this report have followed up on the different initiatives and policies described in the National Action Plan. This means that it also covers recent policy initiatives in relation to vulnerable children.

The main conclusions of the monitoring report is that Denmark continue to fulfill the objectives of the European Child Guarantee, even if further effort may contribute to ensure that vulnerable children have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Finally, a minor amendment to the structure and data in the Social Policy Statement may be relevant in the future in order to better fit the European Child Guarantee, making the monitoring of the implementation easier.

Further inquiry into this question will be integrated in the work on the Social Policy Statement for 2025.