

Carsten Jensen

# Social Policy and Social Policy Research in Denmark

## A Report on Social Policy Teaching, Policy Advice and Data Infrastructure

### AT A GLANCE

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- Danish social policy research and teaching is fragmented across different disciplines and institutions.
- Most social policy teaching in higher education takes place in electives within broader master level degree programs, though more specialized programs also exist.
- There is substantial social policy advisory in Denmark in the form of ad hoc commissions and more institutionalized bodies such as the Economic Council and the Danish Centre for Social Science Research.
- The landscape of social policy advisory is relatively homogenous with a core group of individuals, often university professors in economics, circulating between different advisory bodies.
- The micro-level registers available to Danish researchers via Statistics Denmark and the Danish Health Data Authority and anonymized survey data at the Danish National Archive are internationally rare.

## ABSTRACT

Danish social policy research and teaching is fragmented across different disciplines and institutions. Most social policy teaching in higher education takes place in electives within broader master level degree programs, though more specialized programs also exist. There is substantial social policy advisory in Denmark in the form of ad hoc commissions and more institutionalized bodies such as the Economic Council and the Danish Centre for Social Science Research. The landscape of social policy advisory is relatively homogenous with a few individuals circulating between different advisory bodies. The micro-level registers available to Danish researchers via Statistics Denmark and the Danish Health Data Authority and anonymized survey data at the Danish National Archive are internationally rare.

## GERMAN ABSTRACT

Die dänische Sozialpolitikforschung und -lehre ist auf verschiedene Disziplinen und Institutionen verteilt. Die meisten Lehrveranstaltungen zur Sozialpolitik im Hochschulbereich finden im Rahmen von Wahlpflichtfächern innerhalb breiter angelegter Masterstudiengänge statt, obwohl es auch spezialisierte Programme gibt. In Dänemark gibt es eine umfangreiche Politikberatung in Form von Ad-hoc-Kommissionen und stärker institutionalisierten Gremien wie dem Wirtschaftsrat und dem Dänischen Zentrum für sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung. Die Landschaft der Politikberatung ist relativ homogen, mit einigen wenigen Personen, die zwischen verschiedenen Beratungsgremien zirkulieren. Die Registerdaten auf Mikroebene, die dänischen Forschern über Statistics Denmark und die dänische Behörde für Gesundheitsdaten zur Verfügung stehen sowie die anonymisierten Umfragedaten im dänischen Nationalarchiv sind international einzigartig.

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# 1 Introduction to the Report

This report is structured into five parts. The first provides a general outline of the social policy 'scene' in Denmark, which serves as a necessary background to the content of the report. The second part briefly presents the educational system to put the presentation of social policy teaching in higher education into context. This is followed by a longer third section that zooms in on social policy teaching in higher education. The fourth section discusses the structure and role of social policy institutions and committees involved in political consultancy in Denmark, while the fifth turns to the data infrastructure available to Danish social policy researchers.

## 2 The Social Policy 'Scene' in Denmark

Denmark is known for its universal welfare state, which offers health care, education, and several other services free-of-charge as well as comparably generous transfers to a variety of social groups. Yet despite the central role of the welfare state in Danish society and politics, there are relatively little focus on social policy in research or higher education. There is no unified social policy 'discipline' or 'community' in Denmark.

Social policy research is fragmented across both disciplinary and institutional lines. Research on social policy is conducted by political scientists, sociologists, economists, and public administration scholars, among others. Institutionally, social policy is researched either at universities, of which there are five in Denmark, or more specialized centers and think tanks, which either is funded by a major private sponsor or on a project-by-project basis. University-based research tends to be internationally oriented with a focus on peer-reviewed publications in (mono-disciplinary) journals, whereas most other research is more applied and directed at a Danish audience of decision-makers and bureaucrats. For this reason, too, developing a social policy community has proven difficult.

Recently, however, a new social policy network (VELNET) has been established in 2021 with the purpose of bringing researchers together across disciplines and institutions. The ambition is – in collaboration with the European Social Policy Network (ESPAnet) – to facilitate cross-institutional and -disciplinary research and graduate teaching.

Social policy research flows into the political decision-making process in two ways. First, via the research that especially the specialized centers and think tanks produce and which frequently is paid for by the government or a private foundation to evaluate the effects of new initiatives. Second, via the participation of individual scholars in commissions preparing new legislation. Such participation is not very common and almost always on an ad hoc basis. With the partial exception of the Danish Economic Councils there is no permanent advisory body in Denmark providing social policy advice to the government.

Social policy teaching is similarly fragmented. The research centers that specialize in social policy research do not offer teaching; and teaching in social policy at universities tends to be nested in broader programs such as political science or economics. This means that social policy primarily is taught in the context of BA or MA level courses (typically with a workload of 5-10 ECTS) that are planned and run by individual scholars. With a few exceptions, there is no tradition in Denmark for offering an entire degree in social policy and therefore no discussion of what such a degree should contain.

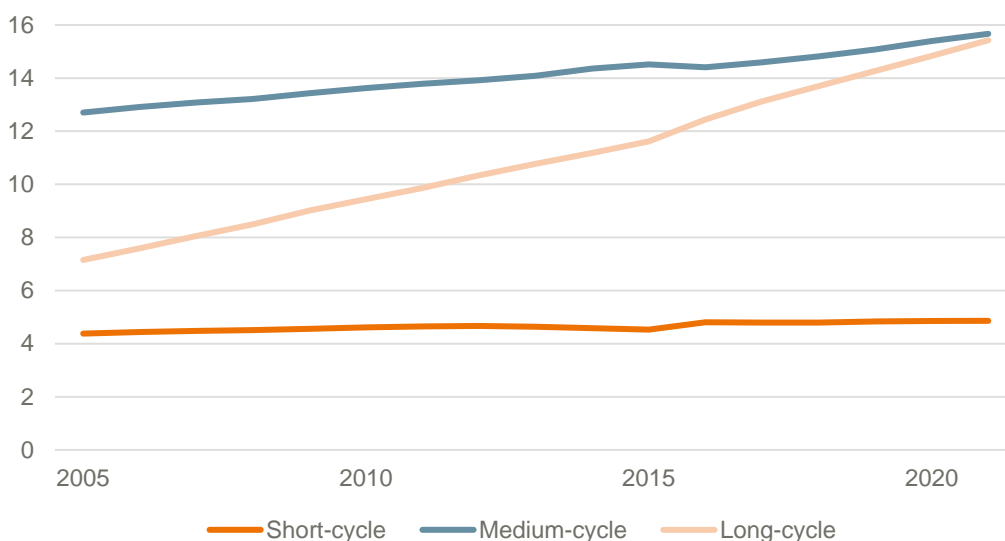
### 3 An Overview of the Educational System

Ten years of primary schooling is mandatory in Denmark. Primary schooling is unified without any selection into tracks based on academic performance or interest. After primary school, children may choose between a small number of high school programs, with the *gymnasium* as the most popular, and a larger number of vocational programs that typically provides a mix of school and workplace training.

Higher education is divided into a number of tracks that are differentiated into a general educational system for the young coming (more or less) directly from high school and an adult and continuing education and training system. For each of these systems a variety of short-, medium-, and long-cycle programs are offered.

Short-cycle programs are normally two years (120 ECTS) and offers Academy Profession degrees in areas such as business, technology, and IT. Medium-cycle programs are normally three-and-a-half years (210 ECTS) and offers Professional Bachelor degrees, which combine a three-year academic bachelor with six months' internship. Many of the welfare state's core functions are taught in these programs, notably primary school teaching and nursing. Long-cycle programs are five years (300 ECTS) and offer Master degrees. Master degrees are typically mono-disciplinary, meaning that students specialize for the full five-year program in a specific topic, e.g. law, psychology, or physics. Masters where students can combine topics are restricted to programs aimed to train high school teachers.

**Figure 1. Percentage of 25-45 y.o. with a tertiary degree, 2005-2021**



Source: Statistics Denmark (2022).

Figure 1 displays the proportion of adults 25-45 years old that have a tertiary degree from a short, medium, or long-cycle program, and how this proportion has developed since 2005. It highlights two prominent features of Danish education. First, there is a rise in the proportion with a tertiary degree; second, this rise is driven by a rapid increase in long-cycle degrees. The gradual trends depicted in Figure 1 is driven by the fact that yearly enrollment in recent years has been around 50% higher in long- than medium-cycle programs and six times higher than for short-cycle programs.

A noteworthy feature of the Danish higher educational system is how access is regulated and its link to funding. The Danish higher educational degrees offer a fixed number of seats. The allocation of seats to students is primarily decided by student demands and their grades, and is administered by the National Assignment Office. In effect, all students submit their preferences for which programs to enroll into the office, which then allocates the seats according to the grades of the students with the student with the highest grades being allocated first and so forth until all seats are allocated. Funding is linked to each individual student, so programs that fail to attract students for all their seats suffer a shortfall in funding. Over time, this entails that most programs match their supply of seats (i.e. costs) to student demand.

## 4 Social Policy Teaching in Higher Education

In Denmark there is, as mentioned, no tradition for social policy programs. Yet this does not mean that there is no social policy teaching, only that it is fragmented and shaped by the institutional structure outlined in the previous section. Often social policy teaching takes places as individual (elective) courses within large degree programs such as political science. This implies that it is not possible to provide an exhaustive overview over number of programs, students enrolled, teachers affiliated, and related quantities because these are not recorded. That said, this section draws the contours of social policy teaching in Denmark and provides a couple of in-depth examples of programs and individual courses as illustrations. The specific programs and courses highlighted have been selected to provide an impression of the variation in social policy teaching, but because of its small size, the examples in fact cover a substantial amount of the Danish educational landscape.

### 4.1. LONG-CYCLE SOCIAL POLICY TEACHING

The arguably most coherent social policy program in Denmark is the MSc in Comparative Public Policy and Welfare Studies at the University of Southern Denmark. A number of BA degrees give direct admission, including political science and history. The program started 10 years ago and have typically enrolled 20-30 students per year, but enrollment was paused for the year 2022 as part of a national reform of student intake.

**Table 1. MSc in Comparative Public Policy and Welfare Studies**

	Common courses		Possible Specialization	
	Methods	Policies and outcomes	Social change	Social justice
<b>1st semester Basic courses</b>	Quantitative methods for public policy (10 ECTS)	The Nordic model of governance (5 ECTS)  Public policy (5 ECTS)	Science, technology and society (10 ECTS)	Social policy: Challenges and solutions (10 ECTS)
<b>2nd semester Applied courses</b>	Research design (10 ECTS)	Economics for policy evaluation (10 ECTS)	Global issues and development (10 ECTS)	Ethics and public policy (10 ECTS)
<b>3rd semester Continued specialization</b>	Elective courses in Denmark or abroad (10-30 ECTS) and/or internship (10 or 20 ECTS)			
<b>4th semester Independent work</b>	Master thesis (30 ECTS)			

Source: University of Southern Denmark (2022).

The program is structured with a set of common courses that focus on either methods or policies and outcomes and a set of specialized courses that allows the student to study aspects they care particularly about. With 20 ECTS in total devoted to methods, the program reflects a general trend to emphasize methodological skills, and often statistics, also at the more advanced master level. Only one course (5 ECTS) is dedicated to the Nordic model, so it is fair to say that the orientation of the program is international both in the sense of focusing on international issues (e.g. Global issues and development) and in the sense of speaking to international agendas (e.g. Ethics and public policy). The program resembles most other master programs in Denmark by putting a relatively large emphasis on electives, which can be taken either at the home institution or elsewhere, or be converted to an internship.

The MSc in Comparative Public Policy and Welfare Studies at the University of Southern Denmark is hosted at the Department of Political Science, which naturally reflects on the course content. The MSc in Social Work at Aalborg University is distinct from this by its greater emphasis on applied social work and law (see Table 2). It is also distinct from most other master degrees in Denmark by offering a single integrated course the first two semesters. On the first semester, students are trained in theories about social work, social problems, and social policy, while the second semester focuses on organizational theory and methods. On the third semester, Law in social work is mandatory, but otherwise students are expected to select a number of electives that cover topics like vulnerable children and youth, public policy evaluation, and voluntary work and civic society.

**Table 2. MSc in Social Work**

<b>1st semester</b>	<b>The field of social work (30 ECTS)</b>	
<b>2nd semester</b>	Actors and organizations in social work (30 ECTS)	
<b>3rd semester</b>	Law in social work (5 ECTS)	Electives or internship (10-15 ECTS)
<b>4th semester</b>	Master thesis (30 ECTS)	

Source: Aalborg University (2022).

Apart from these specialized, but also rather small, Master degree programs, social policy at the master level is mostly taught as stand-alone elective courses at the different departments of political and social science. Aarhus University is home to the biggest of these programs (followed by the University of Copenhagen) with a yearly intake of around 300 BA students and 200 MA students. Given its size, it is interesting to see how social policy has been taught at this department. At the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University, electives are not recurring, but based on the semester-by-semester supply of courses by the faculty members. The supply of courses will therefore typically vary greatly from one semester or year to the next, but all are worth 10 ECTS. Table 3 lists the master level electives related to social policy that have been offered in 2020, 2021, and 2022.

**Table 3. Master level electives in social policy at Aarhus University, 2020-2022**

<b>Spring 2020</b>	Party politics and the design of the welfare state (PhD student Tobias Varneskov)
<b>Fall 2020</b>	Welfare Conditionality (PhD student Rasmus Jensen Schjødt)
<b>Spring 2021</b>	Digitalisation and the welfare state (Prof. Kees van Kersbergen) Educational inequality (Prof. Simon Calmar Andersen)
<b>Fall 2021</b>	The Politics of Inequality (Ass. prof. David Weisstanner) Inequality and political behavior (PhD student Matias Engdal Christensen)
<b>Spring 2021</b>	Comparative health policy (Ass. prof. Viola Burau)
<b>Fall 2022</b>	The welfare state in changing times (Prof. Carsten Jensen) Capitalism, democracy and the welfare state (Ass. prof. David Weisstanner)

Source: Aarhus University (2022).

There is an emphasis on inequality in most of the courses, also when this is not explicit from the titles. The focus of the course Educational Inequality (taught by Professor Simon Calmar Andersen) was on identifying causal effects of social interventions and policies on educational inequalities. As such, this course was located at the cross-roads between political science, economics, and sociology. The Politics of Inequality course (taught by Ass. prof. David Weisstanner) looked at the political causes and consequences of economic inequality, while the course Inequality and Political Behavior (taught by PhD student Matias Engdal Christensen) had a narrower focus on the connection between economic inequality and citizens' preferences and behavior. Other courses like Party Politics and the Design of the Welfare State (taught by PhD student Tobias Varneskov) and the Welfare State in Changing Times (taught by Professor Carsten Jensen) presents broad introductions to the welfare state literature, with an emphasis on the political dynamics around reforms of social policies. A third



set of courses zooms-in on more specific topics like digitalization, conditionality, and health policy.

All exchange students at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University has to take the course Danish Politics and Welfare in Comparative Perspective, which is one of the few master level courses that are recurring every year (normally in the fall semester). The course introduces the international students to the Danish constitution, the party system, the structure of government, Danish EU politics and the development of the Danish welfare state from a theoretical, historical and contemporary perspective. The design and functioning of the Danish welfare state take up a substantial part of the course, reflecting that this element is considered central for understanding Danish politics in general.

## 4.2. MEDIUM-CYCLE SOCIAL POLICY TEACHING

The three programs presented so far are all master level programs, and the MSc in Comparative Public Policy and Welfare Studies at the University of Southern Denmark and the MSc in Social Work at Aalborg University are both meant as specializations of broader political science and social science bachelor's degrees. As such, there is no full long-cycle program in social policy. At the medium-cycle level several programs exist that contain social policy elements, but the programs are aimed at training welfare professionals such as nurses and teachers. The medium-cycle program that comes closest to a full social policy degree is the social worker program.

Social workers are a professional bachelor degree, meaning that it takes three-and-a-half years to complete compared to the normal three years at universities. The extra six months makes room for a mandatory internship and the content of the program is in general more applied than at university bachelors (but similar to other professional bachelor degrees in, e.g. nursing). To illustrate how these programs look like, Table 4 provides an overview of the social work program offered at VIA University College, one of the biggest medium-cycle schools in the country with a yearly intake of almost 500 on the social worker program every year. The 1<sup>st</sup> semester contains two courses that introduce the students to the content of the program and with a project-based exam that allow students to touch on a number of the topics that come in later semesters. The next semesters are dedicated to more specific topics, like the jobseekers, vulnerable children, and the handicapped. The internship on the 4<sup>th</sup> semester is organized by the school, making sure that all students get one. The electives on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> semester allow student to specialize into either the jobseekers, vulnerable children and children with handicaps, or vulnerable adults and adults with handicaps. The program ends with an independent bachelor project.

**Table 4. BA in social work, VIA University College**

1 <sup>st</sup> semester	Social problem and social work practices (15 ECTS)	Development and context of social work (15 ECTS)
2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	Social work in the employment sector (15 ECTS)	Vulnerable adults and adults with handicaps (15 ECTS)
3 <sup>rd</sup> semester	Vulnerable children and children with handicaps (15 ECTS)	The organization of social work (15 ECTS)
4 <sup>th</sup> semester	Internship (30 ECTS)	
5 <sup>th</sup> semester	Social work in cross-professional and cross-sectorial contexts (15 ECTS)	Electives (15 ECTS)
6 <sup>th</sup> semester	Quality assurance and evaluation (15 ECTS)	Electives (15 ECTS)
7 <sup>th</sup> semester	Knowledge development (10 ECTS)	Bachelor project (20 ECTS)

Source: VIA University College (2022).

In conclusion, social policy teaching in higher education in Denmark comes in several variants. Although there is no full long-cycle social policy degree program, there is plenty of social policy teaching going on, nevertheless. At the long-cycle level, this is mostly in the form of electives, but with the partial exception of a few more dedicated two-year social policy programs. The concrete courses are typically reflecting the disciplinary context of the institutions that offers them, which implies a bent towards political science.

### 4.3. JOB MARKET AND PROMOTION OF SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH

It follows from the outline so far that there is no coherent job market for individuals who have received social policy teaching, especially at the long-cycle level.<sup>1</sup> First and foremost, there are only two MA level degree programs (i.e., Comparative Public Policy and Welfare Studies at University of Southern Denmark and Social Work at Aalborg University) that provides graduate with a social policy certificate, and both of these programs are small compared to related programs in political science or economics. Students taking one of the two social policy degree programs are, moreover, coming with a diverse set of background, so their job market profile will be diverse, too. Second, the job market situation of students taking individual courses within broader master programs will reflect the job market of that master program rather than any 'social policy job market'.

Given the sheer size of the political science programs at Aarhus University and University of Copenhagen, it is likely that the largest proportion of students receiving social policy teaching are enrolled here (though the number of students taking social policy courses at these institutions is not public, or even collected systematically). Around two-third of all graduates from these two programs to a large extent find work in the public sector and a large proportion of those hired in the private sector works in consultancies servicing the public sector.

<sup>1</sup> For information about the job market of Danish degree programs, see Uddannelseszoom (2022).

The bachelor in social work has a much more defined job market that is also more clearly connected to issues of social policy. Here around 85% of graduates find work in the public sector either as case workers handling the claims and associated requirements of citizens, primarily at municipalities, or social consultants working in the care sector.

The social policy teaching in Denmark promote scientific research and careers in the sense that it directs the interests of potential PhD candidates and brings them into contact with senior researchers. Yet without designated social policy degree programs there is also little structure at the subsequent stages. In this sense, social policy research faces the same obstacles as many other social science areas, namely that access primarily happens via broad PhD calls with fixed stipend that cover fields such as political science or economics. This has the advantage that PhD candidates' research is based on their own interests, but also that there is no coherent input into the social policy research field.

## 5 The Structure and Role of Social Policy Advisory Bodies

Denmark is variously described as a 'consensus' or 'corporatist' country, emphasizing the tradition for bipartisan compromises and integration of the social partners into the political process. The tradition reflects a multiparty system where no party holds a majority and coalition-building therefore is necessary, and where the labor movement historically have been comparably strong and therefore viable as a negotiating partner for other political actors. At the same time, Danish central administration is highly concentrated into a number of powerful departments that often has considerable steering capacity. The Danish Ministry of Finance, especially, has considerable oversight and analytical capacity, which frequently guides policy-making.

It is possible to divide political advisory into more socioeconomically oriented advisory (e.g., effects of social initiatives on the economy) and more social oriented advisory (e.g., what policy design is best at increasing learning in primary school). However, in reality the line is blurred as the same institutions tend to focus on both aspects, even within the same reports. For the sake of categorization, what follows is divided into socioeconomic advisory bodies and social advisory bodies, but the distinction is very crude and may not necessarily be recognized by the actors themselves.

### 5.1. SOCIOECONOMIC ADVISORY BODIES

Socioeconomic advisory takes place within this duality of social co-operation and strong government. An important form of political advisory is, of course, the inputs from labor unions, employer associations as well as the two associations organizing Danish municipalities and regions, respectively. These organizations produce a substantial number of reports with analyses of key issues in Danish politics and economics; reports that potentially can inform decision-makers. Yet, while clearly playing a major political role, these activities are best regarded as lobbying rather than political advisory because these actors represent the material interests of their members, and the analyses produced are typically part of larger efforts to push policies in a particular direction.

Socioeconomic advisory in a stricter sense takes place primarily in two forms: ad hoc commissions and the Economic Council. Commissions are organized on an ad hoc basis by the government to analyze a specific problem. The membership of commissions varies both in terms of numbers and profile, but often feature a mix of experts and representatives of the

stakeholders (notably relevant interest organizations). A commission will normally end its work by submitting a report to the relevant department with proposals for legislation. The commissions are typically serviced by the relevant ministry.

Commissions are an important political tool in Denmark. Setting up a commission can be a way of generating and testing new ideas but can also be used to postpone inconvenient debates because the work of commissions frequently takes more than a year. Because the report of a commission can get substantial attention when released, deciding the terms of reference for the commission's work is important. The terms of reference stipulate the topic of the commission's work and can set certain 'ground rules', e.g. that the proposal must be cost neutral or not reduce overall employment.

To illustrate the functioning and importance of commissions for social policy advisory, two recent commissions can serve as examples. Ydelseskommisionen (the Benefits Commission) was established in 2019 and delivered its report in 2021 on a reform of the social assistance system. The commission consisted of six members of which four were academics specializing in social policy or economics. The commission also had a reference group consisting of representatives from the main labor union and employer association, respectively. The terms of reference were brief (three pages), but charged the commission to come up with a replacement for the politically contested social assistance ceiling ('kontanthjælpsloftet') and secure better conditions for children living in families on social assistance – but without adding costs to the system or impair overall employment levels. As such, the set-up of the commission and the terms of references clearly reflected the agenda of the government and its parliamentary support who, on the one hand, had campaigned on reducing child poverty in families on social assistance, while appearing fiscally responsible, on the other. The commission's report made up the basis for the parliamentary negotiations between the social democratic government and its left-leaning support parties, which led to a reform of the social assistance system in 2022.

Ydelseskommisionen is an example of a commission with a relatively concrete task where the parameters to a large extent were fixed. Most commissions are like that, but a few are charged with setting a broader agenda. Reformkommisionen (the Reform Commission) was established in 2020 with five out of seven members being academics with an expertise in social policy and economics. The terms of reference (again only three pages) asks the commission to develop a set of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation reforms; with 1<sup>st</sup> generation reforms being supply-side oriented 'workfare' schemes which put a heavy emphasis on pushing unemployed into (lower pay) jobs or retraining. The focus on 2<sup>nd</sup> generation reform was at least partially driven by the need of a center-left government to signal its ideological credentials, but also implied that the commission's members were given considerable discretion in their work. The terms of references highlighted three topics: ensuring better education for everyone, higher employment rate, and more and better jobs. The work form was supposed to be inclusive, with inputs from stakeholders. In the spring of 2022, the first report was submitted containing several far-reaching proposals for reforming the educational system, fueling a significant public debate and a government bill (which has not yet been adopted).

A key feature of commissions is that they are ad hoc and supposed to deal with a specific topic selected by the government. The Economic Council supplement the advisory by the ad hoc commissions. The Economic Council was established in 1962 to provide independent analysis of economic and social issues, including the labor market, the pension system, and family policies. The Economic Council consists of a chairmanship of four university professors in economics and 17 ordinary members that represent labor unions, employer associations, and the public sector. The chairmanship is supported by a permanent secretariat of some 15-

20 analysts that helps producing two biannual reports on socioeconomic affairs. The biannual reports always contain a fixed part with economic forecasts and policy recommendations following from this assessment of the economic situation. The reports normally also contain a rotating part that focus on different topics that the chairmanship themselves decide to explore. Surveying the last three reports give an impression of the topics selected. The spring 2021 report contained an analysis of the employment effects of the 2006 and 2011 pension reforms, documenting a positive effect, but lower than expected at the time of decision. The autumn 2021 report analyzed the effect of elders' health status on their employment, showing how deteriorating health reduces labor market participation. The report also included a discussion of the Minister of Finance's estimation methods when calculating budgetary effect of reform proposals.

The Economic Council, and especially the chairmanship, enjoys considerable respect and their analyses and proposals often get substantial mass media attention. The chairpersons are known as *vismænd* ('the wise men'), and the speaker of the chairmanship as *overvismand* ('senior wise man') and their reports as *vismændsrapport* ('the wise men's report'); nicknames reflecting their position in the public (and applied to both male and female chairpersons). Yet it should also be noted that the Economic Council adhere to the same mainstream economic thinking as the Ministry of Finance (indeed, the chairpersons have frequently taught the analysts in both the Economic Council's secretariat and the Ministry of Finance). Therefore, although the Economic Council can put the spotlight on issues as they please, which may not necessarily fit the government's agenda, the work of the Economic Council is in practice seldom politically controversial.

Another important feature of both commissions and the Economic Council is that the membership is constrained to a relatively short list of individuals. Browsing through the last 15-20 years of commissions, the same 8-12 persons feature many times – and often also as members of the Economic Council's chairmanship. The consequence of this, and the fact that top-level analysts at both the Ministry of Finance and the Economic Council usually are trained at either Aarhus University or University of Copenhagen, has produced a knowledge regime – the institutional structure of mainstream socioeconomic knowledge production – with very little ideational conflict.<sup>2</sup>

## 5.2. SOCIAL ADVISORY BODIES

Moving from socioeconomic advisory to what might be labeled social advisory – i.e. a focus on policy design and effects of policy design, and less on the costs – two institutions are worth highlighting. First, the Danish Centre for Social Science Research (VIVE), which is an independent research unit under the Ministry of the Interior and Housing. VIVE's research is typically more applied than research at universities, with a focus on literature reviews, benchmarking, and evaluations of new social policy proposals and initiatives. These may include more home visits to young parents in areas with social problems or the effect of different child/teacher ratios on learning outcomes in Danish primary schools.

The analyses by VIVE are frequently conducted on behalf of a public agency at the local, regional, or national level with the aim of generating insights that can inform future political decisions. Compared to commissions, the work of VIVE is not meant to directly prepare new decisions and VIVE rarely formulate an explicitly proposal such as commissions are expected to do. Still, VIVE provides important social policy advice that often are integrated into the political process. It is, in this regard, interesting to observe that the current chairperson of VIVE is one of the most widely employed members of Danish commissions and has been a

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of this, see Campbell and Petersen (2015).

member of the Economic Council, while the previous director of VIVE similarly are used in commissions and, previously, was managing director of the Economic Council. This illustrates that, although VIVE's focus is different from the work of most commissions and the Economic Council, it remains largely embedded in the entrenched knowledge regime.

The second social advisory body is the Rockwool Foundation. The foundation was established by the donation of shares in a large Danish company, which now forms the basis for the foundation's social policy research. The type of research conducted by the Rockwool Foundation resembles that of VIVE, but since the Rockwool Foundation is economically independent, its research will typically be less likely to inform political decisions directly simply because its reports are not commissioned for a specific purpose by a decision-maker.

### 5.3. PRIVATE THINK TANKS WITH A POLITICAL AGENDA

Commissions, the Economic Council, and VIVE are all part of the public sector, though they retain substantial autonomy. Social policy advisory also takes place in private think tanks that promote a specific political agenda. AE Rådet is the oldest think tank in Denmark, established as far back as 1936 by the labor movement to provide analyses facilitating a labor friendly policy development. Today, AE Rådet produces numerous analyses every year on topics such as inequality, poverty, and labor market marginalization. The analyses are frequently taken up by the mass media, and as such influence the political agenda, and informs the member of the board of AE Rådet, which consists of members of labor unions and the Social Democratic Party. In this way, AE Rådet provides valuable social policy advisory, but in a way very different from the Economic Council, VIVE, and the various commissions because AE Rådet explicitly aims to affect policy in a more egalitarian direction.

In recent years, several new think tanks have emerged all providing social policy advisory in the sense that they produce analyses and, on that basis, participate in the public debate. Yet compared to the institutions that are part of the public sector and arguably AE Rådet, too, these think tanks have no direct link to decision-makers and their research and advice do normally not feed into the political process except if individual politicians pick up a specific analysis. It is also noteworthy that most analyses by Danish think tanks are related to specific issues and are much briefer and frequently less in-depth than those of the Economic Council or VIVE; a fact that reflects that the main purpose of these think tanks is to affect the public debate. Important think tanks that feature prominently are the fiscal conservative CEPOS and the left-leaning CEVEA, which is financed by the labor unions like AE Rådet, but is more activist in the public debate.

## 6 Data Infrastructure

Social policy research in Denmark covers a wide range of topics, employing a diverse set of data and techniques. Reflecting this, and the fact that there is no distinct social policy research community, no common data infrastructure for social policy researchers have emerged. Almost all surveys are run by individual researchers or research groups and are not part of larger data infrastructures. To the extent individual social policy researchers benefit from, or contribute to, data infrastructure this will often be part of international collaborations, such as the European Social Survey or the Comparative Agendas Project. There are, however, a couple of exceptions to this state of affairs.

The first and biggest exception is the micro-level registers available to Danish researchers via Statistics Denmark and the Danish Health Data Authority. The scope of these data, and above all else the ability to link different registers, is internationally rare. The unique data

source is based on two conditions. First, that the public sector in Denmark records massive amounts of information on Danish citizens, from income and economic assets, over grades through all levels of education, to health status and utilization. This is by itself distinctive from many other places. The data is recorded in stand-alone registers to ensure, e.g., that tax authorities do not obtain information about a citizen's health status or family situation. Social policy researchers can, however, be allowed to link anonymized versions of the data. This is possible due to the second condition, the personal identification number, which is used in all registers. This key allows linking data from different registers to study phenomena that otherwise would be impossible to gauge. Access to the register data, and not least linked data across registers, is highly restricted even for senior researchers at universities and other vested research institutions located in Denmark. Access granted is only for the subset of variables necessary for the specific research project. The new General Data Protection Regulation has made access more demanding to obtain, but it has always been very tight. It is possible to link register data with surveys. These surveys are fielded by Statistics Denmark, and Statistics Denmark also link to the relevant registers.

Examples of the analytical value of these data are legion and have been published in leading international journals and are frequently employed by both the Ministry of Finance and the Economic Council as well. The register data available, moreover, allows for important cross-disciplinary research, expanding the boundary of social policy research significantly. In a recent project at Aarhus University a research team, for instance, asks what the effect of being confronted with different unemployment rules is on mental health in later life. Others have investigated the effect of childbirth on earnings discrepancies between genders, and others again the effect of debt release on well-being. Such seemingly simple questions are virtually impossible to explore in a systematic way without register data that tracks individual citizens over time in highly sensitive domains such as their job market situation and health status.

Another important exception is the Danish National Archive's collection of surveys with anonymized data. Here a number of rich surveys, often gathered over several survey waves and covering many years, are freely available for social policy researchers and students. Among these are the National Election Survey (covering 1971-2019), the Longitudinal Survey of Youth (covering 1968-2010), and the Perception of Safety Survey (covering 2004-2013). Publicly sponsored data must by law be submitted to the Danish National Archive, while privately sponsored data can be submitted to the archive for storage. Depending on an assessment of the public value by the researchers of the archive, data is then made publicly available in easy-to-use formats at the webpage of the Danish National Archive.

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### Information on the Author

**Carsten Jensen (Dr. scient. pol, PhD)** is Professor at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. He has published extensively on issues related to social policy and currently function as director of the Platform for Inequality Research at Aarhus University (PIREAU). He has previously served as Director of Studies at Aarhus University

The author bears full responsibility for the contents of the publication.

### Imprint

**DIFIS** – German Institute for Interdisciplinary Social Policy Research

Director: Prof. Dr. Ute Klammer (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Executive Director: Prof. Dr. Frank Nullmeier (University of Bremen)

Duisburg Office: Institute for Work, Skills and Training (IAQ), Forsthausweg 2,  
47057 Duisburg

Bremen Office: SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy,  
Mary-Somerville-Straße 5, 28359 Bremen

Homepage: [www.difis.org](http://www.difis.org), Twitter: difis\_org

**Date and place of publication:** January 2023, Duisburg/Bremen

**Content oversight:** Dr. Achim Schmid, Dr. Anna Hokema

**Oversight of the publication series:** Dr. Miruna Bacali