

SPOTLIGHT REPORT

DENMARK'S CHALLENGES
IN ACHIEVING THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

ENGLISH SUMMARY

JUNE 2019



2019 is in many ways a crucial year for Denmark, for Europe and for the world.

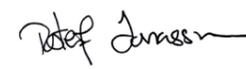
In Denmark, general elections to the Danish parliament were held in June, and Danes also voted in European Union elections to the European Parliament in May. The appointment of a new European Commission will follow in the fall of 2019. A recurring election issue is the activism against climate change, where thousands of courageous school students have taken to the streets, to protest against the lack of political will to act. Other essential agenda items are inequality, tax havens and migration.

The United Nations (UN) is going through a profound reform process and three major global agreements, that were negotiated and adopted in the UN in 2015, are up for critical review in 2019. These are: the 2030-Agenda for Sustainable Development with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Paris Agreement negotiated at COP 21; and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

One of the most important issues that has been a recurring trend in 2019 – both nationally and globally – is the concept of sustainable development. Denmark, like most of the world, has agreed to strive to achieve the SDGs. By signing the Paris Agreement, we have also agreed to ensure that Denmark lives up to clear objectives of reducing the risks and effects of climate change before 2030. In other words, Denmark has a responsibility to deliver actions and results that reduce climate change risks and impacts and move towards sustainable development.



Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen
Chair, Global Focus



Torleif Jonasson
Chair, The Danish 92-Group

On this background it is extremely important that the Danish people, and not the least Danish politicians, consider how Denmark must improve. Denmark has welfare, wind power and a high level of knowledge; but there are still many crucial areas where Denmark has a long way to go, to achieve the SDGs and the Paris Agreement commitments. Besides, there are areas of Denmark's international engagement, where more can be done to create a sustainable development that benefits all populations in all countries, so that no one is left behind.

The two civil society networks, Global Focus and the Danish 92-Group, have produced this SPOTLIGHT report to shed light on the challenges we face in Denmark and in Denmark's international engagement. The report also offers concrete recommendations for political solutions that could resolve the challenges. The report is a snapshot of the current challenges to achieve the SDGs and is designed to be an inspiration for the coming government and members of the Danish Parliament. Many of the recommended actions are relatively easy to implement, but the larger systemic challenges require bold and ambitious choices and solutions.

We hope that this report will inspire Danish politicians to make both the easy and tough choices that are necessary to bring Denmark and the rest of the world closer to the main objective – a sustainable world where human development takes place within the limits of the planet's scarce resources.

Enjoy the report!

This SPOTLIGHT report was developed and produced by two Danish non-profit network organizations, Global Focus and the Danish 92-Group together with their member organizations, in the Spring of 2019.

In the report, the organizations assess the implementation of the 2030-Agenda in Denmark and the relation between Denmark and other countries. The aim of the report is to highlight the challenges that Denmark faces in order to fully achieve the SDGs and at the same time yield a maximum contribution on a global scale. However, some goals and targets are not assessed, as Global Focus' and 92-Group's member organizations have chosen to focus on areas and challenges within their specific areas of expertise. This ensures the integrity and professional content of the report. In connection with the information about each challenge, the report also proposes recommendations for political actions.

The secretariats of the two networks have worked together to coordinate the production of the report and have written the general sections. Member organizations of the two networks have analyzed and assessed the challenges under the specific SDGs and global goal targets and formulated the recommendations for political action. The contributing member organizations have also drawn on expert knowledge from actors who are not members of Global Focus or the 92-Group.

The report was sent to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a hearing process from April 12th to April 25th, 2019. No comments or suggestions were made.

The report has been developed for political decision-makers – independently from political party color or ideology – to get a general view of the challenges and recommended actions. The content of the report covers a broad range of subjects and is hence also useful for anyone with a general interest in the 2030-Agenda and Denmark's domestic and international engagement.

It is often said that Denmark is in a leading position on SDG implementation, compared to other countries. However, this report does not compare Denmark's achievements to that of other countries. Instead, the intention is to highlight the challenges that Denmark faces domestically and in contributing to the international achievements – not on Denmark's performance relatively to other countries.

The UN monitors the level of achievement of the SDGs at the global level on an ongoing basis. Each year in July, the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), is convened to take status. The SDGs are reviewed through a rotation principle, where a group of goals are selected for review each year. In 2019, the goals in focus at the HLPF are: SDG 4 (education), SDG 8 (economic growth and decent jobs), SDG 10 (inequalities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships). For this

reason, these six goals have been in focus in the report and has been giving more space to highlight challenges and bring forward political recommendations. The remaining eleven SDGs have to some extent been based on a revision of the political recommendations found in the two NGO-networks' report from 2018, "Shadow-report on Denmark's Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals".

This paper is a shortened version of the SPOTLIGHT report in Danish. In the following, we present general recommendations to political action from the two networks. At the end of the document, an overview shows how the contributing Danish NGO's assess the achievement of the SDGs within each goal.

CHALLENGES

The authors of the report have focused the challenges that are most relevant to achieving the SDGs in and for Denmark. The assessment is made by the respective authors on national and international levels:

- Assessment of challenges in achieving the SDGs in Denmark
- Assessment of challenges with delivering a positive Danish contribution to achieving the SDGs at global level

The assessment is based on three parameters:

1. "Political strategy adopted":
Is there a political plan, a strategy or a policy for the relevant goal or target, which can contribute to solving the challenge?
2. "Strategy updated after 2015":
Has this political plan, strategy, or policy been updated since the 2030-Agenda was adopted in September 2015?
3. "The specific SDG can be achieved in 2030 with the current effort":
With the current political plan, strategy, or policy and implementation, will Denmark be able to solve the challenges and realize a sustainable development in accordance with the SDGs?

See overview of the assessment of challenges on page 7.

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Global Focus and the Danish 92-Group follow and engage in political development in Denmark, in Europe, and at the global level. Together with our member organizations, we possess a comprehensive knowledge about a wide range of different areas – a knowledge that is used in our work for a world that is developing sustainable social, economic, environmental and climate-related conditions and relations.

A sustainable development for people and nature on land, in the air and below water, the essence of the 2030-Agenda, requires a serious and ambitious effort from all sides – also from the Danish political system. A number of recommendations for political action focus on the related areas, where we believe Denmark has challenges – both within Denmark's borders and in Denmark's international engagement.

We encourage the incumbent government at any time to live up to its responsibility for implementing the 2030-Agenda for Sustainable Development, both domestically and internationally.

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH SHOULD BE A BASIC PRINCIPLE IN DANISH POLITICS

One of the main challenges for the SDGs is that a nuanced view of the relationship between growth and sustainability is lacking, more precisely between economic growth – measured by GDP – and the overall impact on our environment and society. If the current global, material growth level is maintained, pressure on the planet's fossil and renewable resources will increase. Life-supporting ecosystems will increasingly become overloaded, and global inequality will become greater. Unfortunately, many international organizations, including the UN, are still counting on a continued GDP growth, in rich and poor countries as well.

Social and environmental sustainability must be promoted through economic and other types of regulation and by decoupling growth and environmental issues. We recommend that the debate about growth and sustainability takes the planet's boundaries as well as the unequal distribution of goods in the world into consideration. It is necessary that the focus of political-economic activity is changed, allowing promotion of human well-being and reduced environmental strain to become the overarching principle, instead of the one-sided focus on continued economic growth.

MAKE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLITICAL PROGRAM AND INTERGRATE DENMARK'S INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Denmark has a long tradition of engaging in the world surrounding us – whether it concerns developments in countries close to us or far away. Through Denmark's accession to the 2030-Agenda and the Paris Agreement in 2015,

Denmark committed itself to engage in sustainability in all its dimensions. Given that the 2030-Agenda is a transformative agenda, Denmark must take political actions tomorrow that are different from those of yesterday. These commitments entail that Danish politicians and the Danish government must make these commitments a starting point for a holistic and cross-cutting approach including all policy areas. The actions within one area have implications for other areas, and these implications must be assessed in advance to ensure that the actions are sustainable.

We recommend that the Danish government accepts its responsibility and makes the SDGs a leading principle in the government program, ensuring that policies in one area cohere with policies and their positive or negative implications in other areas. At the same time, we recommend that Denmark integrates its international engagement – into diplomatic relations and into foreign-, trade-, industrial-, security- and development policies.

THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD HAVE THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Since the adoption of the 2030-Agenda in 2015, several ministers have had the main responsibility for Denmark's implementation of the agenda and the attainment of the SDGs. The responsibility was first placed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later divided between the Ministry of Finance for national attainment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for international contributions. In several European countries, and in the rest of the world, the responsibility for achieving the SDGs is often the responsibility of the prime minister, president, or head of state, because it has been recognized that sustainable development creates complex relationships among different policy areas. The responsibility to achieve the SDGs must therefore rest with the authority that has the overarching and general responsibility on the national level.

We believe that the time has come to relocate the responsibility for Denmark's attainment of the SDGs to the Prime Minister's office and include Denmark's international impact.

ADOPT A DANISH CLIMATE LAW NOW!

Climate change is no longer a question whether to act or not, but about sufficient political action while there is still time. The world's leading climate experts all agree: the next 5-10 years are crucial if we are to prevent the worst consequences for people and nature.

In Denmark we have a special responsibility to take care of the climate and our planet, since we are one of the countries with the highest carbon footprint per capita. Denmark hence needs a new climate law, which sets a clear framework for Danish

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climate action. The law must commit Denmark to set new national climate goals in accordance with the Paris Agreement in the short-, middle- and long terms. Setting these goals must be based on a greenhouse gas (GHG) emission budget, which shows the maximum amount for total GHG emissions up to 2050. The climate law must state that the reduction of GHG emissions is a cross-cutting consideration that must be part of all relevant policies and be a central goal for the entire society.

Denmark must contribute to the global climate action through ambitious efforts, both domestically and internationally. It must be a driving force in developing European and international climate policies which support the Paris Agreement and the goal to limit the increase in global temperature to 1.5 °C.

The climate law must be formulated so it ensures that Denmark achieves the targets in the Paris Agreement. In addition, the climate law must:

1. Establish five-year targets minimum for the next 15 years
2. Integrate climate considerations into all other policies
3. Strengthen the Danish Council on Climate Change and secure its independence
4. Focus on the development of green solutions
5. Ensure that Denmark is a driving force in international climate politics

USE SCREENING MECHANISMS TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL DECISIONS CONCERNING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A helpful and concrete element in the former government's action plan for SDGs, from March 2017, was the idea that a 'screening mechanism' would be put in place to evaluate the impact of all political proposals on the achievement of the SDGs. The elaboration of this screening mechanism has since been delayed several times. During a hearing in the Parliament's Finance Committee, in February 2019, the Minister of Finance, Kristian Jensen, stated that the delayed was due to the complexity of the interdependence between the different SDGs.¹ We agree and acknowledge that there is a high level of complexity, but it should not hinder the development and testing of an impact assessment, such as for example in Holland.² Therefore, we recommend that the tool is developed and that the impact assessment of all political proposals is initiated as soon as possible.

ESTABLISH A THOROUGH AND EXTERNAL MONITORING OF DENMARK'S PROGRESS AND FOLLOW IT UP INTERNATIONALLY

In Denmark, the former government (November 2016 - June 2019) has set up its own national objectives and indicators for how Denmark contributes to the SDGs. It also monitored its own achievement based on these indicators in a progress report, in April 2018.

There is no immediate correlation between these national objectives and indicators and the 17 SDGs or their 169 targets, or between the associated indicators. In addition, it is reprehensible that the government both determines the objectives and measures its own success in achieving these objectives.

Because the sustainable development agenda is so important, there is a need for external stakeholders to monitor Denmark's progress, so the monitoring is as objective and impartial as possible. This should preferably involve all relevant stakeholders in the Danish society. We recommend that an external stakeholder or institution annually publishes a progress report and, based on the report, facilitates annual open parliamentary hearings, with the participation of the accountable ministers and relevant stakeholders.

We also recommend that participation in the UN's annual forum for follow-up and review of the 2030-Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), is made a priority of all Danish governments, as well as the Danish Parliament's Finance Committee's working group on the SDGs and the "All-party coalition on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals" in the Danish Parliament. We recommend that the relevant ministers and spokespersons participate and are actively engaged in the HLPF in July 2019, especially those in charge of ministers related to the six goals that will be reviewed in depth: SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (inequalities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

THE PRINCIPLE OF "LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND" MUST BE IN FOCUS – BOTH NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

The principle of "leave no one behind" is an essential part of the 2030-Agenda. Following the principle entails that all Member States pledge to ensure that no one will be left behind, and that the achievement of the SDGs starts with the poorest and most marginalized. This important principle demands respect for and compliance with human rights. To guarantee sustainable development for all, it is necessary that Denmark – together with other countries – ensures that the principle is a central part of Denmark's international policies: foreign-, trade-, industrial-, security- and development policies. It is important that Denmark acknowledges this principle and implements the necessary changes to ensure that "leave no one behind" is reflected in national policies.

RESPECT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY'S CIVIC SPACE GLOBALLY

Without an active and vibrant civil society, we will not achieve the SDGs. The work of NGO's, human rights defenders, journalists, climate activists, and others is

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essential, if we want sustainable change for everyone all over the world. Unfortunately, only 4 percent of the world's population live in countries, where freedom of association, assembly, and expression are respected, and without being subjected to arbitrary imprisonment, torture, murder and persecution.³ The civic space of civil society is under enormous threat – not only far from Denmark's borders, but also nearby in countries such as Poland and Hungary.

Civil society is often excluded when it comes to international negotiations or procedures. International relations are often far too disconnected from civil society. This is apparent in UN's own review of the SDGs, which are not consistently reviewed in relation to civil society's civic space, and where it is not clearly underlined that the SDGs cannot be achieved without an open civic space.

Denmark must send a clear message through official statements, declarations, and decisions, to reconfirm the legitimate role of civil society and must, at the same time, engage directly with civil society.

LEAD THE WAY IN MOBILIZING PUBLIC FINANCE FOR PUBLIC GOODS

Financing the SDGs is a major challenge. The latest report from 60 multilateral organizations⁴ stress the urgent need to reform the international financial system, with focus on 1) more long-term investments in sustainable solutions, 2) new mechanisms to renegotiate debt, in order to halt the debt crisis that is currently threatening development in more than 30 countries, 3) strengthen tax systems and international cooperation against tax evasion, so enabling developing countries to mobilize public investments in public goods. Eradicating extreme inequality is crucial, and the allocation of resources and political influence must be addressed in order to establish better conditions for a sustainable development towards 2030.

The world's 59 poorest countries need 300-400 billion US dollars each year to achieve the SDGs. Even with higher growth rates and increased tax revenues, these countries will not be able to finance the SDGs on their own. It is encouraging that the private sector is willing to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, but technical solutions to systemic challenges are rare, and profitable projects in the sectors that are most important for the poorest countries are not frequently seen. Moreover, only seven percent of global private-public partnerships, funded with development aid, actually benefit the world's poorest countries.⁵ The consequence is, that the achievement of the SDG 1, eradicating poverty, will not be attained, with important consequences for the most marginalized groups.

On this background, we recommend that Denmark leads the way in international efforts to mobilize public finance for public goods and contributes to the creation of an improved international financial system, which for example addresses

tax havens and tax evasion. More and better development aid, as well as mobilizing additional resources, is needed to achieve the SDGs. Global and national taxes on carbon emissions and on the world's largest fortunes, as well as the development aid, should be targeted at strengthening and developing tax collection systems in the poorest countries.

INCLUDE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE EU

In January 2019, the European Commission presented a reflection paper on EU's work with the SDGs by 2030.⁶ The European Union has, just like the Danish 2014-2019 government, chosen to focus on already ongoing initiatives and their relation to the SDGs. The SDGs are hence not presented as catalysts for a transformational agenda. Denmark should advocate for the European Union to take the responsibility for an ambitious implementation of the SDGs through EU policies, programs, and institutions. The responsibility for this implementation should be placed with the future President of the European Commission, ensuring that the EU becomes a global frontrunner in achieving sustainable development. We recommend that Denmark works proactively to ensure that the SDGs are an integrated part of the newly elected European Commission's working priorities.

In its 2030-strategy, the European Semester should be extended to include environmental and social dimensions, in order to achieve the SDGs'. Today, the European Semester only guides the economy on a macroeconomic level, without considering climate or sustainability. It is equally essential that the European Union's multi-annual financial framework for 2021-2027 (MFF) incorporates the concept of three bottom lines (economic, social and environmental), if we are to successfully achieve the SDGs by 2030. We therefore recommend that the Danish government engages in negotiations on the EU's long-term budget and works actively to incorporate the three bottom lines into the budget.

SOURCES

1 <https://www.ft.dk/aktuelt/webtv/video/20181/fiu/td.1546171.aspx?from=19-02-2019&to=19-02-2019&selectedMeetingType=Udvalg&committee=FIU&as=1#player>

2 <https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/documents/publications/2019/02/27/iak-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>

3 <https://monitor.civicus.org/PeoplePowerUnderAttack2018/>

4 UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development, Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2019. <https://developmentfinance.un.org/fsdr2019>

5 <https://www.unctf.org/bfids/executive-summary>

6 European Commission, REFLECTION PAPER TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE EUROPE BY 2030, January 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp_sustainable_europe_30-01_en_web.pdf

OVERVIEW: ASSESSMENT OF DENMARK'S WORK WITH THE SDGS

- 1 Political strategy adopted
- 2 Strategy updated after 2015
- 3 The specific SDG can be achieved in 2030 with the current effort

- ✓ Yes
- ✗ No
- Not rated



National achievement

International contribution

SDG	TARGETS IN FOCUS	National achievement			International contribution		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
1 No Poverty	1.1 • 1.3	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
2 Zero Hunger	2.3	—	—	—	✓	✗	✗
3 Good Health and Well-being	3.1 • 3.2 • 3.3 • 3.4	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
4 Quality Education	4.1	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
	4.2	—	—	—	✓	✗	✓
	4.3	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	4.4	✓	✓	✗	—	—	—
	4.5	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
	4.6	✗	✗	✗	—	—	—
	4.7	✗	✗	✗	—	—	—
	4.8	✓	✗	✗	—	—	—
5 Gender Equality	5.1 • 5.2 • 5.4 • 5.5 • 5.6	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
6 Clean Water and Sanitation	6.1 • 6.2 • 6.3 • 6.A	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
7 Affordable and Clean Energy	7.1 • 7.2 • 7.3	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	8.3	—	—	—	✓	✓	✗
	8.5	✓	✓	✗	—	—	—
	8.6	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	8.7	—	—	—	✓	✓	✗
	8.8	—	—	—	✓	✓	✗
	10 Reducing Inequality	10.1	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	10.2	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
	10.3	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	10.4	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	10.5 • 10.6	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	10.7	—	—	—	✗	✗	✗
11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	11.1 • 11.2 • 11.3 • 11.6	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
12 Responsible Consumption and Production	12.2 • 12.4 • 12.7	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
13 Climate Action	13.2	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	13.A	—	—	—	✗	✗	✗
14 Life Below Water	14.1 • 14.2 • 14.4 • 14.7	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
15 Life On Land	15.1 • 15.2 • 15.5 • 15.9	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	16.1	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
	16.3	—	—	—	✓	✗	✗
	16.7	—	—	—	✓	✓	✗
	16.10	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
	16.8	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
17 Partnerships for the Goals	17.1 • 17.14	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	17.3	—	—	—	✓	✓	✗
	17.17	—	—	—	✓	✓	✗

AUTHORS



EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS

