



Industrial relations and social dialogue  
**Denmark: Working life in the  
COVID-19 pandemic 2021**

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# Introduction

In Denmark, the start of 2021 was characterised by very high numbers of infections and hospitalisations. The country was in a second lockdown with restrictions that included the closing of malls, gyms, restaurants etc. and most employees, for whom it was possible, were working from home. The winter lockdown, which initially would end on 3 January was extended and Denmark started to open back up in March. On 8 February the first school kids returned to school, which included the kids in grades 0-4. A gradual reopening of schools and universities continued until a full reopening of elementary schools was implemented from 6 May and from 21 May and onwards, all universities were open with full capacity.

An almost complete reopening of Denmark was realised on 18 May with only nightclubs remaining closed. All restrictions were lifted, and a full reopening of Denmark was achieved on 10 September. On this day, COVID-19 was no longer deemed a socially critical disease. This decision was reversed in November and some restrictions were again implemented, such as earlier closing hours for bars and putting a cap on number of people allowed into shops and supermarkets (Tænketanken Europa, 2021).

Wearing facemasks was mandatory before summer and during the fall, when COVID-19 again was deemed a socially critical disease. It has likewise been mandatory to show a corona passport to enter restaurants, concerts, bars and schools. This law was also lifted during summer but implemented again in autumn. Corona passport can be achieved by getting a vaccine, having immunity, or getting tested (Tænketanken Europa, 2021).

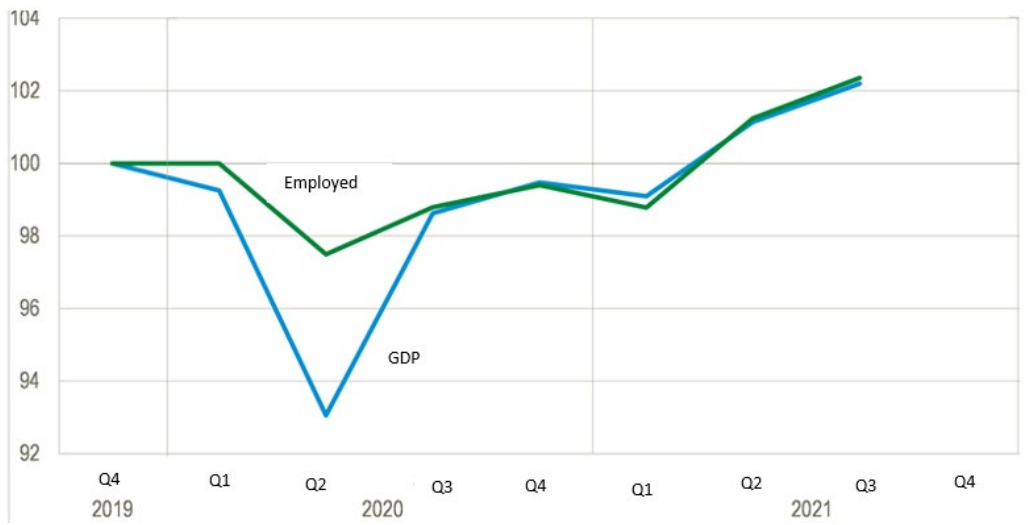
The vaccination programme began on 27 December 2020. Older and/or exposed citizens were the first to be offered the vaccine, which was then offered to the rest of the population, starting with the older age groups. In autumn 2021 a third booster jab of the vaccine became available to elder and exposed citizens and in December it was further offered to all citizens over the age of 18 (Danish Health Authority, 2021). As of 20 January 2022 there are over 4,7 million citizens (81%) that are fully vaccinated (minimum two vaccines) and over 3,4 million (62%) have also received a third vaccine (Coronasmitte.dk, 2022).<sup>1</sup>

As is evident from figure 1 below, the GDP dropped tremendously in 2020, but has since the initial hit been increasing and is now higher than before the pandemic. The same is evident for the number of employed people in Denmark (Statistics Denmark, 2021a). In November 2021 there were 80,600 unemployed people in Denmark, which corresponded to 2,8% of the Danish labour force at the time. This is the lowest rate since 2008 (Statistics Denmark, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage shares are calculated from the overall Danish population number from start 2022, which is available at Statistics Denmark: <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/befolkning/befolkningstal>.

**Figure 1: BNP and employed people (seasonally adjusted)**



Source: Statistics Denmark (2021a)

## Political context

Since the last general election in 2019, the Social Democrats have formed a one-party Government supported by a centre-left coalition. Throughout 2021 the government and the various measures taken and implemented, have generally been backed either by the entire parliament or a vast majority of the parliament.

COVID-19 has been on top of the agenda in Denmark, especially with a focus on the roll-out of the vaccines. However, there have also been important political discussions relating to climate policies, immigration, and the working environment and terms of healthcare professionals. The latter was prompted by the amount of work and pressure that healthcare professionals have been under during the last couple of years.

In 2021, the election for municipalities and regions occurred with a very high voting percentage across the country, compared to the previous elections. The outcomes of the elections were primarily characterized by the Social Democrats going down in votes, which could be due to the conflict relating to the terms of the healthcare professionals. In the Northern Region of Denmark, the decline was primarily a result of the action taken by the government in the spring of 2021 that demanded all minks in the region put down in order to prevent a new COVID variant from spreading.

The elections for regions and municipalities have not had a major impact on the handling of COVID, since most COVID-19 related measures have been driven by the government. However, more local measures, such as having a vaccination centre in certain municipalities might have functioned as election promises.

Going into 2022 the political situation is stable, which has also been the case in Denmark throughout the pandemic.

# Governments and social partners response to cushion the effects

The year 2021 in Denmark started with a high infection rate and restrictions, of which many were prolonged into late spring. The wage compensation scheme<sup>i</sup> was extended several times to continuously help both employees and companies during the difficult period. In the beginning of 2021, the Danish Government earmarked DKK 55 billion (€7.4 billion) to a green reboot of Danish economy post-pandemic.<sup>ii</sup>

In spring 2021 many settlements were reached in the public sector as per usual without any influence from the pandemic (Hansen and Mailand, 2021). Following the winter/spring period with large closures and hospitalised patients, Denmark faced a controlled and gradual reopening of society and an expectation of flock immunity provided by extensive vaccination. The efforts were aimed at getting the society back and running and to get more people into the labour force. Aarhus municipality brought forward several initiatives for unemployed academics.<sup>iii</sup> A national political agreement<sup>iv</sup> allocated DKK 159 million (€21.5 million) to temporary initiatives towards getting long-term unemployed to return to the labour market. An agreement on increased unemployment benefit rate<sup>v</sup> was extended to all of 2022, with the aim of getting a more skilled labour force. The government launched a summer business package for hard-hit sectors.<sup>vi</sup> In October the only non-COVID related tripartite agreement in 2021 was reached. The agreement aims at providing more work force to companies in the short run, by introducing initiatives aimed at unemployed and companies, as well as assistance in recruiting European labour (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021a). In October, the government also released the framework DK2025,<sup>vii</sup> aiming to ensure a green, fair, and responsible recovery of the Danish economy post COVID-19.

In the Agreement on the plan for the reopening released in the spring (Statsministeriet, 2021), the parties agreed to set up a special epidemic committee of experts (Epidemikommissionen) to provide input to the long-term strategy for dealing with the effects of the pandemic. The committee was established in May and published an extensive report in September in which they assessed that it was overwhelmingly likely that national shutdowns, intrusive restrictions, and a large extent of serious disease outbreaks could be eliminated. However, a disclaimer was put stating that it depends on whether new worrying virus variants arise and spread in Denmark, which will change the preconditions for the current epidemic control (Finansministeriet, 2021). This is exactly what happened in winter 2021.

Over the autumn and winter, there was a flare-up of the COVID-19 epidemic in connection with the change of season together with the relatively few restrictions on societal life, as well as the introduction of the new more contagious omicron variant. In early October there were around 400 new cases of COVID infection and in the end of December the number had reached more than 20.000 (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2021) and with this, more measures were put into motion again. Throughout November and December, the government reintroduced many former measures related to the pandemic in tandem with introducing several new restrictions on society. These joint efforts were aimed at keeping the society open and at the same time reducing the pressure on the health care system as much as possible. Measures reinstated by the government include, among others: compensation for self-employed,<sup>viii</sup> parental benefits for home-sent children,<sup>ix</sup> sickness benefits for

infected/quarantined employees,<sup>x</sup> employer's reimbursement for sickness benefits,<sup>xi</sup> sickness benefits to self-employed,<sup>xi</sup> **Error! Bookmark not defined.** support scheme for artists,<sup>xii</sup> compensation for corporate fixed expenses,<sup>xiii</sup> compensation for hard hit sectors,<sup>xiv</sup> and compensation for larger cancelled events.<sup>xv</sup>

The social partners and government settled a tripartite agreement, which later became law<sup>xvi</sup> that gives employers the opportunity to require either corona passports or self-testing of employees. Further, the parties also reintroduced the wage compensation scheme<sup>i</sup> and job-sharing scheme.<sup>xvii</sup> The wage compensation has since its introduction in March 2020 been adjusted and extended no less than 10 times amounting up to over 100,000 applications and almost DKK 20 billion (€2.69 billion) in compensation pay outs (Erhvervsstyrelsen, 2022). The Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH) states that the scheme has proven to be both flexible and long-term sustainable and has saved many jobs and created great security for employers and employees. They further state that the social partners contribute effectively to responsible solutions for the entire Danish society (FH, 2021a).

All children started back in school on 5 January 2022 and the infection numbers are continuously increasing. There is foresight to several months with COVID in the Danish society, however, as omicron is less severe, and many people are vaccinated the effects are not as far reaching and a full lockdown of society has not been necessary despite the high numbers. This means that the main aim of avoiding lockdowns has been successful. Currently, the government has launched a special Winter Package<sup>xviii</sup> allocation of DKK 1 billion (€134.5 million) to support the challenged hospital sector. The social partners are to distribute the allocation between the different areas in the sector. In Denmark, this is the first time that such a big allocation of money will be transferred from the political system to the public bargaining system.

<sup>i</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Tripartite agreement on wage compensation in the private sector](#), case DK-2020-11/633 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>ii</sup> Eurofound (2021), [Green Reboot of the Danish Economy](#), case DK-2021-1/2046 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>iii</sup> Eurofound (2021), [Aarhus municipality establishes new initiatives with the goal of alleviating unemployment among young academics](#), case DK-2021-22/2042 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>iv</sup> Eurofound (2021), [Agreement on measures targeted at the long-term unemployed](#), case DK-2021-22/1624 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>v</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Increased unemployment benefit rate granted during education](#), case DK-2020-31/956 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>vi</sup> Eurofound (2021), [Summer business package to boost economy and holiday activities](#), case DK-2021-23/1943 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>vii</sup> Eurofound (2021), [DK2025 – Framework for the future fiscal policy in Denmark](#), case DK-2020-31/2044 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>viii</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Temporary compensation scheme for self-employed](#), case DK-2020-11/624 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>ix</sup> Eurofound (2021), [Assistance for families with children at home during COVID-19](#), case DK-2020-40/1704 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>x</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Special Act on sickness benefits and flexible distribution of work](#), case DK-2020-9/787 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>xi</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Expanded entitlement for employer for reimbursement and for self-employed for sickness benefit](#), case DK-2020-11/625 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>xii</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Support scheme for artists with different types of income](#), case DK-2020-11/707 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>xiii</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Compensation for corporate fixed expenses](#), case DK-2020-11/600 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.



<sup>xiv</sup> Eurofound (2020), COVID-19. [Better conditions for particularly hard hit parts of Danish business, sports and cultural life](#), case DK-2020-35/1596 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

<sup>xv</sup> Eurofound (2021), [Compensation scheme for cancelled larger arrangements and events](#), case DK-2020-12/1792 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

<sup>xvi</sup> Eurofound (2021) [Tripartite agreement and Act allowing companies to require corona](#), DK-2021-46/2133 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

<sup>xvii</sup> Eurofound (2020), [Jobsharing made more flexible](#), case DK-2020-11/305 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

<sup>xviii</sup> Eurofound (2021), [COVID-19 winter package for hospitals](#), case DK-2021-50/2128 (measures in Denmark), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

## Adapting to the pandemic and the return to work: Policies and debates

### New occupational health and safety rules

In Denmark there has not been any national legislation dictating the health and safety rules at the workplace to which companies must accommodate. However, extensive use of telework in both public and private workplaces is encouraged, as well as it is recommended that meetings and seminars, etc. be held virtually (Arbejdsliv, 2021). Private companies as well as private cultural institutions and associations are allowed to have stricter demands than the law prescribes - for example on corona passports and the use of facemasks. Rather than national legislation dictating the laws that the companies must comply with, the responsibility is put on the individual company. Although there are general guidelines and recommendations in place, it is the employer who is responsible for preventing and managing the risk of infection with COVID-19 in the workplace.

The Government, the Trade Union Confederation (FH) and the Danish Employers' Association (DA) entered into a tripartite agreement on the 12 November 2021. The agreement gives private and public employers the opportunity to demand corona passports from employees when COVID-19 is categorized as a socially critical disease (HK, 2021). As of the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2021, the government adopted the 'Act on employers' allowing them to impose the presentation of corona passports and tests for COVID-19 on employees (Folketinget, 2021). Across all sectors, both private and public, employers may require employees to present a corona passport. Employers may also require employees to be tested for corona and state the result of the test. However, they are only allowed to require a test if it is objectively justified to limit the spread of infection with COVID-19, or in significant operational considerations at the company (Coronasmitte.dk, 2021; FOA 2021). Getting tested for COVID-19 is free for everyone in Denmark, however if employers require testing of their employees on the premises, they have to cover the cost of said test. The social partners are supportive of the agreement, as it is a mean to monitor and prevent COVID-19 from spreading, however, they emphasize that it is important for the different workplaces to be flexible (HK, 2021).

If an employee does not comply with the employer's requirement to get tested, the employee may be subject to employment sanctions (e.g., reprimand, warning, dismissal, or expulsion). This is, however, only if the employee has been informed in writing by the employer that they can be subject to such sanctions if they do not comply with the requirements (IDA, 2021).

As of 26 of November 2021, it was made mandatory for all employees working for the government and the regions, to present corona passports. This implies that the employees need to have been

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Disclaimer: This working paper has not been subject to the full Eurofound evaluation, editorial and publication process.

either vaccinated or have a negative COVID-19 test. At the individual workplaces, it is the employer's task to inform the employees about the new requirement for presentation of corona passports. It is also the employer's task to implement the requirement to present corona passports, considering the conditions in the workplace. The requirement is valid until COVID-19 is no longer categorized as a socially critical disease (Medarbejder- og Kompetencestyrelsen, 2021).

Although employers are allowed to demand corona passports from their employees, they are not allowed to require an employee to be vaccinated. There is no legal basis for employers to require the employee to be vaccinated to enter the workplace. This is because being vaccinated is not a prerequisite for the employee to be able to perform their job (DM, 2021a). There may be specific situations where the employer may rightly ask the employee to get vaccinated if the job tasks is impossible without a vaccination. This may be the case, for example, if the employee is to be sent to a country where the entry requires vaccination. However, the employer must investigate whether it is possible for the employee to be reassigned to another job. If there is no other job for the employee to be assigned to, the employer can make vaccination a requirement for the continued employment (DM, 2021a).

As the individual workplaces to a large degree dictate their own measures related to COVID-19 health and safety, it is very different to what extent the companies choose to implement the measures. Novo Nordisk, for instance, required their 17,000 employees to show corona passports when they were supposed to take part in bigger meetings and arrangements or if they wanted to use the gym facilities at the company premises (Fagbladet 3F, 2021).

There are currently no court rulings concerning vaccination status or testing and access to the workplace.

## New working arrangement policies

Telework and hybrid work have been prevalent in Denmark for a long time. The legislation and rules regarding the ruleset of telework and hybrid work was first implemented in 2003 and has lastly been updated in 2014. The legislation has thus not been changed because of COVID-19 (Arbejdstilsynet, 2014).

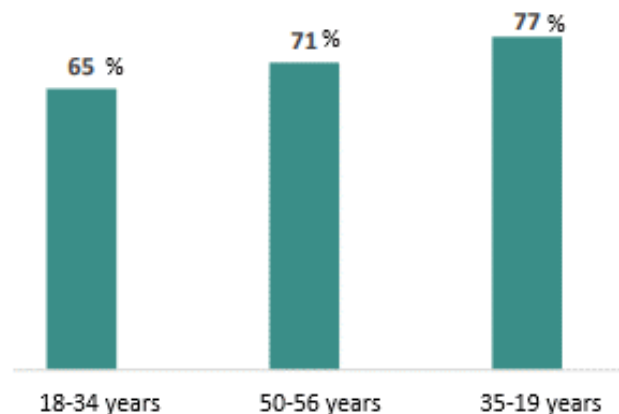
The Danish labour market is highly regulated, also when it comes to work environment, equipment etc. Generally, the entire work environment legislation and all rules applicable in this area also applies when the work takes place at the home of the employee. This is with some few exceptions. If telework is performed less than one day a week on average from home, the rules do not apply and will not affect the requirements and demand for proper equipment at home. If telework is performed more than one day per week on average, the employer needs to ensure that rules are complied with (Arbejdstilsynet, undated). It is the employer's job to make sure everything is safe and sufficient for the employee to perform their job.

According to the legislation that has been present for several years, it is possible for employee and employer to make individual agreements when it comes to telework. All employees in Denmark have a contract that is signed by them and their employer. In this contract working hours, salary, when the work is expected to be performed and workplace are stated. If the employee wants to telework or is expected to do so, this must be stated in the contract as well (Selvskabsadvokaterne, undated).

Much research has been done on telework during the pandemic, and some general findings are, that firstly, there is no evidence that telework increases or decreases stress or productivity. Therefore, the debate in Denmark is concerned with the future of telework and how it should be tackled in the future. There is no motivation for unions or employers to push more legislation or a stricter ruleset on the area. There is now a lot of flexibility for the companies and employees to find the best contract with the best arrangements when it comes to teleworking. Secondly, studies point to chances of working overtime during telework is lower than before COVID-19. A study conducted by the Rockwool Foundation compares the change of working overtime in 2017/18 to 2020, and it concludes that employees working at the workplace have a higher chance of working overtime than those teleworking (Rockwool Foundation, 2021).

There is no public debate or research in Denmark showing that working overtime or longer hours is particularly present when teleworking. A study performed by the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) show that some employees have a difficult time relaxing and decoupling from work, because their computer is always within reach. They find it difficult to take time off, especially if they did not finish something that day. This is not because employers expect them to work but because the separation of work and home is washed. The study is based on DI's business panel, which consist of 1,122 companies that represent 121,000 employees (DI, 2021). Thirdly, research conducted by the Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark (HK - the largest union in Denmark for salaried employees) and Dansk Magisterforening (DM - professional union in Denmark) show that many workers experience a better work/life balance when working from home. The experience having more time to spend with their families and/or hobbies (HK, 2020; DM, 2021b). Some groups do not have the possibility to work from home due to their profession e.g., nurses, most doctors, carpenters etc., but within the professions who have the possibility, most do agree that they enjoy working from home and want more workdays at home in the future. The older the people, the more they enjoy working from home (Videncenter for God Arbejdslyst, 2020). As seen in figure 3, 77% of the workers in the oldest age group have a desire to work when they work from home, whereas this is only the case for 65% of the workers in the youngest age group.

**Figure 3: Workers reporting a desire to work when working from home (%), by age group**



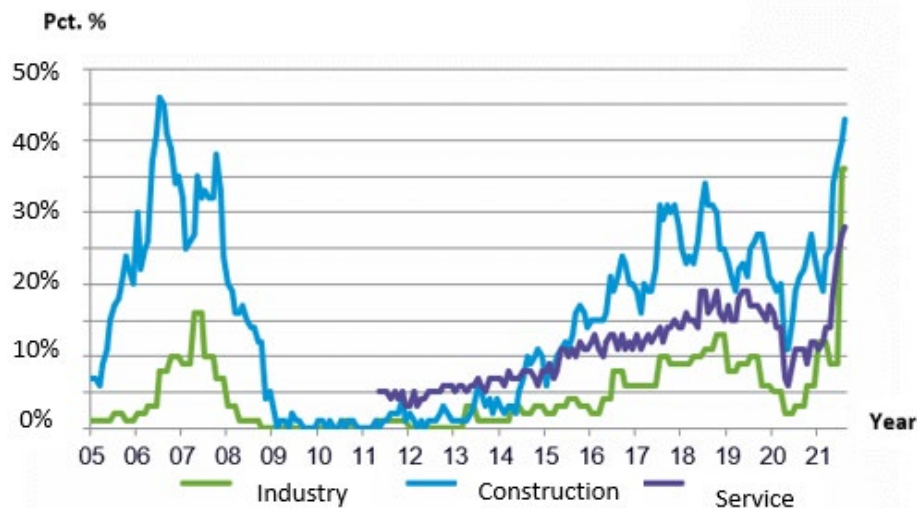
Source: Videncenter for God Arbejdslyst (2020)

Lastly, a study conducted by the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) shows that people with young kids at home find it more stressful to work from home, because they have care for the children at the same time as working (DI, 2021).

## Labour shortages

As shown in the introduction, the Danish GDP, and numbers of employed people are increasing and are now higher than before COVID-19. In Denmark, especially three sectors are hit by labour shortages. These are: industry, construction, and service (KL, 2021). These sectors have trouble attracting qualified workforce. They also report that the labour shortage is a limitation for productivity (as seen in figure 4). More than one in three industrial companies reported labour shortages in July 2021, this is a record number. More than one in four service companies reported shortages, which is also a record. In construction, the number in August 2021 was 43% (DA, 2021a).

**Figure 4: Companies reporting labour shortages as a limitation of productivity (%)**



Source: Local Government Denmark (KL, 2021)

The problems are severe for hotels, where 82% now report a shortage of skilled labour. Labour shortages are also high for restaurants, where 65% report a shortage of skilled labour. There are signs that labour shortages are now spreading to more industries. The biggest increase is seen in publishers, telecommunication, and IT, where the number of companies reporting labour shortages has increased from 21% to 32% in a one month period from August to September 2021. In addition, 61% of cleaning companies report labour shortages (DA, 2021a).

The increase in labour shortages must be seen in the context of the increase in employment in the wake of the reopening. Many companies have had to rehire at the same time, within a short period of time, which has made it more difficult to recruit new workers. This is especially true for hotels, restaurants, cleaning companies, etc., which were most affected by the restrictions (DA, 2021a).

Due to COVID-19, many jobs have been created for testing against COVID-19 and vaccination. Especially the first category does not command specialized skills and many young people have been employed here. Much of these young people would otherwise have worked at cafes or restaurants.

The construction industry has reported missing skilled labour for years now since business has been booming after the financial crisis in 2008 (Jensen, 2019). In general, the amount of people graduating or completing training within this field is decreasing.

As seen in the figure below, the number of people with vocational training has decreased over the last 10 years. Vocational training covers e.g., construction, transportation, commerce, and pedagogy.

**Figure 5: The population's highest education – Vocational training (age: 15-69)**



Source: Statistics Denmark (2019)

Some measures have been implemented and a tripartite agreement between the government, Local Government Denmark (association and interest group for all municipalities in Denmark) and all economic and employer unions (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021a). The main headings in the agreement are:

- Matching unemployed and companies: increased focus in the job centres and municipalities, who will have a greater focus on sector with urgent need for employees.
- Tightening up the rules on availability for unemployed: the unemployed will have to be available for the labour force and will have to document their job seeking process within 2 months instead of 3.
- Special efforts to get unemployed seniors into jobs: seniors should have better opportunities to return to the labour market and that companies should take advantages of their skills and knowledge at a higher degree. A special pool of DKK 7 million (€940,539) has been earmarked the initiative of getting seniors back into the labour force.
- Helping companies recruit European labour: the current regulations will be examined with the aim of making it easier to hire foreign labour within the EU. DKK 5 million (€671,817) in 2022 and 2023 will be invested in the national public employment service Workindenmark<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>2</sup> Workindenmark is the national public employment service for qualified international candidates looking for a job in Denmark, and Danish companies searching for foreign candidates. Workindenmark is part of the Danish Ministry of Employment and member of European Employment Service (EURES). See [www.workindenmark.dk](http://www.workindenmark.dk) for more information.

which helps international jobseekers and Danish employers find each other. The current labour force in Denmark is argued to not sufficiently live up to the current demand.

The agreement will be implemented 1 January 2022. Many of the initiatives in the agreement will span over several years, and the outcome and effects of the agreement is not yet known or visible (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021a).

In general, the agreement is well received, although some points of critique have been raised. The agreement will make it easier to hire European labour, however, not labour from outside of EU, which can potentially be critical. The critique is raised by the deputy director in Danish Confederation of Industry (DI) and Executive director in the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) (Arbejderen.dk, 2021)

## Wages and wage-setting

The pandemic has not had any effect on the wages and wage setting in Denmark. Wages are collectively negotiated at sectoral and company level. In the private sector the negotiations were settled in 2020 and in spring 2021 the public sector bargaining took place. In the public sector the collective bargaining concluded with a general wage increase on 5.02 % for all groups of employees and a special pool on 0.15 % directed at initiatives regarding equal pay, low pay, and recruitment. Some discussions and debates, however, have been linked to the pandemic - for example, there has been much focus on the frontline workers and their exposure to risks of infection, however, the main debate has concentrated around the non-pandemic topic of equal pay. The nurses went on a ten-week strike and as part of the legislative intervention by the parliament a “wage structure committee” (Lønstrukturkomitéen) was established by law to examine the wage structures throughout the public sector. In connection with their work a public hearing will be held as well as a published report no later than the end of 2022 (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021b). The next rounds of bargaining are in 2023 for the private sector and in 2024 for the public sector and the pandemic will thus not likely have any direct effects on future wages.

## Impacts on the social dialogue and collective bargaining

As in the first year of the pandemic, the social dialogue and collective bargaining have not been particularly affected in 2021. The public sector collective bargaining took place in spring 2021 and proceeded as usual. The main change in social dialogue is the large amount of settled tripartite agreements and the shorter time spent on each. From the first tripartite agreement in 1987 up until the pandemic there were concluded 17 tripartite agreements in all, which corresponds to an average of almost one agreement every two years. During the corona pandemic 21 tripartite agreements have been concluded, of which seven took place in year 2021. Nineteen of the agreements are linked to COVID-19 (FH, 2021b). In this way, social dialogue has increased as the parties have come together several times to solve the societal problems arising from the pandemic.

## Labour disputes in the context of the pandemic

Statistics Denmark (2021) will publish their numbers of working days lost from year 2021 around April 2022 and thus the numbers are not available yet. However, for 2020 their numbers are very close to numbers that DA (The Danish Confederation for Employers) reported from its own database of conflict statistics for their members (they cover around 30% of the Danish workforce) and their database can thus work as a temporary estimate. So far only the first three quarters of 2021 have been published by DA, which amount to 83 work stoppages and 4,351 lost working days. They state that this year's conflicts are equal to the pre-pandemic numbers and that wage is the most common issue (DA, 2021b). During 2021, no strikes or lockouts have happened because of the pandemic. The largest case in 2021 was the nurses' strike during the public sector collective negotiations on wage. The strike ended after 10 weeks with a legislative intervention by the Parliament (Hansen and Mailand, 2021). Another strike that has received some public attention is a lockout and strike during COVID lockdown in spring 2020 as part of collective negotiations in the private sector. During the strike, the company could not receive any wage compensation due to the state remaining neutral in the conflict. The company believed the strike to be illegal because of the crisis, however, the Labour Court concluded in 2021 that it was legal – the Danish labour market model and the right to conflict persist even in extreme crises (FH, 2021c).



## Commentary and outlook

The government and social partners have effectively cooperated in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on the labour market and society as a whole and the main aim of 2021 has been to avoid further national lockdowns and to get the population vaccinated. At the end of 2021, and going into 2022, all adults are offered a booster vaccine. The year of 2021 has been a year of recovery for both the economy and labour force. The GDP is currently higher than before the pandemic, which is also the case of the number of people employed in Denmark. The increase in employment must be seen in the wake of the reopening, which has also caused an increase in labour shortages, where the sectors of industry, construction and service are experiencing the largest labour shortages.

There have been two lockdowns during the year of 2021. The larger lockdown took place in the beginning of the year and ended in the late spring. Between the two lockdowns, COVID-19 changed status to not being a socially critical disease, and from September to November society reopened and the pandemic measures were de-activated. The second lockdown started in the end of the year with many reinstated restrictions and measures, however, the lockdown was not as severe as the first one, partly due to high vaccination numbers and partly because the less severe Omicron was the dominating variant.

Telework in both public and private sectors have been encouraged and thoroughly used throughout the pandemic and especially in the lockdown periods. The preventative measures and risk managing at the workplaces have been for the individual companies to decide rather than national legislation. Employers are not allowed to require their employees to be vaccinated and can only require a test if it is objectively justified to limit the spread of infection with COVID-19, or in significant operational considerations at the company.

In 2021 the close cooperation between the government and social partners has continued, and there has been a common front trying to secure the jobs of the individuals as well as supporting the businesses through the pandemic. On the short term, this focus entailed several extensions of the wage compensation scheme among other measures throughout 2021, and on the long term, the government has released a framework with the aim to ensure a green and fair recovery of the Danish economy post COVID-19. Thus, there is an agreed general agenda on how to move forward and return to normal.

There is no reason to believe that the cooperation between the government and social partners will change going into 2022. The public sector collective bargaining took place in spring 2021 and proceeded as per usual. Regarding the vaccine roll-out, which has been one of the main focuses in 2021, there has also been agreement amongst the government and social partners. There have not been any big issues or resistance regarding the governments and social partners' measures on the possibility to demand corona passports or self-testing. While it can be mandatory to present a corona passport, moving into 2022, there is no sign that the government, in one way or another will make it mandatory for any citizen to get the vaccine.

As of January 2022, the number of infected people is at its' highest and virus experts believe the coming spring to be the last hard battle of COVID-19 in Danish Society. In this upcoming period a lot of restrictions will continue, but it is believed that when summer of 2022 is reached, the numbers will decrease, and society will increasingly return to a more normal state.

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