



Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation
srwatsan@ohchr.org

April 24 2020

Answers on questionnaire

Question 1

“How is the concept of the minimum core obligations of the human rights to water and sanitation translated and applied in the water and sanitation sector in the country?”

It is the Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark’s assessment, that Denmark meets the core obligations of the human rights to water and sanitation. Denmark have no defiance when it comes to ensuring universal and equal access to safe and affordable drinking water. An assessment from 2018 found that this also applied for the marginalized groups in Denmark, whom at that time had access to safe and clean drinking water. A new assessment of the access to drinking water for marginalized groups will be conducted within the next year. Moreover, there are no challenges within the sanitation sector.

Denmark focus on ensuring sufficient amount of drinking water now and in the future

Denmark focus on the sustainability of drinking water and to secure protection of the groundwater, which represent the drinking water in Denmark. Denmark among others focus on the efforts to lower water leakage. This is, as an example, done through financial incentives for the water suppliers to minimize water leakage. Denmark also have a persistent focus on the safety and certainty of water supply and for the streamlining of the supply system which is done through the demand of quality management and the use of ISO-standards at the water supplier. One of Denmark’s main focusses are to secure protection of the groundwater, and to ensure that the water resources are utilized sustainable. This is done to ensure that future generation will also have access to clean and safe drinking water.

Denmark focus on maintenance of the existing sanitation infrastructure

Denmark has a well-established sanitation infrastructure, and there are no challenges within the sanitation sector, besides the expected need for expansion and maintenance of the existing infrastructure. The wastewater companies are aware of the importance of the maintenance of the sewer network to prevent leakage and rupture. In addition, there is a focus on ensuring the necessary investments for the sewer system in the future. With this focus Denmark ensures, that there will be access to adequate and well-functioning sanitation facilities in the future.

Denmark focus on transparency

The citizens and utility companies within the water and sanitation sector are involved in the local plans. When the local authorities draws up the plans for both wastewater and drinking water, these plans are submitted for consultation. This ensures the transparency and encourages to cooperation from which better solutions can be drawn.

Question 2

“What policies and programmes are in place to ensure that those obligations are always met? In case the minimum core obligations are not met, please provide information on the extenuating circumstances.”

See answer given to question 1.

Question 3

“Please describe efforts made by the Government in the last few years that allowed of progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation.”

See answer given in question 1.

Question 4

“Please describe how planning in the water and sanitation sector is guided by the principle of progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation, and how it reconciles the two priorities – increasing levels of access to services on one hand, and reducing inequalities between different groups on the other.”

See answer given in question 1.

Question 5

“Please describe methods of budgeting and budgetary planning which aims to ensure that the maximum available resources are utilised for the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation for all. Please include the process of allocating budget as well as the output achieved by the utilisation of the budget.”

The local authorities administrate the permission for water supply companies to extract and distribute drinking water and the permissions for providing sanitation services.

Most consumers in Denmark are connected to systems from a water supply company and a wastewater company (sanitation). The Danish water and wastewater utilities are regulated by a cost of service principle by which the companies can charge the price that corresponds to the necessary costs. To secure protection of the environment, wastewater companies must have a discharge permit to discharge purified wastewater into the environment.

Since 2011 revenue caps have regulated the largest companies in the sector. There is a requirement of cost efficiency with general- and individual efficiency measures based on benchmarking. The companies can get supplements to their revenue cap for non-negligible increases in their cost structure, for example due to improved water treatment or climate adaptation. The revenue cap regulation has provided incentives for improved asset management and more efficient investments. The above-mentioned measures are regulated in the Water Sector Act. Companies outside the Water Sector Act are water suppliers owned by the consumers, and their budget and accounts are approved at their annual general meeting and regulated by the cost of service principle.

The Water Sector Act is in place to ensure that the water is affordable for the consumers. Furthermore, the local municipalities also approves water tariffs and delivery terms from the utilities.

Question 6

“Please describe how non-financial resources have been utilized to progressively realize the human rights to water and sanitation including the process of utilization and the output.”

When the water suppliers and wastewater utilities are encouraged through Government regulations to focus on water leakage, sustainability and efficiency of the supply system it has the derived effect, that it lowers the costs for drinking water and amplifies the security of the supply system.

Question 7

“In case where trade-offs with resources usage on other national agenda and implementation of other rights were required, please provide the circumstances and the decision taken as well as reasoning behind the decision.”

In Denmark, everyone has access to sanitation. In relation to the treatment of wastewater, Denmark has given priority to utilizing the resources in the wastewater. That is primarily carbon, phosphorus and energy.