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STATSREVISORERNE  
RIGSREVISIONEN



Extract from Rigsrevisionen's report on  
**knowledge of effectiveness  
created in connection with  
social-sector funding schemes**  
submitted to the Public Accounts Committee



1849  
147.281  
237  
1976  
114.6  
22.480  
908

# 1. Introduction and conclusion

## 1.1. PURPOSE AND CONCLUSION

1. This report concerns the effort made by the Danish Ministry for Children and Social Affairs to build an evidence base on the effectiveness of project programmes in assisting and supporting disadvantaged citizens. Having access to this knowledge is important to ensure that social services are tailored to the needs of the citizens. The majority of the project programmes administered by the ministry are funded through a special funding scheme called *satspuljen*.

2. Annual spending on social work interventions amounts to approximately DKK 45 billion. For more than a decade, changing governments have sought to gain more knowledge of the effectiveness of social work interventions. For several years, the *satspuljen* has been considered an essential instrument in developing and testing methods that could improve the quality and effectiveness of social work interventions. The project programmes can help the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs and the municipalities identify the most effective methods and, subsequently, disseminate these across the country. For disadvantaged citizens, it is therefore essential that the ministry develops an evidence base on the results of the tested methods.

The study is a continuation of a report from March 2017 on the basis for developing an evidence base on effectiveness. In that report, Rigsrevisionen criticised the fact that the effectiveness of social work interventions was not measured on the basis of national statistics data. In response to this criticism, the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs informed Rigsrevisionen that knowledge of the effectiveness of social work interventions is created in connection with the project programmes; the ministry allocates funds from the project programmes to, for instance, the municipalities, who are responsible for implementing the social work interventions. It is the ministry's responsibility to monitor that the funding is used in compliance with the objectives of the individual project programmes.

The purpose of the study is to assess whether the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs, to the extent necessary, build knowledge, including knowledge of effectiveness that shows whether the project programmes administered by the ministry meet their purpose of supporting disadvantaged citizens.

Rigsrevisionen initiated the study in March 2017.

### PROJECT PROGRAMMES

The purpose of these is to support concrete projects directed at the citizens. A programme generally includes several sub-projects. The term *project programmes* is used in the report to distinguish these from the programmes implemented by the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs concerning operating aid or support for procurement of consultancy services.

### NATIONAL STATISTICS

The Danish municipalities are by law required to report social data to the national statistics databases like, for instance, the database on children in care.

## PROGRAMMES ON EFFECTIVENESS

The purpose of these programmes is to develop evidence-based, cost-efficient and effective social work methods.

## CONCLUSION

For more than a decade, it has been the goal of the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs to base social policies more extensively on evidence of effectiveness to ensure that disadvantaged citizens receive the appropriate support. In 2017, the ministry was responsible for the allocation of DKK 876 million from a special funding scheme called *satspuljen*. The ministry allocated DKK 104 million of this amount to programmes on effectiveness that aim to support and test social work methods, and measure their effectiveness.

It is Rigsrevisionen's assessment that the programmes administered by the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs generate different types of knowledge, but that the ministry has obtained too little knowledge of the effectiveness of interventions. The reason for this is mainly that very few of the programmes implemented by the ministry during the examination period from 2012 to 2017, provide evidence of effectiveness.

In this period, only 11 per cent of the funding from the *satspuljen* was allocated to programmes on effectiveness. Rigsrevisionen finds it unsatisfactory that the ministry has failed to increase the share of funding allocated to such programmes beyond 11 per cent over this five-year period.

Another reason for the gap in the evidence base on effectiveness is the fact that none of the evaluations of the programmes on effectiveness examined by Rigsrevisionen met the intentions of the ministry, in respect to measuring effectiveness; partly because no qualitative evaluations of effectiveness had been carried out, partly because the quantitative evaluations that were carried out, did not meet generally accepted principles for measuring effectiveness. It follows that the quantitative evaluations are not providing any evidence on effectiveness. Rigsrevisionen finds it unsatisfactory that the ministry has failed to ensure that the programmes on effectiveness meet their purpose of building evidence on effectiveness.

Every year, the ministry works out a proposal for programmes for the annual negotiations on the *satspuljen*. It follows that the ministry has opportunity to influence both the number and scope of programmes on effectiveness and, at the same time, strive to ensure that the proposed programmes contribute to building evidence on effectiveness.

The study shows isolated examples of evaluations that actually meet the criteria defined for measuring effectiveness. These were detected among the programmes administered by the ministry that were not subject to any requirements of measuring effectiveness. Although, measuring the effectiveness of social work interventions can be difficult, there are examples of important evidence resulting from such programmes. In the course of this study, Rigsrevisionen detected examples of evaluations that had generated evidence of the positive impact of tested interventions, and examples of interventions that had turned things to the worse for the disadvantaged citizens. The ministry needs to have this knowledge to be able to support and disseminate effective interventions that actually help the disadvantaged citizens instead of doing them more harm than good.

Last, the study shows that the ministry has not systematically collected knowledge on lessons learnt. The ministry has not established an overview that could provide the basis for the implementation of new programmes and formulation of new legislation, nor has the *Vidensportalen* been updated with the most recent knowledge of effective social work interventions. This is considered unsatisfactory by Rigsrevisionen.

Rigsrevisionen recommends that the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs should:

- Work towards ensuring that the ministry's proposal for social-sector programmes – funded by the satspuljen – reflects a prioritization of programmes that contribute to building an evidence base on effectiveness. For instance, the ministry's proposal should clearly indicate the programmes that generate evidence of effectiveness. The ministry could also introduce a fixed practice according to which a minimum percentage of the programmes included in the ministry's proposal should be programmes on effectiveness.
- Support the efforts to build an evidence base on effectiveness by ensuring that the programmes on effectiveness, proposed for funding by the satspuljen, meet the criteria of measuring effectiveness.
- Create an accessible general overview of evaluations of the ministry's programmes. Rigsrevisionen also recommends the ministry to establish a standard practice for updating Vidensportalen with relevant results of evaluations of programmes once these have been published. Such a practice will enable the municipalities to draw on the knowledge in their work with disadvantaged citizens.

#### VIDENSPORTALEN

This is a web-based portal providing news on the most effective social work interventions. The portal is intended to support the municipalities and others in selecting effective and professionally sound solutions. The website was launched by the Danish National Board of Social Services in 2010.