



# DENMARK

## EurOMo Country Report 2025

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## Introduction to the Danish media system

Denmark is a small constitutional monarchy in Scandinavia with around 6 million citizens. It is characterized by an extensive welfare state as well as thorough digitalization with 100 percent internet penetration, according to the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2025). The Danish media system is characterized by the co-existence of strong public and private news media, media subsidies for private news media, a high degree of journalistic professionalism, and a high degree of press freedom (Blach-Ørsten et al. 2024; Kammer, 2017; Willig, Blach-Ørsten & Burkal, 2022). Media users have high trust in (legacy) news media and get their news primarily through public service media (both online and offline) and the news websites of legacy newspapers, with younger media users also relying on social media for news (Schrøder et al., 2025).

The scholarly literature on both media ownership and ownership transparency is still limited in the Danish context. Lund (1976) has studied ownership and power in the Danish public service media as well as the effect of increased media concentration on news content (Lund, 2013). As part of the *Media Pluralism Monitor* project, reports by Willig and Blach-Ørsten (2017) and Simonsen (2024) have focused on ownership transparency and consistently concluded that transparency in Denmark is subject to a moderate degree of threat, due to the lack of legislation that concerns media ownership specifically. Blach-Ørsten et al. (2024), analysing ownership transparency for both digital native news media and legacy news media, found legacy news media to be more transparent than new digital news media, as the latter category had less transparent forms of ownership and more owners with their main economic interests outside the media sector. This could lead to a potential risk of media capture by ownership with owners seeking to own news media, not for the sake of publishing news, but for the sake of either influencing politics or using news media to promote other business interests.

At the time of writing there is no national legislative framework around media ownership specifically; rather, the area is covered by the national and EU-level legislation that regulates ownership in general (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2024; Willig, Blach-Ørsten & Burkal, 2022). In practice, information about ownership is publicly available through The Central Business Register (CVR, n.d.), where log-in with a user profile has been required since October 1, 2025. However, members of the press have easy access with registration and confirmation of access taking only a few minutes. Individual owners with less than 5 % shares of a company are not registered in the database, and sometimes not all the available information in the database is up to date (Willig, Blach-Ørsten & Burkal, 2022). The Media Freedom Act that entered into law in August 2025 has a focus on monitoring ownership, but no new regulation on the subject is part of the Act<sup>1</sup>.

## Outlets and owners

The Danish media system is known as a “dual media system”, where both public service media (with a history in broadcasting) and commercial print, online, and broadcast media operate (Kammer, 2017). Historically, this co-existence has been peaceful because the different types of media have only been in direct competition with each other to a limited extent; however, in the increasingly converged media landscape there are more tensions because public and private

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<sup>1</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/protecting-democracy/european-media-freedom-act\\_da](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/protecting-democracy/european-media-freedom-act_da)

media increasingly compete over audiences on the same platforms (Schrøder, Blach-Ørsten & Eberholst, 2023, 2025). The privately owned press is largely owned by non-profit industrial foundations, while the public service news media either has the state as the only 100 percent shareholder (TV 2) or is listed as a self-owned company (DR) that is solely funded by the state through taxes.

It is very rare that “natural persons” (i.e., individual human beings) own more than 5 % of media companies; while such ownership is not found among the national legacy media that are included in this sample, it is, however, the case for some emergent and independent online news media (e.g., Zetland). One of the private media companies in the sample (Berlingske) is owned by a foreign media conglomerate (namely Amedia from Norway), even if the publishing rights are still owned by a foundation in Denmark (Kammer, 2017; Blach-Ørsten et. al, 2024). It should be noted that after the data collection, Swedish media conglomerate Bonnier News acquired the majority of Zetland<sup>2</sup>.

### **Main forms of ownership in privately owned news media**

With regards to patterns of ownership, Denmark is characterized by self-owned or state-owned public service media that dominate the audiovisual media market. At the same time, the print/online media market is also dominated by a few large, private owners (Kammer; 2017; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2024), with private ownership being divided into either ownership by stock or by private foundation (Kammer, 2017). Specifically, ownership by foundation stands out in the Danish media system, as it is a widespread phenomenon. Main outlets like Ekstra Bladet, Jyllands-Posten, and Politiken as well as regional ones (e.g., Fyens Stiftstidende) all have this form of ownership. In a recent study Aleksevych and Tomaz (2025: 18) conclude that the “Danish content media market is characterized by dispersed ownership with foundations and professional organizations as stakeholders”.

An industrial foundation is a tax-exempt or charitable foundation that owns or controls one or more conventional business firms. This type of ownership is common in Northern Europe and particularly in Denmark. The difference between foundations in Northern Europe and, for instance, in the United States is that in the former context the foundation has a company purpose, namely the preservation and development of the business. These characteristics of foundation ownership are formalized in the foundation charter, which makes ownership of the company the most important objective for the foundations in question (Willig, Blach-Ørsten & Burkal, 2022).

Second, foundation ownership is not subject to the travails of succession to new generations of the founding family. Ownership remains within the foundation, and it is not an option for new generations to withdraw from involvement and obtain financial profit by selling their shares. Thirdly, foundations are patient owners since they have no residual claimants who can demand dividends. Consequently, personal profit motives as well as incentives to maximize short-term profits are absent or at least muted (Willig, Blach-Ørsten & Burkal, 2022). According to Thomsen et al. (2018), ownership by industrial foundations can be found around the world in companies like Bosch (Germany), Hershey (United States), and Rolex (Switzerland).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://journalisten.dk/zetland-er-blevet-solgt/>

With foundations playing a large role in media ownership, Denmark does not have a strong tradition of publicly traded news-media companies. Historically, however, some of the large newspapers have been publicly traded; one example is Jyllands-Posten, which from 1953 to 1970 was publicly traded, but then transitioned to ownership by foundation in 1971 (Lund, 2013). Today, in some cases, privately-owned media are owned by a combination of foundation ownership and shareholders, some of whom hold less than 5 % of the shares and are, accordingly, not registered or publicly identified. Privately owned news media receive public subsidies both directly (through the press-support framework) and indirectly (VAT exemption) (see, e.g., Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015).

### **Type of information missing**

Overall, few types of information are missing on actors and owners in the Danish news-media sector. In some instances, some information about ownership is missing from the home page of the media companies but can be freely located in the Central Business Register. In Denmark, there are neither tradition nor legal requirements to make public whether leading persons have (potential) affiliations to political or commercial interests; however, board members with political positions are easily identified via simple online searches or through public profiles, for example on LinkedIn.

An audit of online traffic to almost all news websites is conducted by the Association of Danish Media (the interest organization for the privately owned media). Such measurement is methodologically challenged by the fact that some users reject tracking cookies, nonetheless the audit constitutes the industry standard for measuring online audiences. Also, historically there are neither tradition nor legal requirements for media to publish how much advertising revenue they get from public authorities or from different types of political or commercial actors, though the latter will change in the future (see later). Finally, as mentioned above, for some companies the exact shares (and votes) of ownership are not stated publicly but, in an interval, or range.

### **Main risks to transparency**

According to the measurement instrument of the *Media Pluralism Monitor* project (Simonsen, 2024), transparency of media ownership in Denmark constitutes a “medium risk” for market pluralism. This risk “primarily stems from the absence of specific regulations addressing concentration in the news media sector” (Simonsen, 2024: 8). Blach-Ørsten et al. (2024) highlights that while ownership of legacy news media is generally transparent, it is a different matter for digital native news media. Digital native news media have more actors from outside the media industry, like venture capital and others whose main financial interests are in technology, public affairs, or retail. Some investments in digital native news media have also come from investors located in tax shelters outside of Denmark (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2024).

### **Role of linear vs. non-linear distribution**

It has long been a political ambition for Denmark to be a global leader in terms of digitalization. Largely, this is reflected in the Danes’ use of media. According to longitudinal surveys on media uses in Denmark (Schrøder, Blach-Ørsten & Eberholst, 2025) the national public service television channels are still the preferred source of news among the Danish population. However, the use of

television is undergoing changes with the use of traditional flow television declining and the use of streaming increasing (Lassen, 2018; Bruun, Lassen & Johnson, 2024)<sup>3</sup>. Measured by the number of streaming services per household, Denmark is also at the top. In the first quarter of 2025, the two public service media, The Danish Broadcasting Corporation and TV 2, are market leaders, while the viewership of international actors such as Netflix and Viaplay have decreased (other streaming services like, e.g., Amazon Prime experience increases in subscriber figures, however).<sup>4</sup>

### **Relevant non-linear distributors**

The level of internet penetration in Denmark is high with many different distributors, and it is regulated by legislation. According to the 2025 report on media use in Denmark (Schrøder, Blach-Ørsten & Eberholst, 2025), there are only five digital information intermediaries which are used by more than 5 % of the population to get news. These intermediaries are all in the category of social media, where Facebook still stands out as the most important one (the use of X is slightly decreasing, that of YouTube, TikTok and Instagram for finding news slightly increasing).

### **Main risks to transparency**

From the polity as well as civil society there is an interest in regulating the global platform and technology companies (such as Alphabet/Google, Byte dance/TikTok, and Meta/Facebook) to address the challenges their presence poses to the traditional producers and distributors of news. However, the passing of legislation and the implementation of concrete rules and regulations take a long time and are challenged by the fact that the issue is transnational in nature (and for that reason spans multiple national jurisdictions). The global platform and technology companies may constitute a potential threat not only to the transparency of news distribution, but also to the general transparency of the news market. The Digital Services Act is the first major step in this direction, and at the time of this writing the Danish government is proposing national regulation to curb the use of social platforms.

### **Which laws concern transparency in media ownership and control**

As mentioned above the annual reports from the *Media Pluralism Monitor* project (Simonsen, 2024) have highlighted, there is no specific legislation regarding ownership for media companies, and the Media Responsibility Act's main aim is not to regulate ownership or control (Willig, Blach-Ørsten & Burkal, 2022).

The absence of media-specific competition legislation impacts the indicator on news media concentration, which scores high in Denmark. The Danish media market is concentrated in few media companies of which some of the largest ones are owned by the state; for example, the public service media dominate the audiovisual media market (Kammer, 2017). This pattern of ownership in the Danish news media must be understood in the context of a high degree of state

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dr.dk/om-dr/fakta-om-dr/dr-i-2024/medieudviklingen-2024-vi-streamer-dokumentarer-sport-og-nyheder-som>

<sup>4</sup> <https://omtv2.tv2.dk/medier/streaming-i-danmark/streaming-i-danmark-q1-2025-kvartal/>

involvement in the media market and according to the strength of the arm's-length principle of the Danish regulatory bodies.

As of June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, new amendments to existing laws on Radio and Television as well as law on media support were passed because of the new EU-legislation on political advertisement and the Media Freedom Act. The law, L 162<sup>5</sup>, entitles the Ministry of Culture to create “rules (...) for media service providers to make information on ownership and revenues from state advertising available to increase transparency in the media sector” (translated by the authors). It also requires the Ministry of Culture to set up a national database on media ownership. The same law includes demands on more transparency on political advertisement in the news media.

### **Main risks**

For the Danish media system, the overall risk is found to be limited. On a 0-3 scale, the EurOMo risk assessment tool returns result below 1 for almost all news media – and nearly all the results above 1 are related to news distribution through social media, where audience figures are uncertain because of the absence of independent auditing. Considering these results, with the current legislation and accessibility of information, we find little structural risk to the Danish media system in terms of ownership and ownership transparency.

This, however, does not mean that questions of ownership and ownership transparency in the Danish media system should not be subject to continuous scrutiny. On the contrary, to maintain the low-risk environment and the high level of transparency, policymakers as well as scholars must continue to pay attention to these matters. This is especially pertinent as more new digital news media emerge, as these often have more complex and commercially oriented ownership structures than the legacy media.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lovguiden.dk/afgorelse/28-02-2025-forslag-til-lov-om-%C3%A6ndring-af-lov-om-radio-og-fjernsynsvirksomhed-m-v-og-lov-om-mediast%C3%B8tte-etablering-af-tilsyn-og-supplerende-bestemmelser-med-henblik-p%C3%A5-efterlevelse-af-forordning-om-gennemsigtighed-og-m%C3%A5lretning-ifm-politisk-reklame-og-den-europ%C3%A6iske-forordning-om-mediefrihed>

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