

Denmark

Population: 5.4 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.76. **GDP per capita:** USD 29 200. **Children under 6 years:** 400 000.

Female labour force participation: (women aged 15-64, in 2004): 76.1% of women participate, 24.3% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 11.6%) (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

Labour force participation rate of women with children: Mothers with children 3 and below: 70%; children 3-7 years, about 80%, with the average employment rate from mothers with children under 6 at 74%. Share in part-time employment for mothers with children under 6 is 5% (OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005). Women out of work are generally students, parental leave, housewives working at home, etc. ("Børneforløbsundersøgelsen", 2000, 2004, Danish National Institute of Social Research and OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005).

Maternity and parental leave: 14 weeks maternity leave, followed by 14 weeks parental leave and 2 weeks paternity leave – all paid at full unemployment benefit rate, to which 26 weeks of child care leave may be added, paid at 60% of the unemployment rate. Total child care leave period may not exceed 52 weeks.

Average duration of parental leave: Women 43.2 weeks and men 3.4 weeks.

Compulsory school age: 7 years.

Social expenditure: 29.2%. **Child poverty rate:** 2.4% after taxes and transfers, the lowest rate in the world (UNICEF, 2005) (OECD average is 11.2%).

Funding of all kindergarten services and leisure time facilities (ISCED Level 0): 2.1% of GDP. The unit cost per child in centre-based day care amounts approximately to USD 10 200 per older child (USD 19 550 for the youngest), and in leisure-time services for 6-10 years USD 5 950. Net annual public expenditure for all children enrolled in services 0-6 years is approximately USD 7 650.

Average costs to parents: Costs are capped at 30-33% of costs with low-income families paying much less. Average parental contribution comes to approximately 22% of costs.

Legal entitlement to a free service: There is a legal entitlement to a place in the kindergarten class in the primary education system, generally at 6 years, but could be from 4 years and 10 months.

Major service types and duration: Day care facilities (*dagtilbud*) for children from 6 months to 6 years, which are divided into family day care (*kommunal dagpleje*), centre-based day care (*Vuggestuer-crèche; bornehaver-kindergartens and aldersintegrerede institutioner*-age-integrated centres). *Bornehaveklasse*, kindergarten classes for children 5-6 are led by pedagogues; after school care leisure time facilities (*fritidshjem* and free-time activities, SFOs) are led by pedagogues.

Rate of access to regulated services: 0-1 year: 12%; 1-2 years: 83%; 3-5 years: 94% (2004).

Designation and professional qualifications of key staff: Managers of services: all day care facilities, with the exception of municipal child minder facilities, have a manager and a deputy manager. Both must be qualified educators. Pedagogues (*pædagog*) i.e. qualified child and youth educators (sometimes called social educators) work in day care facilities, kindergarten classes and SFOs. Pedagogues also work in the *Folkeskole* kindergarten classes that belong to integrated school start. Pedagogues have completed a three-and-half-year course at a specialised tertiary training college. Nursery and child care assistants (*pædagogmedhjælper*) work mainly in crèches, kindergartens and SFO facilities. They receive secondary vocational training. Municipal child minders or family day care caregivers have no mandatory training but courses in child care are offered regularly since the early 1980s when municipal child minder facilities for children aged 0-2 years were placed on an equal footing with day care facilities. In ECEC services (excluding family day care), 60% of staff have a tertiary level qualification.

Child-staff ratios: 0- to 2-year-olds: 3.3:1; 3- to 5-year-olds: 7.2:1; mixed age 0-9 (or 0-13)-year-olds: 6:1 (2003); special day care: 1.4:1; OSP: 9.7:1 or 13.7:1, depending on organisation.

Maximum group size: There is no legal regulation of group size. Normally no more than 12 for 1- to 2-year-olds, 22 for 3- to 5-year-olds and with activity-dependant and flexible group size for 6- to 13-year-olds.

Auspices

Services for 0- to 6-year-olds are considered in Denmark to be an integral part of the social welfare system. Pre-school institutions comprise crèches, kindergartens, and, to a growing extent, integrated services for children 0- to 6-year-olds. A further option for children 0-3 years is public family day care. All these institutions are established in accordance with the 1998 Social Services Act. According to this law, the purpose of the institutions is pedagogical, social, and care-related. The pedagogical aims are to take care and to prevent; to ensure the opportunity for children to play and learn; to stimulate the fantasy, the creativity and the language of the child – in short, to ensure that children get a good and secure childhood.

The national authority for child care centres is the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs. The Ministry has responsibility for policy in the field, and for overseeing the principle of: admission criteria; the quality of the services provided, and the implementation of quality regulations and measures; work conditions and training of staff; parental involvement; funding and financing. A major aim is to support, in collaboration with parents, the development of young children and provide caring and learning environments for them while their parents are at work. The Ministry of Education, through the *Folkeskole* Act (covering the pre-school class, primary and lower secondary education), has policy responsibility for pre-school classes (-7 years) and SFOs (school-based, leisure-time) facilities.

Current administration and management is, however, the responsibility of the local authorities, e.g. to fund and establish services to meet parental demand; to supervise the quality and educational content of local services; to provide adequate staffing and sufficient support to staff, etc. Frequently, the municipalities establish unified departments, bringing together care and education. Local authorities determine the objectives and the framework for work carried out in day care facilities and schools, and

are responsible for funding and supervision. They have overall responsibility for providing child care facilities for children, to ensure a sufficient supply of places and to take all necessary initiatives in relation to children in need of special supports. Within this arrangement, parents are free in principle to decide the kind of child care they want to use. Because of costs and facility, most Danish parents opt for family day care until children reach the age of 3 years. Parents may also be provided with a grant to use the services of a free-choice child minder, recognised by the municipality.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2004, 76.1% of women (15-64) participated in the formal labour market, decreasing from 77.6% in 1990. Of those employed, 24.3% were in part-time employment in 2004, compared to 11.6% for men (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). The employment rate for mothers with a youngest child under 6 is 74%, and their share in part-time employment is 5%.

Parental leave: Universal paid maternity leave of 28 weeks for mothers + 2 weeks paternity leave paid at 100% salary level (public sector employees and increasingly private sector). It is possible to obtain another 26 weeks at 60% of unemployment benefit. Total child care leave may not exceed 52 weeks. If child care leave is taken after the first year, children aged 3-8 may have part-time places in a child care facility. Special supplementary allowances are available for single working parents with children aged 6 months to 5 years when leave is taken to care for children. The sum of the leave allowance and supplementary allowance must not exceed 80% of the parent's previous income. In many municipalities, parents returning to work after 26 weeks have the guarantee of an immediate child care place for their child, but difficulties are sometimes experienced by parents at this stage. A new amendment to the law ensures child care for families when the child is 9 months old and will in 2006 be lowered further to children aged from 6 months.

Access and provision

The operating hours and annual duration of services vary according to service type. The system is predominantly one of mixed, public and private services, supervised and funded (from local taxes and central government grants) by local authorities. Major forms of provision are:

- Day care facilities (*dagtilbud*) for children from 6 months to 6 years, which are divided into family day care (*kommunal dagpleje*), centre-based day care (*Vuggestuer-crèche; aldersintegrerede institutioner*-age-integrated centres; and *bornehaver-kindergartens*) and independent day care facilities. About 70% of day care facilities are operated by public, community services. Public provision is supplemented by independent, non-profit providers and networks (about 30%), which offer parents another choice of service. There is no significant use of private for-profit operators, although in 2005, new legislation favouring the entry of private operators was proposed by the government. To receive municipal grants independent providers must work in conjunction with the local authority and observe local authority regulations and operating guidelines.
- Kindergarten classes (*bornehaveklasse*) for children -7 years (7 is the compulsory school age). The kindergarten class, led principally by a pedagogue, takes place in the primary school (*Folkeskole*) and is free. Teaching in the kindergarten class is expected to be play-based and linked to the developmental stage of the child. Approximately half of all

public schools run a programme called “integrated school start” where pupils from pre-school classes and 1st and 2nd classes are taught to some extent in age integrated groups. In recent years, emergent literacy approaches have been gaining ground in the kindergarten class.

- *Leisure time* or out-of-school-time care in centres or schools, or in leisure time facilities (*fritidshjem* and SFO facilities). Out-of-school provision is fee-paying, but is massively enrolled, with approximately 80% of 6- to 10-year-age group (does not include 10-year-olds) involved (2004).

Rates of provision

0-1 years: Parental care predominates, but from the age of about six months parents begin to enrol their children in day care facilities. Informal care outside the family is little used. *Legestuer* – the playrooms and facilities shared by all municipal child minders (family day carers) – operate within the municipal child minder arrangements. Parents may also take their children to *Legesteder* to play with other children. In 2004 12% of 0-year-olds were enrolled, whereof 8% were in family day care and 4% in centre-based day care (*crèche* or age-integrated centres).

1-2 years: 83% of children are enrolled in day care facilities in this period (the highest rate in Europe). Family day care (45%) is most widely used in rural areas, while age-integrated facilities and *Vuggestuer* (*crèche*) are the most common day care facilities elsewhere (38%).

3-5 years: 94% of 3- to 6-year-old children were enrolled in 2004 – almost exclusively in centre-based day care (age-integrated centres or kindergarten). Furthermore, there are 15-hour programmes for bilingual children who are not attending the day care system.

5-6/7 years: 98% enrolments in free pre-school class in *Folkeskole*, with wrap around care provided for children in fee-paying, integrated services or leisure-time facilities.

Children with diverse needs

Children with disabilities: Inclusion of children with disabilities in all early services and schools is common. Mainstreaming is the general objective, but there is also a wide variety of specialised institutional settings.

Children from low-income families: The child poverty level after redistribution policies is 2.4%, the lowest in the world (UNICEF, 2005). However, as many as 11.4% of the children lived in families receiving social benefits because of low income or temporary loss of income (according to *Red Barnet* on the basis of a research report from the Danish National Institute of Social Research on the level of poverty amongst children in 2002).

Ethnic and bilingual children: Immigrants form 4.1% of the Danish population, and it is estimated that bilingual children will soon constitute 10% of enrolments. In February 2000, the government published an overall action plan for the improved integration of these children. It is now mandatory for local authorities to offer language-stimulation activities to bilingual children from 3 years. Language activities mostly take the form of intensified Danish language coaching in kindergarten and in the first years of primary education. When children are not in the kindergarten system, 15 hours per week of Danish language contact may be offered to families in their own home.

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: It is the responsibility of local authorities to supervise and support all child care services within their area. Because of this decentralisation, disparities in access and quality have been noted between different municipalities, a situation which generally does not favour poor neighbourhoods and families.

Funding: Investment in ECEC is high in Denmark, owing to low child-staff ratios and relatively higher salaries for pedagogues and teachers than in other countries. Total expenditure on day care and leisure time facilities (i.e. all ECEC) is approximately 2.1% of GDP. Fees are capped for parents at 30-33% of running costs, with poorer families using services free of charge or at reduced rates. Fees will be lowered to an upper ceiling of 25% of costs through new legislation foreseen in 2006 and 2007. Gross costs for children under 3 come to USD 19 500 dollars per child; and for children 3-6 years, approximately USD 10 200 dollars per child; and in leisure-time services for 6-10 years (leisure time), USD 5 950 per child. Some of this expenditure is clawed back through high (for Scandinavia) parental fees. Net public expenditure for all children enrolled in services 0-6 years is approximately USD 7 650 annually.

Staffing: With the exception of family day care, all facilities have a manager and deputy-manager, both of whom must be qualified pedagogues. Pedagogues (social educators for children and youth), are the lead personnel in all facilities, including kindergarten class. With pedagogues accounting for 60% of staff, Denmark has the highest rate of professionals working in centres of all the Nordic countries. Nursery and child care assistants (*paedagogmedhjælper*) are also employed in crèches and kindergartens. Among qualified pedagogues, men make up 8% of employees in day care facilities for children aged 6 months to 6 years, and make up 25% of staff in out-of-school care.

Training requirements: The minimum qualification for pedagogues requires 3.5 years at tertiary level in Centres of Further Education. A small proportion of assistants undertake an adult education or vocational training course for 18 months. Qualified teachers with four years tertiary education are sometimes partly engaged in *Folkeskole* kindergarten classes linked to integrated schools. In-service training is also available. There is no mandatory training for family day carers, but all receive at least three weeks training, and have access to intensive supervision and in-service training.

Work conditions: Pedagogues and assistants working on a full-time basis, work 37 hours a week. Family day carers (child minders) work 48 hours per week. All of these staff are entitled to paid holidays, pay during periods of sickness, and parental and child care leave. Almost all pedagogues are members of the National Union of Child Care and Youth Educators (BUPL). Nursery and child care assistants are organised by the national trade union FOA – Trade and Labour. Nursery assistant positions are popular since this type of work is relatively well paid for unskilled workers and offers responsibility and team work with others.

Child-staff ratios: Child-staff ratios in 2003 per full-time adult are as follows: crèche (0- to 2-year-olds), 3.3:1; kindergarten (3-5 years), 7.2:1; age-integrated facility (0-9 or 13 years), 6:1; leisure time facilities (*fritidshjem* and *SFO* for 6-9 years) respectively 9.7:1 and 13.7:1; special day care, 1.4:1. The number of staff per child is highest for the youngest children. Staff intensity is highest in special day care facilities for children with physical and/or mental disabilities. There is no national regulation concerning child-staff ratios or about the involvement of qualified staff. A negotiated agreement (through collective bargaining) guarantees, however, that the manager and deputy-manager in child care centres must be qualified pedagogues.

Curriculum and pedagogy: The general purpose of ECEC as specified by the Act of Social Services is to further the well-being, development and independence of children in consultation with their parents, while also functioning for educational, social and care purposes. The children learn by playing, by observing committed adults and by interacting with them. The child's right to participation (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) ensure that s/he must be listened to. Children are expected to play a participatory role and share responsibility for their own daily life. The programmes offer experiences and activities in an environment designed to stimulate imagination and creativity. Day care facilities must give children an opportunity to achieve a broad understanding of Danish culture as well as understanding of other cultures met in the daily life of the centre. In addition, children must be able to acquire knowledge about and experience of the natural environment.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: Monitoring, evaluation and research are normally the responsibility of the line ministry, the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs. The task is generally achieved through regular reporting and data collection, and through periodic surveys. Since the first OECD review in 2000, some confusion in central co-ordination seems to have occurred, as three separate ministries now share responsibility for services to children and families. To our knowledge, there is currently no national government agency providing or gathering systematic data on developments in local child care in Denmark. The close monitoring of kindergartens takes place at municipal level, where teams of pedagogical advisors monitor services and provide support to pedagogues to improve the quality of services or to implement special programmes, e.g. child participation in decision-making processes has been encouraged for more than a decade, though projects such as *Children as Citizens*. In the school system, the Ministry of Education is responsible for formulating learning objectives, monitoring quality and initiating research, including for the kindergarten class (6-7 years).

Parent and community involvement: Danish day care and the *Folkeskole* each operate with strong parent boards, obligatory since 1993, in all municipal and independent day care facilities. The parent boards define the principles for the educational work carried out and for the use of funds available through the budgetary framework. This activity is usually communicated in the form of a business plan. The business plans are used as a basis for evaluation of the work carried out in the centre. Centre staff are also board members although parent representatives must have the majority.

Features of the review period in 2000

Despite the high coverage rates achieved by Danish ECEC services, demand continued to rise, though not as rapidly in recent years. The law required that a place should be provided to parent(s) for each child within three months* of demand, but waiting lists existed in some ten municipalities. New investments by local authorities were being made available to meet the challenge, and it was expected that places for all children would be soon available. Attention was also focused on providing places and appropriate programmes for children at risk, i.e. children with low socio-economic status, immigrant children, children from dysfunctional families. A Danish language stimulation programme

* After parental leave, within four weeks, provided that parents have requested a place within the time framework set by the municipality.

was available to bilingual children and families in the years prior to compulsory school, and some excellent bridging work towards immigrant families was taking place, particularly in Copenhagen.

Qualitative developments were also taking place. The traditional division in Denmark between primary education and the kindergarten was being questioned, and seen as a challenge to be overcome through discussion and partnership. The debate was focused on the need to develop a common set of societal values and aims among pedagogues and teachers for the later years of kindergarten and the first stages of primary education. ECEC was seen to include “structured learning activities in a caring environment”, as well as play, informal learning and social development. The non-compulsory kindergarten class at the start of the *Folkeskole* (the basic school) was to a large extent characterised by this approach, and were conducted by pedagogue-teacher teams.

Co-operation and cohesion between the day care system (i.e. the kindergartens), the school system and leisure-time activities were given special attention in the national *Folkeskole 2000* plan. With the help of their pedagogical advisors, some municipalities were pushing ahead with plans to make of their kindergartens and schools, active centres of learning which would develop their own learning plans. In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark, had created a working group in 1996 to improve quality, and develop new methods for educational work in kindergartens. Other initiatives were being considered, which included reforms in staff training and curriculum guidelines.

Current developments and issues

The new Law on Pedagogical Curriculum

The Law on Pedagogical Curriculum came into force on August 1st 2004 and it applies to all child care centres for the 0- to 6-year-olds as well as to public child-minding. Each individual child care centre must work out its own pedagogical curriculum, while a common curriculum is worked out for the public child-minding. The purpose of the pedagogical curriculum is to make the institution “support, lead, and challenge the learning of children” through, among other things, “spontaneous experiences and playing” with a focus on children’s “potentials and competences”. Before it became law, much discussion was evoked by this project. Many parents and professionals saw in it a risk that “learning” would come too predominate, and thus change the Danish view of childhood and the core of pedagogical objective of supporting the child in its development. BUPL, the national pedagogue trade union, expressed concerns about the lack of time to formulate, carry out, and evaluate the curriculum, and about the adequacy of funding to educate staff to take care of this new task.

The terms of the pedagogical curriculum deals with the following six topics: the holistic personal development of the children; social competences; language; body and movement; nature and natural phenomena; cultural expressions and values. The pedagogical curricula of the different centres must list the aims and intermediate aims regarding the competences and experiences the children are to “acquire”. They should be divided into a section dealing with the younger children (0-3 years) and a section dealing with the older children (3-6 years). In regard to integrated institutions (e.g. children’s houses) with 0- to 6-year-old children, a joint curriculum can be worked out, which makes allowance for both age groups.

The head of the child care centre is responsible to the Board of parents and the local authorities in seeing that a pedagogical curriculum is worked out. In practice, the curriculum is worked out in cooperation with the staff, whereupon it is to be approved by the Board of parents and the local authorities. In an appendix to the Law on Pedagogical Curriculum, examples of content, aim and focal point have been worked out in regard to each of the 6 topics, intended as an example for the child care centres when they are to work out their own curriculum.

Staff motivation

Over recent years, both parents and staff have expressed over financial cuts to day care centre budgets and public debate has occurred. A part of this concern, has been the transfer of administrative functions to the managers and pedagogues in centres, without the addition of administrative staff. Although the move is due in part to the further decentralisation of ECEC, attention to the issue is needed as professional time spent with children is a central aim of early childhood services. Without interaction, children's learning can become dispersed and unstructured. According to a study by the Institute of Local Government Studies (AKF) for Frederiksberg Municipality (part of the city centre of Copenhagen), the directors of ECEC facilities can allocate on average only 27% of their time to work with the children. These findings are consistent with similar surveys carried out by BUPL, the national pedagogue trade union.

Co-ordination at central level

In 2001, the OECD review team recommended attention to co-ordination of policies across municipalities. Since the review, progress has been made in this area through the work of the Association of Municipal Authorities. At central level, however, some confusion in co-ordination seems to have occurred, as three separate ministries now share responsibility for services to children and families. As a result, there is no national government agency currently providing or gathering systematic data on developments in local child care in Denmark. This is notably the case with respect to child-staff ratios and other quality parameters. It is possible, however, on the basis of data from the national statistical agency (Statistics Denmark) to calculate data concerning child-staff ratios, but as explained in the main body of this text (Chapter 8), national statistical offices are generally unable to provide adequately the data and qualitative information that ECEC policy makers and managers need.

Accountability

In Denmark, the local authorities are free to determine standards, and it seems that in some municipalities, there is no requirement for centres to report ratios or other matters. A legal or formal regulation of quality standards seems to be lacking. In sum, quality becomes a matter of opinion or a negotiation, without appeal to research evidence and the good practice in other municipalities. The situation weakens the possibility for parents or professionals to test in administrative or client hearings (and eventually in the courts) whether a particular local government is providing the necessary inputs to safeguard quality, unlike Norway where ratios and other quality standards are governed by law. Parental concern about the quality of services seems to be growing and surfaced clearly during the general elections at the beginning of 2005. At that moment, the issue of rising child-staff ratios was widely debated, until the government announced further financial

support to early childhood services to the amount of DKK 2 billions over the period 2005-09. It is planned also to reduce maximum costs for parents from a 33% ceiling to 25%. This positive response is, however, a political one. The question here is one of administrative accountability: who is responsible for structural quality standards (sufficient funding; recruitment and training levels of staff and the proportion of lead professionals in services; child-staff ratios; the state of buildings and materials); and whether there is a possibility of redress for parents and centres, through recognised administrative procedures, when standards are breached.